RHETRORIC OF SHOWING –WAYFINDING AS MEDIATION OF THE CITY

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INTRODUCTION

Wayfinding systems as parts of information-design are generally regarded as a rhetoric-free area, which is only about the transmission of information and not about the persuasive use of signs. Information-design is assumed to be the rhetorical degré zéro – in the style of the rhétorique générale (Dubois 1974)[1] – in design. The present text is based on the belief that there is no degré zéro of pure meaning and will show that wayfinding systems are in no case to be reduced to the duty of transmission of 'pure' information.[2]

On the other hand, the cooperative relation of rhetoric and design is emphasized from different angles of the design-field. As the designer Per Mollerup says: "It has sometimes been suggested that the difference between commercial and non-commercial signs is that commercial signs persuade while non-commercial signs inform. That is a truth within limitations. All commercial signs inform and many non-commercial signs include elements of persuasion." (Mollerup 2013, 87) Gesche Joost goes one step further by varying a quote of Kenneth Burke: "Wherever there is design, there is rhetoric." (Joost 2006, 211). And Arne Scheuermann and Annina Schneller are discussing in a research through design project at Bern University of Art the rhetorical consequences of a reduction of information-design to the delivery of 'pure' information. By focusing on signs in public transport they found out that next to the logos-level the visual rhetoric is essentially based on elements of ethos and pathos (Scheuermann 2012, Schneller 2013). So, these are approaches in and through design and, till now, there is almost no equivalent effort for this research topic in rhetorical theory. The present text tries to formulate some principles and to create a basis for the lacking rhetorical theory in the realm of information-design. This text aims at laying the groundwork for the so far lacking rhetorical theory by raising some issues and highlighting some spots:

Way-showing is an act of showing and acting is only possible for subjects. So, what does it mean to say that wayfinding systems are showing the way? What exactly do signs show, if it is said they show the way? Who shows something by using signs? To whom is something shown and what for? Every act of showing implies a social intention, which specifies the purpose of the act and clarifies in which regard the act was performed. So, in which regard is the shown object relevant, what for and to whom? Because showing is in that way always an act of interpretation, this question opens the entrance to a rhetoric of showing. This is the starting point to find or develop rhetorical strategies of showing. The present text's objective is to lead close to this point, but it can't be expected that the wide variety of possible strategies could be unfolded within this framework. The main thesis of the present text is that these strategies make clear that within a rhetoric of showing way-showing is part of persuasive motive-creation.

This approach is, of course, first of all a theoretical one, which means that, since this paper is not a case study, the only duty of the given examples is to illustrate the claims. Once they are understandable and acceptably described, it may be possible to do case studies using the terminology and methodology developed in this paper. A rhetoric of showing will – in a practical sense – makes clear that wayfinding-systems are not only an important part of every place-making process, they are, more fundamentally, building blocks in the creation of meaningful environments. Since the creation of meaning is the key concept of the transformation of spaces into places, this paper is also to be understood as a theoretical basis of place-making.

A note on the groundbreaking work of Kevin Lynch: Especially in *The Image of the City* Lynch is directly concerned with questions of wayfinding. Nonetheless his work is left out in this paper for two reasons: First, for Lynch three terms are central for any approach to the city-image. These are identity, structure and meaning. Since his inquiry largely leaves out the third (meaning), which is to be stressed by any rhetorical analysis, this paper is closer to other urban theorists like Amos Rapoport. As the concept of place-making emphasizes and as Rapoport points out "environment is more than physical […]. Thus one acts towards objects in terms of meaning, that is, objects indicate to people how to act" (Rapoport 1990, 60). Second, Lynch focusses on urban structure and mental maps, while he says little about the role of signs and wayfinding-systems in the process of image-creation.

RHETORICAL FUNDAMENT

A rhetoric of wayfinding understands rhetoric as being more than an attempt to transfer rhetorical figures from the verbal realm to the pictorial, but rather understands rhetoric as a structure. Such a structural understanding of rhetoric is within the New Rhetoric given by the work of Kenneth Burke which builds the fundament of the following theory. There are four central terms to be introduced here: motive, situation, act and form.

The term 'motive' is one of the pivotal terms in Burke's whole work. Motive does not mean an isolated reason to explain in a criminological sense human action, but rather it means a linguistic pattern of explanation and justification to describe a situation so that an act becomes understandable. Motives are, like Burke says, "shorthand terms for situations" (Burke 1954, 29). That means: Motives are expressed solely through linguistic forms, which symbolizes experience and creates a connection to reality. Reality, to outline Burke's ontological background, is constituted through linguistic constructed relations and that's why reality is always an interpretation of reality. It is reflected, selected and deflected by our terminologies. So, for Burke, motives are terms of interpretation, and on the basis of these terms, reality can be interpreted as a such-and-such perceived reality. Since interpretative accesses to reality always structure the so interpreted reality within a larger frame of orientation, motives are at the same time regulating and meaningful parts of orientation. Motives are like atoms of orientation, you build them to interpret the situation you're within.[3]

Two aspects of motives are also important to note. First, the naming of a motive is not irrelevant. Language itself is a motive and not only a medium for description of motives. "The names we give to motives shape our relations with our fellows. Since they provide interpretations, they prepare us for some function and against others, for or against the person representing these functions. Moreover, they suggest how we shall be for or against." For example: "Call a man a villain, and you have the choice of either attacking or cringing. Call him a mistaken and you invite yourself to attempt setting

him right." (Blankenship/Murphy/Rosenwasser 1993, 77-78) That's why "naming is one of the ways space can be given meaning and become place." (Cresswell 2004, 9)

Second, it is remarkable that motives create a scope of action, widening it and at the same time restricting it. When Burke says motives are shorthand terms for situations, then motive is to situation like act is to scene, as so far as a motive always includes strategies to handle situations. It is in this respect important to mention that situation is not to be seen as something which lies before any motivated access and is quasi-objectively given, so that it could be said motives were responses to situations, but both are circular bound to each other.
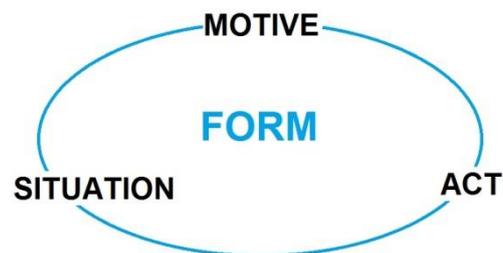
To quote Burke: "One tends to think of a duality here, to assume some kind of breach between a situation and a response. Yet the two are identical. When we wish to influence a man's response, for instance, we emphasize factors which he had understressed or neglected, and minimize factors which he had laid great weight upon. This amounts to nothing other than an attempt to redefine the situation itself. In this respect our whole vocabulary of motivation is tautological."(Burke 1954, 220.) What Burke calls tautological here is describing the circular relation between motive and situation and is a result of the recursivity of every orientation-process. Werner Stegmaier calls this the paradox of self-reference: "The self-reference is justified by the external reference; the external reference of orientation is the sense of its self-reference."[4] (Stegmaier 2008, 13) So tautological doesn't mean what tautological means for an argumentation, in short, that it is ineffective. Tautological means the possibility of transformation so that motives can function as shorthand terms for situations.

Finally, form is the overall principle, "the way of uniting motive and symbol, situation and act." (Blankenship/Murphy/Rosenwasser 1993, 84) A "work has form insofar as one part of it leads the reader to anticipate another part."(Burke 1931, 124) In this sense of uniting, wayfinding-signs as form is to be shown in the following.

Note that there is a certain similarity in Burke's concept of situation and the difference between space and place. While spaces are physical entities, places are always connected with situations in the above mentioned rhetorical sense, involving motives to act accordingly and create thereby a specific meaning. Thus, place-making in the sense of an "expression of the cultural values of communities and social organizations through the design and use of public and private space" (Winikoff 1995, 20) has to be grounded on a rhetorical motive-creation. Moreover, as we will see, a rhetoric of showing explores that the link between wayfinding and place-making is given by motive-creation.

SHOWING

"To show something means to act!"[5] (Wiesing 2013, 42) But neither pictures, nor pictograms, guidance systems nor signs are able to act. Avoiding any kind of mythology in picture-theory, which would assume that dead things could act, we have to conclude that the phrase of way-showing through wayfinding systems is not only elliptical; in fact it is a categorical failure. Non-mythological talking about showing implies answering the following question: Who shows whom what with which intention by the use of which instruments?[6] This is the question to be answered by a rhetoric of showing. The following text will concentrate on questions of the referential and social intention as well as on questions concerning the agencies of showing in reference to urban wayfinding systems.

The scene – the referential intention

The question of *What* is the question of the referential intention of the showing-act (Wiesing 2013, Tomasello 2008). Where should the attention be directed on? In every instance if a medium is used to show something – a picture, a finger, a graphic structure, a pictogram – the medium itself has to be shown first. First of all the attention has to be directed on the showing-medium, then the user has to realize that an object is used as a showing-medium to show something different from itself and, finally, the user has to detach his attention from the showing-medium and to move it to the intended referent. Showing is therefore always doubled and needs a specific design to make the movement of the attention possible. Because the movement both to and away from the showing-medium is a necessary condition of any successful act of showing by wayfinding systems, and because this condition is describable as an extremal-problem (in every instance the wanted solution is both a maximum in attention-keeping and a maximum in attention-losing or transparency), the designed form of the showing-media has to be based on the rhetorical category of the aptum/appropriateness.

The first part of the described movement is sufficiently often object of design research (among others: Berger 2009, Mollerup 2013): typeface, color, contrast, placement and many more are means of attention movement in the first sense. The second part of the movement is in comparison almost unexplored. How to create the needed transparency? In reference to our question: What is shown, if the presentation of the showing-medium was successful? While the finger as archetypical showing-medium primarily directs the attention to the line of sight, showing with the help of wayfinding systems is much more complex. Lines of sight are only useful to show, if the sight on the intended object is free. On the other hand directions of ways to a target object could successfully be shown even if it is not possible to see the intended object, but it is possible to see the way. Location checking on maps, defining the position of oneself on you-are-here-maps and also routes on schemes could be objects of the referential intention of an orator's showing-act. The referential intention becomes rhetorically interesting, if by the choice of a certain referent an emphasis, a valuation or another form of preference takes place, in other words: if certain forms of social intention affect or determine the referential intention.

The purpose – the social intention

Every instance of showing is always an act of showing something. But nothing could be shown as itself, it has to be shown as something. We can point at a car – more exactly we just can show a direction –, but it only becomes relevant if we point at it as the car of a friend or the source of danger or the possibility to hitchhike or whatever. Because of this showing something is always a kind of

sense making and to show something to someone means to communicate a certain sense. Referential calls for social intention and vice versa. To put it otherwise: Showing is a form of let-seeing (Sehen-lassen) of something as something, it is an act of semantic identification and the interpretative acts done with semantic identification are the invitation to the core of a rhetoric of showing – and, of course, the core of any attempt for place-making. It is the social intention of the showing-act which persuasively affects people, because if objects of the environment are interpreted as objects with specific qualities, then, by the same token, situations – in the above mentioned rhetorical understanding – were interpreted as such-and-such situations. These interpretative accesses are – as we saw with Burke – the starting point of preferences in acting, believing and feeling. The outstanding quality of wayfinding systems is that the social intention is communicated to the user so subtle and covered by his own belief in the neutrality of such systems, that he in fact recognizes it – otherwise the showing-act would fail – but normally he perceives it as natural, not worth to question. The rhetorical dimension of wayfinding remains therefore often subtle and only occurs when something goes wrong, showing-acts fail or are perceived to be strange.

The Agency – rhetorical strategies of showing

Signs in wayfinding systems could be classified in four types depending on the main function they have: identification, directional, description and regulation signs[7]. (Mollerup 2013, 60) For the present inquiry are identification and directional signs of primarily interest, because for these types the instruments are often more evidentially such as hierarchizing, narration and over all semantic identification. By the use of such instruments signs help to create meaning and to persuade the user, tourist or city dweller of the character of urban destinations, boulevards, piazzas or even whole cities. In this last chapter I want to focus on questions of such forms of meaning-creating.

Happy Trails Dallas. A failure in social intention, the form of smileys
bites the objective to command and prohibit

Directional signs are signs used to show the direction to certain destinations. In that way they define what counts in a given context as destination, what is preferable to reach, lovely to visit or desirable to experience and moreover in what manner it is valuable. They show by the use of proper names, terms, hierarchies, pictograms and arrows. Directional signs "tie 'here' and 'there' together." (Mollerup 2013, 92) The binding together of here and there enables the spatial relation, which is necessary for

directional signs to perform their duty to show directions of destinations within a continuum. On the other hand a semantic relation may rise out of the spatial relation.

*Directional sign in Ulm. Neither the destinations nor the distance to them has an
action-leading function, but the spatial relation creates a kind of semantic relation,
placing Ulm in a list of the most important cities of the world.*

"Identification signs state the name, function, or nature of a location." (Mollerup 2013, 60) Therefore identification signs are prototypes of semantic identification in the realm of wayfinding. They do not merely summarize the character of a place, but help to create such a character for the interested visitor. Places for example were transformed into historical, political or cultural meaningful scenes. This process of transformation is realized not only by the use of the verbal realm, but also through the effective placement of pictorial media. However, their actual effectiveness derives from his use as medium to perform a showing-act, as a medium used to concentrate the users attention on it and to move, in a second step, from the sign to the now scenic identified place in front of it. Identification signs are the clearest evidence for a genuine rhetorical transformation: the "attempt to redefine the situation itself." (Burke 1954, 220) To put it otherwise: Identification signs may create action-leading motives.

*Identification sign in Seattle library. Of course this room is not a living room, but in
identifying it as a living room, people may act (with limitations) as if they were at home,
feel safe, relax, and meet friends in a homey atmosphere. Moreover your actions have to
express that you assume responsibility as you do for your home*

*Identification sign in Warsaw. The Willy-Brandt-Square is the place of the
Warsaw genuflection (Kniefall). This symbolic gesture is promoted by the
sign, identifying the place as a historic, quasi-religious scene by
expressing a genuflection-motive.*

That's the rhetorical bridge necessary to come from the quotation that identification signs state the nature of a location to the following: "Identification means establishing identity. […] For the purpose of communication the name of the place represents all these qualities." (Mollerup 2013, 90) And different names create different identities and are leading to different forms of action – as we saw with Burke. Because identification signs are used to identify a given place as a such-and-such situation, they create motives on whose basis actual action at certain places become understandable, describable and to a certain degree predictable. That is by the same token to say that identification signs are essential building blocks within the above mentioned motive-circle. Their function as wayfinding-element is primarily not wayshowing, it is motive-creation. You can't show a way, without reference to a certain kind of desirable motive to go the way.

CONCLUSION

Of course, whoever wants to create meaningful places will not only rely on the use of wayfinding signs, but will pull out all the stops – architectural cues, urban forms, local promotion, etc. – to support this creation. After all – that's what the concept of place-making like every rhetorical approach turns out – the successful creation will not be done by the designer or urban planner but through the people's use of the place. Nonetheless the rhetorical process does not end up in pure contingency, since there are cues for identification to deliver persuasively by the designer or urban planner to create motivational situations, that is, to transform spaces into places. "In other words, it is the social situation that influences people's behavior, but it is the physical environment that provides the cues." (Rapoport 1990, 57) In cities, where almost every space is – in questions of meaning for the dwellers – in fact already a place, the task of place-making is not so much to transform 'empty' spaces into meaningful places, but to turn places of one character into places with a different character, evoking different situations and leading to different kinds of action. This is exactly what was above called a redefining of the situation itself and has always a rhetorical dimension. To face this wide process the rhetoric of showing has to be extended to a whole rhetoric of place-making.

ENDNOTES

[1] The rhétorique générale has coined the term degré zero to describe and explain the possibility of relative stability of the meaning of a word within communicational exchange. This concept is with reference to Ivor A. Richards to be interpreted and rejected as an instance of the proper meaning superstition.

[2] Although the rhetorical point zero does not exist, and neither pure neutrality, pure objectivity nor pure information exists, it is important to note that nevertheless designing a wayfinding system means to operate at the rhetorical point zero. Neutrality, objectivity and 'pure' information are rhetorical modes of affect.

[3] To quote Burke: "Motives are subdivisions in a larger frame of meaning; this larger frame of meaning is […] an orientation." (Burke 1954, 19).

[4] Original: "Der Selbstbezug ist auf den Fremdbezug ausgerichtet, der Fremdbezug der Orientierung ist der Sinn ihres Selbstbezugs."

[5] Original: "Etwas zu zeigen, ist eine Handlung!"

[6] This question expresses the five terms of the Burke'ean pentad. For Burke, every complete statement says something from five perspectives: from the perspective of the agent, act, scene, agency and purpose. In that way the raised question is: Who (agent) shows (act) whom what (scene) with which intention (purpose) by the use of which instruments (agency)?

[7] Two remarks: First, in a complete rhetoric of wayfinding the differentiation of types of signs has to be developed along rhetorical categories. This work is still to be done. Second, there are next to identification phenomena of course many different forms of rhetoric also discussable: for example a rhetoric of command, authority, a rhetoric of nativeness in handwritten signs, and many more.

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