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Virtual rhetoric : a theoretical approach

Res Rhetorica

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Retoryka wirtualna. Podejście teoretyczne

Abstract

The paper argues that rhetoric since its very beginning features inherent visual capacities. Therefore, it lends itself perfectly to be interpreted also in terms of virtual communication. The complementary perspectives of virtual as rhetorical and rhetoric as virtual are investigated in order to set a frame for (re)conceptualizing virtual and rhetorical.

Artykuł dowodzi, że retoryka od samego swojego początku wykazywała inherentne własności wizualne. Z tego względu znakomicie nadaje się do interpretacji także w kategoriach komunikacji wirtualnej. W artykule omówione są dwie komplementarne perspektywy - to, co wirtualne, jako retoryczne i to, co retoryczne, jako wirtualne – aby zaproponować model teoretyczny, pozwalający na (re)konceptualizację wirtualności i retoryczności.

Key words

virtual rhetoric, persuasion, visual rhetoric, enargeia
retoryka wirtualna, perswazja, retoryka wizualna, enargeia

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> "Any line of inquiry, any field of interest, any subject matter, then, can be taken as a rhetoric or as a set of rhetorics."
> (Corder 1993, 95)

Introduction

We are in a post-touchscreen and pre-HMD (head-mounted display) age. Everyday media representations are being moved beyond 2D-s as innovators invite audiences to immerse into 3D sensations. After becoming mainstreamed in military, aerospace, construction and automobile industries, 3D computer simulations (virtual realities – VRs) are fuelling businesses to step further. In accordance with the availability and affordability of VR gears, companies now strive to provide novel modes of interaction and participation for everyday media prosumers. The US news network ABC has recently launched its News VR program which enables the viewer to "see the whole picture" that is, to be in the middle of the events, places reported, anywhere, any time. So, with a click and the inevitable Jaunt VR, we are there, in Damascus, sharing the menace of war and contemplating the ways the ancient cultural treasury of Syria could be saved. As our guide says, we can strongly "feel the depth of history" there, and his statement is not the least a poetic exaggeration, but our immediate experience: we sense the air, the sun, the touch of the mosque marbles as we are visually incorporated into the scene. The American national basketball association, NBA has lately announced that it plans to broadcast at least one game per week in virtual reality. With this commitment, NBA is proud to become the first professional sports league to broadcast regular games virtually and thus create a benchmark for future fan experiences. "We do feel that VR provides the potential, if we do it right, to be the next best thing to that in-person experience." – NBA vice president, Jeff Marsilio explained to *USA Today* in October 2016.

The 'everyday virtual' is definitely nearer than a Pokémon these days. It is an experience no longer preserved for gamers, tech-savvy geeks, social evangelists

and influencers. It opened a new market for capitalizing human attention and call for new processes in education, politics and medicine. It is at hand for those innovators who want to enrich the imaginary with the real, the abstract with the concrete, the impersonal with the subjective. Virtuality obtains and offers a new way of embodiment, a new understanding of participation, a new interpretation of experience and an old logic of social discourse. This latter argument shall be in the focus of the present essay.

Stating that the old logic of social discourse is rhetorical I endeavour to define virtual rhetoric in order to highlight the fascinating plasticity of the more than two-millennia-old faculty by identifying the rhetorical nature of virtual media and the virtual in rhetoric. Contemporary scholarship suggests that *virtual rhetoric –* an attractive neologism as it is – can be conceptualized in three separable ways. In the first sense virtual rhetoric is term for web-based rhetorical practices and trainings in which virtual agoras and learning environments are open for enacting and improving rhetorical skills. It is the *rhetoric in the virtual* perspective exploited in empirical studies of CMC (for a comprehensive look at the SIPT, SIDE, TIME and MAIN models, see Sundar 2015), interpretive-critical-practical studies (Welch 1999, Ulmer 2004, Brooke 2009, Eyman 2015) and innovative web-based training programs (Böhme 2009). In the second, virtual rhetoric stands for the ways virtual spaces are created in order to persuade and immerse users. That is what I call the *virtual as rhetorical* prospect. Finally, the third meaning offers a view of rhetoric as a mode of communication that stems from imagination and creates shared, imaginary spaces in which influence is dynamic, formative element, that is, *rhetoric as inherently virtual (and visual).*

Rhetoric being a techné (τέχνη) – a systematic, disciplined, skillful art – originally shares characteristics with (media) technology, the study and body of procedures and processes of (message) production/circulation. Still, there remains a need to show how immediate, immersive, visual and sensible the rhetorical experience is meant to be. In what follows I aim to theorize virtual rhetoric with outlining the conceptions of *virtual as rhetorical* and *rhetoric as virtual* and arguing for the necessity and relevance of rhetorical knowledge in interpreting virtual media.

Rhetoric goes again

Classical rhetoric derives from the ancient Greek and Roman writings where it served as the universal science of public sphere in which right acting and right speaking were considered one. Although defined as the art of persuasion, it has tended to outgrow its original concern with persuasive public speaking. Its genuine communicative, symbolic and strategic characteristics, its references

to both the public and the personal, its communicatively holistic nature have made rhetoric an interdisciplinary field of interpersonal, mediated and public discourse.

Rhetoric is "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" in Aristotle's definition (1355b). It is an art and body of literature that is widely referred to as a literacy and training of suasory communication. This aspect is the one that has brought rhetoric into a history of a long *danse macabre* concerning its legitimacy, reliability and relevance.

As a faculty dating back 2500 years, it had to overcome several existentially critical phases. However, there were two eras of rejection that turned out to be almost fatal according to the seminal essay of Bender and Wellbery (1990): Enlightenment (18th century) and Romanticism (19th century). In the enlightened mode of discourse, transparency and neutrality became the determining merits. From this perspective, rhetoric seemed empty, blurred and diffuse. Public discourse had to be freed of its individual interests, deprived of rhetorical ambiguity, magniloquence and passion. For Romanticism, by contrast, rhetoric became a craft rather than the faculty of the genius, a way of producing rather than creating. It was not supporting the Romantic nation-state ideal and its linguistic identity, as it was rather the foundation of an "international intellectual community (…) and a vehicle of a unified tradition" (Bender and Wellbery 1990, 21). Romanticism disesteemed rhetoric for what the Enlightenment could only accept from it. These two sets of ideological attacks resulted in the rejection of the classical tradition of rhetoric for the following reasons: ascendant scientific objectivity with values of transparency and neutrality, a new emphasis on individual originality and authorship, liberalism's displacement of republicanism in political theory, the dominance of literacy over orality and the rise of the vernacular language nation-state.

However, with/for the advent of new media technologies a lingua franca of influential communication was needed again. New, virtual spaces for participation called for a global language through which epistemological pluralism and individual voices were manifested. Rhetoric has regained its relevance in relieving scientific and moral paradoxes of postmodern societies, performing playfulness in communication, fulfilling global communicative exigencies and objectives. By the need for subjectivity, participation and an effective community of minds, rhetoric has returned to the intellectual landscape of the 21st century. Rhetoric regained its relevance in communicating and studying communication as "a feature of all human communication" (Kennedy 2007, 7) and as a perspective of human-computer interactions.

Even though the disciplinary survival of rhetoric was, by no doubt, successful it has never ceased to be surrounded by moral debates and social suspicion. Drawing upon the claims of Enlightenment there is still a democratic dismay

of rhetoric as it may involve manipulation of the audience's mood and thus coercion (Dryzek 2010). Though critically questioned as an academically consistent theory of practice, rhetorical practice is certainly widely accepted and applied by those who formulate new (virtual) media spaces. That is why media- and virtual rhetoric raises a specific interest toward reflection and literacy.

Rhetorical (new) media

Media are used here to broadly label those human, technological and institutionalized activities that translate, create and recreate realities into symbolic complexes, frame cognizance, set meanings, exert influence and inspire actions. By its operations media are selective, creative, dramatic and strategic. In that sense, mediatexts, objects and events are rhetorical, and the mechanism they are the results of is rhetorical, too (Aczél 2012).

As Roger Silverstone (1999, 31) posits "the spaces which the media construct for us in public and in private, in our ears, our eyes and our imagination are constructed rhetorically." These spaces are discursive and offer the opportunity for claims to be identified, for a space of communicative-behavioural engagement. Silverstone comprehends rhetoric as a mechanism of media, as a textual and analytical strategy. Concerning mediatexts as 'texts like any other' rhetoric can direct our attention to the persuasive nature of media-representation. Persuasion here does not primarily mean that media direct or redirect human behaviour (decisions, activities, relations); it rather refers to the capacity to make audiences believe that what is represented and ritualized has happened or can occur. Media are persuasive in the sense that they enable the formulation of cognitive truth and an alternative space of 'reality'. Media-persuasion, Silverstone suggests, is dependent on the presumption that there is always a desire to influence and on the acceptance that media-communication is structured hierarchically. "The language of media" – he sums up – "is rhetorical language" (Silverstone 1999, 31). Hence, with media spaces and media language, the contexts and codes all have a rhetorical nature.

It is true of a new, digital paradigm of media technology as well. New media is a convergent notion of convergent and digital media technologies made up of the computer, the internet, the mobile (smart)phone, social media, digital television, augmented and virtual reality: a net of interactions and a capacity of permanent connection (Aczél 2013). Digital media can refer to new textual experiences, new ways of representing the world, new relationships between man and machine (technology), new, immersive spaces, interfaces and modes of discourse and new experiences of the relationship between identity and community (Lister et al. 2003, 12-13). Their digital nature brings with it the dematerialization of media

texts, the compressing of data into very small spaces, ready to be accessed at high speeds in a non-linear way, and the possibility to manipulate the forms. Digital media cannot be narrowed down to technical features, they may also serve as a logic of sensing ourselves and the world, relating to reality, identity, and community, trying new behaviours and viewing consequences of our actions. New, digital technologies introduced us to the hyper-world, be it personal, mediated or real.

Virtually everywhere

Virtual is something latent, something that is visible but does not exist, like our body's reflection in the mirror. It is something very close to being something without being it, offering "other spaces" (Foucault 2002) that share attributes of real ones without sharing their material existence and/or mirroring everyday activities in a festive way. Virtual is not the opposite of the real but a sort of reality itself (Lister et al. 2003, 124). It is the alternative reality or hyper-reality that is either a creation or a simulation or a representation serving as an opportunity to parallel or overcome reality and its interactions. With the advent of new media technologies the virtual refers to a space and experience that promises "to transform interpersonal communication to the very extent of our imaginations. (…) VR will eventually provide the means by which interactants will transcend the real and create communication environments that are hyperreal" (Palmer 1995, 290). Computer generated virtuality encompasses intentionality, purpose, accessibility, constitutive power, shared symbols and meanings. The term is readily and frequently used as a synonym of digital/cyber/simulated, that is, of the numerically based, networked capacity of ephemeral, infinite and intense communicative processes, codes, platforms and activities. In this view virtual stands for the technological imagery that formulates spaces for individual and collective actors: online virtual realities.

Virtual reality, first written about by Ivan Sutherland as "computer generated illusion" and later coined by Jaron Lanier (1989), expresses that it is a type of reality, a symbolic environment without the qualities of the 'actual'. It is a technologically, graphically and sensually constructed space that is based on the idea

> that a computer can synthesize a three-dimensional (3D) graphical environment from numerical data. Using visual, aural, or haptic devices, the human operator can experience the environment as if it were a part of the world. This computer-generated world may be a model of either a real-world object, such as a house; or an abstract world that does not exist in a real sense but is understood by humans, such as a chemical molecule or a representation of a set of data; or it might be in a completely imaginary science fiction world. Usually VR is described as a particular collection of technological hardware. (Riva et al. 2015, 536)

Virtual reality is constantly (re)produced by an apparatus to serve as a symbolic dimension for the individuals' telepresence, whereas the apparatus is operated by its human wearer who (re)produces herself within the boundaries of the digital sphere: virtual reality is where physical bodies and spatial illusion are intertwined through technological imagery. Virtual realities are online environments, digitally shaped spaces for embodiment and immersion in which the visual has a dominant, creative force.

Visuality for virtuality functions the same way sounded words functioned for primarily oral cultures where practices of rhetoric can find their origins. Sounded language for oral peoples – for whom writing was non-existent – was a mode of action, a way of (re)creating the world. Words in these cultures were sounds that could not be made notes of therefore the thought and actions they expressed and provoked should be imaginable, memorable, rhythmic and sensory. In primary orality speech is aggregative rather than analytic, additive rather that subordinative, empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced and homeostatic, the latter referring to the embeddedness of speech into the very present situation (Ong 2002, 35-46). These psychodynamics are analogically observable in the primarily visual digital-virtual space where images bolster the sense of the present and presence, where visual elements are memorable, additive, aggregative, empathetic and immersive.

Rhetoric has its roots in oral cultures, in the world of powerful words that created rather than denoted reality. Thus, the dynamics of online visual-virtual spaces and original persuasive speeches bear a notable resemblance.

Virtual as rhetorical

Mark Ulrich sets a sound argument for the virtual as rhetorical claiming that

> [v]irtual reality is a new, complex form of communication, and as in any other medium of communication, we can use rhetoric in virtual reality to convey arguments and change how individuals view the real world. (…) Visual rhetoric refers to the ability of images to convey arguments, primarily through invoking an emotional response. (…) I introduce the concept of "virtual rhetoric" to examine how virtual reality persuades users. (Ulrich 2011, 6)

Rhetoric here is means the apparatus of persuasion and virtual rhetoric in this sense embraces the phenomena of persuasive technologies; interfaces, spaces and procedures designed to influence their users. Design can be persuasive intentionally, that is when the designer applies rhetorical principles to the interface to capture and move user audiences. However, persuasive technologies operate unintentionally, too, where there is a critical-rhetorical literacy needed to make influential gestures overt. Virtual as rhetorical thus comprises two approaches:

the practical (*utens*) and the critical (*docens*). The first deals with the creation of persuasive virtual realities (planning, structuring and designing effects) and the other concerns the reception and interpretation of the persuasive intention and outlay. The merging of these two may point to a significant ethical assumption, articulated by Selber as follows:

> In short, persuasion permeates technological contexts in both obvious and not so obvious ways, yet those who are rhetorically literate, who understand that persuasion always involves larger structures and forces, will be in a unique position to design agreeable and worthwhile interfaces. (Selber 2004, 150)

Technologies and the virtual spaces they offer can definitely persuade, they keep us engaged, make us attentive, feel real and personal; they ask and insist, express and react. Moreover, they create – especially with VR media "a total environment capable of true and genuine interpersonal communication" (Palmer 1995, 290) rivalling face-to-face situations – or transferring them into visually, symbolically, emotionally and sensorily enhanced, digital contexts rich in stimuli. The persuasive advantages of a well-developed interface

> lie in the application of the multichannel, real-time interface to human-to-human interaction. Thus, VR mediates interpersonal relationships by providing a human-like, anthropomorphized interface bringing two people together, rather than machines and people. (Palmer 1995, 290)

Persuasive technologies can be designed to be influential. Design here manifests the persuasive intent of its creator by which attitudes and behaviours of recipients can be modified. This perspective of virtual persuasion is by nature rhetorical, the virtual 'artifact' (reality) being its speech. Fogg (2003) terms these rhetorically formulated complex technological operations, their applications and research captology – a neologism specifying the critical approach to study designed persuasive effects of human-computer (internet) interactions and to investigate "how people are motivated or persuaded when interacting *with* computing products rather than *through* them" (2003, 16). As Fogg asserts, in the coming years computing products and software applications would be more persuasive and motivational by being designed as more supportive and empathetic with human psyche. Computers can be persuasive in three different functional roles: as tools, as mediums and as social actors. In Fogg's taxonomy the persuasiveness of virtual spaces and experiences is the result of computers being simulative mediums and social actors. A medium, Fogg explains "can be persuasive by allowing people to explore cause-and-effect relationships, providing people with vicarious experiences that motivates, helping people to rehearse a behavior" (Fogg 2003, 62). Computers can become sensory media that provide users with simulated spaces where the intense presence the

hyperreal cyberspace offers and requires immersing into a flow of influtainment. That flow motivates them to adopt new attitudes and behaviors in a safe place, involves them into cause-and-effect chains that unfold in a compressed time span, without immediate real-life consequences. Being immersed, the user is often biased by the intensity of sensory media, by her own participation and forgets to reflect on the designers' biases built into the programming and display.

This is what Ian Bogost considers when he identifies the suasory effects of procedures in digital online/offline games. To interpret these effects he introduces a new subfield of rhetoric proposing the term procedural rhetoric. Procedurality refers to a way of creating, explaining, or understanding processes that define the way things work: the methods, techniques, and logics of system-operations, be they engines or environments.

> Procedural rhetoric, then, is a practice of using processes persuasively. More specifically, procedural rhetoric is the practice of persuading through processes in general and computational processes in particular. (…) Procedural rhetoric is a technique for making arguments with computational systems and for unpacking computational arguments others have created. (Bogost 2010, 2).

This rhetoric is built on procedural logic that operates through the graphical (depiction of movement, lighting, rhythm of change, collision, etc.) and textual (selection, combination, sequencing) features. It is also fed by operational models and their common patterns of media usage and interaction. In a virtual space (game) it is about the agency choices, the alternatives, the paths and carrier one can have and apply, the aggregate of which makes up a bigger picture of the narrative and the ethics. Procedural rhetoric is capable of revealing how media message programming and program decoding is inherently rhetoric (Aczél 2012). So helps procedural rhetoric uncover the meaning of system operations, created, virtual spaces and their cultural patterns. Procedural rhetoric is also a critical method which facilitates and improves media literacy: the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts. This leads us to the second aspect of virtual as rhetorical, that is, virtual literacy. Selber (2004) projects for a rhetorical breakthrough here incorporating the humanistic view, the rhetorical asset into the consideration of communication technologies. Discussing the problems of technology education he affirms the significance of the skills humanities convey in building multiliteracies. His conceptual landscape for a multiliteracies program comprises of three layers: the functional, the critical and the rhetorical. The functional literacy conceives of technologies as tools, the critical understands technologies as cultural artefacts while the rhetorical sees computers as hypertext media. Students thus can be users, questioners and producers of technology and become effective, informed and reflective with digital media. Selber's approach

highlights the complexity of the human-computer interaction and the need to unfold its persuasive effects. By adding the rhetorical level to the system of multiliteracies, Selber apprehends the deliberative and persuasive quality of interface (and content) design, the inbuilt rhetorical capacity of digitally created virtual spaces. From the rhetorical perspective media design is a social rather than a technological action, proving that HCI is "like a persuasive speech" (Buchanan and Boyarski 1994, 34; Selber 2004, 145).

Virtual realities are immersive, animated, vivid spaces where – apart from strategic thinking – emotions and moral judgements are raised and applied to simulated situations and decision-making. The persuasive power of VR as medium is nurtured by the intensity of the sensory experience and the bias of presence and involvement.

Therefore it is of crucial importance to allow

> rhetorical studies of technology (or technologies) (…) encourage us to identify and reflect upon the moments of decision in technological development writ large. They ask us to examine the choices that we have made during the creation and dissemination of any given technology, which we can hopefully revise or redesign. As part of that reflexive process, we recognize how technology reconfigures society by creating new connections between disparate parts of our social world. (Lynch and Kinsella 2013, 6-7)

Rhetoric as virtual (visual)

In this dimension I plan to investigate the virtual capacity and dynamics of rhetoric, by diagnosing its visual, spatial and creative assets. It was not until the 1990's that a spirited inquiry into the rhetorical study of images started. Forerunners were thinkers like Kenneth Burke (1955) or Douglas Ehninger (1972) whose definitions of rhetoric did not privilege verbal symbols and were sufficiently broad to include the visual. They considered rhetoric as the use and study of symbols and addressed symbolicity not as exclusively verbal. Current scholarship, by broadening rhetoric's scope, either focuses on the pictorial in rhetoric (Knape 2007) or tends to support the development of its visual paradigm by integrative definitions (Johnstone 2007, Rickert 2013).

Visual rhetoric is a term used to describe visual imagery within the discipline of rhetoric.

> It is used to mean both a visual object or artifact and a perspective on the study of visual data. In the first sense, visual rhetoric is a product individuals create as they use visual symbols (…). In the second, it is a perspective scholars apply that focuses on the symbolic processes by which visual artifacts perform communication. (Foss 2004, 304)

In the first case visual rhetoric is the actual image itself, in the second it is the theoretical venture through which the image becomes interpretable. For us here neither seem convenient enough to grasp the visually-spatially coded, creative capacity of the rhetorical mode. Therefore a third facet is to be added, that of the immanent visual and virtual capacity of the rhetorical system. Platitudinous, semi-forgotten elements of the ancient faculty prove that rhetoric requires creative visual imagination from both parties (orator-audience) and that it emanates from and embeds in visuospatial, sensual experiences. Among these are the *ars memorativa* (the semi-conventional, picture- and space-based system of memory), *phantasia* (the inner sense of the speaker and the receiver, that connects imagination, cogitation and memory), *ingenium* (the creative force in meeting, cognizing and expressing the world), *enargeia* (the energizing force that guide speakers to create vivid descriptions and to make their audiences picture what is said in order to persuade), *ekphrasis* (the rhetorical description that unfolds before the audience's eyes) or *thaumazein* (the initial shock of seeing and sensing the world uniquely, the wonder that comes from experience and recognition).

As the extensive analysis of these terms cannot be aimed here, I limit myself to elucidating some characteristics of memory, presence and *enargeia* to cast light upon rhetoric as virtual in its origins, operations and effects. By this I mean that rhetorical communication is based upon immediate and intense impressions and thus can it create visuospatially, emotionally and sensibly cognizable psychological-virtual spaces for its perceivers.

Memory in classical rhetorical theory was held in high regard. Even with its most sceptical writers it was considered the centre of the orator's arsenal, the cornerstone of the rhetorical discipline. It was defined either a mental art (a revival or recollection of perfect, ideal images), a part of the virtue of prudence, or a prescribed, trainable strategy. Often called the treasure-house of ideas, memory was originally related to invention that is built on the use of 'loci' and 'imagines', backgrounds and images. The locus has to be thought of as a real place that the speaker is familiar with. The background should be mentally divided into separate scenes and thus it forms a continuous series in the mind providing linkage in the 'material' and keeping it in the right sequence. This background once learned can be used repeatedly as a board that is there to be erased or reused when needed. Further on in memorization the subject matter is divided up into scenes and each marked point is represented by physical object, an incredibly intense impression (Yates 1974). Loci mnemonic was thus imagistic and synthetic, and orchestration of the senses impressions and meanings offering a virtual space for the speaker where rational, emotional and associational processes can go on. Creativity, selectivity, situatedness and spatiality of seeing are recognized

by the rules the ancient system made – which can be viewed as forecasting and mirroring the programming of today's virtual spaces.

Presence is what grounds the rhetorical situation and experience – such as it founds the immersive experience of the digital virtual participant. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) addresses the issue of rhetorical presence assuming that the effectiveness of argumentation is greatly affected by how successfully the speaker can make the elements of her proposal stand out for the audience, "to make these elements more salient and memorable. This can be done partly by the simple act of selecting and pointing out those elements. (…) Indeed, such a choice endows these elements with a presence" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 116). Rhetorical presence is more for the 'viewer' than for the listener. Fahnestock insists that the "intense realization of an actual or hypothetical event, as though occurring before the eyes, have crucial purpose: rhetoricians believe that such mental images could induce and emotional state in the audience" (Fahnestock 2011, 336). The "psychological assumption here (…) is that the emotions are reached through the senses, so the best way to create an emotion is to recreate the situation with a deictic immediacy stimulating the senses that would then evoke the emotion", as Fahnestock (2011, 337) underlines. The deictic immediacy directly operates on the 'passions' and creates the feeling here and now, a kind of immersion in the present. Presence and immediacy are likewise foundational in VR, where a whole world is made up around the virtually re/embodied agent. According to Riva et al. (2015),

> we can describe VR as an "embodied technology" for its ability of modifying the feeling of presence: the human operator can experience the synthetic environment as if it were "his/her surrounding world" (incorporation) or can experience the synthetic avatar as if it were "his/her own body" (incarnation). In summary, VR provides a new human–computer interaction paradigm in which users are no longer simply external observers of images on a computer screen but are "present" within a computer-generated 3D virtual world (Riva et al. 2015, 536)

Presence entails the usage of vivid illustrations in order to create vivid impressions in the receiver both in rhetoric and in VR. Vividness – a phenomenon contemporary psychology invest considerable interest into without much referring to the ancient roots and rhetorical knowledge – comes from the rhetorical virtue of *enargeia*. *Enargeia*, as the word itself suggests, energizes rhetorical descriptions with the visualization of things in activity (Aczél 2014). It brings words in front of the eyes by creating lively images of active persons and things, thus giving the impression of presence, of the here and now. It involves the audience into the happening of things as if they were unfolding right then, right there. The virtue of *enargeia* enacts the idea of actualization and the formulation of a common, shared reality; a reality that is virtual and rhetorical. Vivid information has its

source in the communicator's enargeia and is identified as concrete, emotionally interesting, imagery-provoking information and proximate in a sensory, temporal, or spatial way (Nisbett and Ross 1980, 45). Concrete, intense language, imagistic, figurative expressions (metaphors), personal narratives and first-had experiences serve vividness well, actual experience being the most vivid on the scale. Some psychological experiments in the field demonstrated that vivid information prompts more emotional responses and thus turns out to be more persuasive (Hill 2004, 32).

Memory, presence and *enargeia* exemplify the spatial, visual, emotional volume of rhetorical practice (and theory). Even though the logical-verbal paradigm has long been domineering the inquiry into rhetorical processes and products, there is a rich body of evidence that visuospatial-emotional assumptions are equally relevant and applicable in its tradition. However neglected this line of thinking may be, this is what makes rhetoric so lucrative in the analysis of virtual spaces and this is what calls for further quests into rhetoric as virtual (visual) itself.

In lieu of conclusions

We are on the edge of everyday virtual realities. Having been hyper-connected, augmented and nested into the internet of things, acquiring a new fluency of hybrid codes in global interactions what we face next is the interface of the virtual. Virtual is becoming the new real and so will its interpretations further proliferate. Rhetoric has re-entered the intellectual-academic field full-fledged to investigate, reflect and facilitate changes brought by/designed in digital media. The efficiency of applying rhetorical operations to the construction and analysis of virtual spaces is unquestionable when it comes to attraction, persuasion and immersion. However, it is indeed significant to uncertain and interpret rhetoric's inherent creative capabilities with which spaces and relations can be built, attitudes can be formed and decisions can be reached. Rhetoric may be viewed as an ancient head mounted display of spectacular shared worlds, visual persuasion, emotional states, compressed decisive processes – a virtuality that preceded digital technology with thousands of years. The present paper wished to be a humble contribution to this vision by theorizing virtual rhetoric, a new aspect of the capacious ancient faculty.

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