THE RHETORIC OF TELEVISION

Summary

"The Rhetoric of Television" is the first book in Poland which aims to present the rhetorical dimensions of television in as comprehensive a way as possible. Not only does rhetoric allow communication by means of television to be researched and described, it also reveals its ability to shape reality. This ability is not only typical for television, but also for rhetoric itself.

There are three reasons why television should be recognised as an important subject for research. Firstly, despite the expansion of the internet, television retains its strong foothold in contemporary media and its permanent position in daily life. This stems from its accessibility: television communication is easy to receive, and in contrast to print media and the internet, requires no competences and also reaches those who read rarely, if at all. Television has the additional merit of not demanding knowledge of a particular language, but rather a more universal interest in images. Secondly, recognising the rhetorical mechanisms shaping television communication allows a better understanding of those used by the internet. Thirdly, the transformation of the televisual medium opens up new areas for research. Contemporary television functions and is used in various ways. Viewers are not required to be in front of their sets at a particular time of day. They may be guided by the programming, but might also watch whatever and whenever they wish, in a non-linear way, regardless of programming limitations, using new devices and services such as VOD or *catch-up TV*. This changes both the viewer and the way in which television is used. All this results in an unceasingly significant subject for research, including that on rhetoric.

The book is composed of four parts. Part One, entitled "Rhetoric and Television", provides definitions of the most important notions, i.e. rhetoric and television, as well as the proposed rhetoric model of television. The starting point here is the assumption about the universal nature of rhetoric, which as a system was designed to teach how to deliver speeches, but on the other hand, it has evolved together with the means of communication between the speaker and the audience that have been constantly changing. Therefore, the key notions from the rhetoric of antiquity can still serve as the starting point for the analysis, be updated as part of contemporary interdisciplinary research, and applied in the analysis of the various forms of communication.

Initially, rhetoric was tightly connected with public life and mainly represented the art of 'good' speaking (*ars bene dicendi*). At present, it is less logocentric. It incorporates architecture, music, image, sculpture, advertising, television, radio, the internet etc. This kind of extension of the object of research stems from the assumption that *rhetorical criticism* can be utilised to analyse any human activity, process,

product or artefact, which can trigger, maintain or modify attention, attitudes or behaviour. Rhetoric can be seen as the analysis of how people use language and other symbolic signs as part of their particular activity, as a means towards a particular objective, as a way to determine particular attitudes and behaviour and also, on a more abstract level, as a symbolic activity through which we construct (and interpret) different realities that we inhabit. Understood this way, rhetoric serves as a perfect tool for analysing media, especially television.

As an audio-visual medium television activates the sense of sight and hearing and also offers the simultaneous production and reception of live coverage. This way television communication bears similar features as face to face communication, which makes it possible to search for analogies between the television speaker setting (the broadcaster) and the primary rhetorical situation of the speaker addressing the audience. However, at the same time the features typical for television bring about significant differences. For instance, a lack of direct contact and therefore a lack of immediate feedback, as well as the diffuse nature of the audience, make the actual perception situation almost unpredictable. Also, the situation of the sender is far more complex, as it comprises the media institution, collective broadcaster and individual broadcaster.

Drawing on Anne Ulrich and Joachim Knape's analysis, the rhetorical model of television is comprised of: the sender or broadcasting authority, communication tools (text and medium) and the target audience, i.e. the television viewer. It is commonly assumed that the focus of television rhetoric is the key question of conditions for effective, targeted communicative behaviour and that television rhetoric analysis deals mainly with the analysis of all the dimensions that the media broadcaster (the broadcasting authority) has to take into account in order to draw viewers' attention and to create the communication sphere that would make the latter susceptible to persuasion. This is what the following three parts of this publication are devoted to.

The issue of the broadcaster and especially the creation and presentation of its credibility (the rhetorical *ethos*) is the object of the analysis in Part Two, i.e. "Broadcaster: Credibility Building". The key issue here is the conviction that the performative power of a message, hence its capacity to change social reality is determined by who the broadcaster is. In the television communication context it is essential to conceive of the broadcaster on two levels, i.e. in a broader sense it is the television channel, whereas on a micro level it will be the actual person performing on television. In other words, the credibility of the broadcaster means on the one hand its credibility as a television channel, i.e. as a corporation which includes its staff, production, financial, political and technological background, which all contribute to the creation of the particular media message. On the other hand, this credibility is also evoked by the particular individuals that the viewer sees on the screen, i.e. journalists, reporters, television presenters. A television station creates its own *ethos* by utilising particular media strategies, such as the choice of programmes, the actual offer structure and its originality, particular actions that journalists engage in and the self-promotion measures aimed at creating and establishing a particular image. On the other hand, the actions taken by others also play an important role,

i.e. those of competition, the viewers, commentators and experts, all of whom in various contexts comment on the television station and evaluate its actions. This way the credibility of a television station is the product of auto-creation and also the allo-creation. Both of these are not independent paths, but instead are interdependent and determine each other.

In the analysis of the *ethos* of television presenters, the category of a persona used is that developed by Donald Horton and Richard Wohl. It enables one to talk not only about the para-social interaction between such personae and their audience, but also to analyse the process known since ancient times of creating screen personalities, which stems from the strategy of crafting *ethos* as a 'temporary character' or 'situational character'.

The multifaceted nature of the broadcasting authority opens up areas for reflection on the tools available to the broadcaster, which must be presented to the viewer in order to achieve the desired aims. The focal point here are the three components of *ethos* distinguished by Aristotle: *phronesis, arete* and *eunoia*, brought up to date with regard to the categories of television broadcaster. *Phronesis* is the dimension of *ethos* in which the broadcaster presents its professionalism, knowledge and experience. In the case of television stations this is related to the evaluation of how its media products are prepared and distributed, which viewers assess on the basis of the level and attractiveness of the programmes on offer. This specialisation gives rise to professionalism. The label of specialist is afforded to theme-based stations. The professionalism of the presenters seen on the screen is presented to a great extent in terms of particular actions and strategies for self-promotion. *Arete*, the ethical component, refers to the journalist's responsibility to be objective in describing reality, which in practice means that the broadcaster needs to create journalistic behaviour that viewers will deem to be 'credible' and 'honest'. The strategies of authenticity and objectivity help achieve this. On the other hand, *eunoia* can be associated with seeking the viewer's appreciation. The key points here are creating bonds with the viewer, the problem of adapting to the tastes of a mass audience, and increasing the attractiveness of the message, as well as striving for exclusivity (priority and publication before others), and also forming the conviction that the broadcaster cares for their viewers. This is mainly done by means of 'intervention programmes', but also directly through the various types of reality shows: talent shows or makeover shows.

Part Three – "Medium and Text: Performative Dimensions" – is an analysis of the rhetorical potential inherent in televisual text and media, which influence the performance of such texts. From the rhetorical point of view televisual texts should be understood as a deliberately coordinated collection of signs (and intended meanings), which together lead to a defined effect or fulfil a particular function. Televisual text is therefore a ready, manufactured audiovisual message, arranged in terms of invention, arrangement and delivery, which meet the requirements of intentionality (to meet particular objectives as the result of the speaker's intentional acts). As television deals with a multicoded message, this 'arranging' relates to three codes: linguistic, iconic and aural (including musical), and their mutual relations. At the

level of delivery one might refer to figures both in the linguistic sense (the figures of speech and figures of thought described in classical rhetoric), image (choice of frame, reduced size, enlarged size, zooming in and out, which create a certain order that might have a meaning and function assigned), and also music (musical figures understood as particular repeatable, classified audio means that aim to influence the audience). Understood in this way, each feature of a text, be it content or structural element, might influence the audience in a persuasive way, by constituting a tool to direct their attention, or introduce a certain order or sense to their way of experiencing and understanding the world.

The fundamental assumption underlying television rhetoric is that each medium is distinguished by specific ways of performance, which constitute both its rhetorical potential and limitations. The audiovisual nature of television, streaming, direct broadcasting capability, transience and the structure of programming all create different ways of perceiving and experiencing in viewers. The next three chapters of Part Three deal with these issues.

The chapter entitled "Audiovisuality and the Authenticity Effect" describes the audiovisual character of the message and the authenticity effect associated with this (of particular importance in terms of the effectiveness of television). Audiovisuality engages the vision and hearing, not only reducing the viewer's resistance to perception and interpretation, thus allowing *face-to-face* communication to be stimulated, but also the credibility of the message. Sound, vision and speech (spoken and written) are important in this sense.

The chapter "Sound in Television" contains an in-depth analysis of rhetorical functions that are of particular importance for the effect of television sound. These include the ability to get the viewer's attention, inducing affects, rendering the message credible, and also giving structure to the televisual stream and to specific television performances. Not only is sound a delimiting signal which ensures the coherence between images, but it also creates dramatic effect. Michel Chion deemed the human voice to be the most important sound in television. It is this that guides viewers towards a given interpretation, also performing a phatic function in its role of maintaining communicative contact with viewers. The questions discussed include ones such as the influence of vocalisation on how viewers take in and remember programme content, react emotionally and change attitudes.

The starting point for analysing the persuasive functions of television is the assumption that image builds semantic networks more effectively than text and generates stronger associations, which is why a visual message has a greater impact on viewers' attitudes than a verbal one (cf. the chapter "The Televisual Image"). The audiovisual form of televisual text allows the conviction to develop in viewers that they are not merely being informed about what is happening in the world, but also observing reality and participating in events. As Pierre Bourdieu notes, images have the particular ability to create the 'reality effect'. Camera angles and moves as well as montage have a decisive effect on the persuasiveness of the visual message. Selecting shots in television rhetoric should be regarded as the selection of the means of expression, which is to generate a particular effect or perform and given function.

This is not just an aesthetic choice, but it also determines the informational content of the message and its persuasive potential. For instance, situational shots (long and full shots) allow information to be conveyed about the place in which an event occurred. On the other hand, psychological shots, i.e. those in which the individual is the dominant element (American, medium and close-up shots), are used to build emotions. In addition to this, analogous to the classical understanding of rhetoric as "the art of persuasion using words", in which teleological linguistic constructions such as tropes ad figures serve to persuade and suggest, in television narrative one may also refer to visual figures. These include camera moves, variations in picture size, changes in the angle of view, optical effects, image changes, darkening, simultaneous pictures, etc. In view of television's persuasive potential, visual figures such as repetition, comparison (by means of the *split screen* figure), metonymy, synecdoche, euphemism, symbol and gradation are of particular importance.

An important dimension of visuality for television rhetoric is televisuality, a characteristic visual style of presentation. Televisuality has a rhetorical character in a sense that it is the effect of the broadcaster's strategic actions – conscious choices made by the television speaker in order to achieve particular aims, such as distinguishing the programme in an essentially uniform stream, gaining the viewers' interest with the message and engaging them in discourse. Television's idiosyncratic visual way of presenting means that television is not anonymous, but is endowed with 'authorship'. Thanks to this, the viewer is able to recognise the station and channel at a glance.

The next means of communication that is important for television rhetoric is language, which is analysed in the chapter entitled "Spoken and Written – the Word in Television". In Walter J. Ong's opinion, television introduces a new type of orality – secondary orality, whose predominant rhetorical function is to stimulate *face to face* communication and generate a sense of community and existence within the group. Statements made on television can be analysed from different perspectives. The rhetorical perspective demands that the following are taken into consideration: 1) the dominant functions of the message (*movere*, *docere, delectare*), 2) the strategies adopted by the speaker (for instance, writing a text beforehand and reading it out in a manner that suggests spontaneity), 3) the conventions that apply in a particular format, and 4) the individual speaker's linguistic and communicative competences.

To a large extent, live broadcasts constitute television's attractiveness (cf. the chapter on "Television as a Direct Message"). The rhetorical potential of a live broadcast lies in the effect of what can be seen live has on the viewer. This is achieved by applying *dissimulatio artis*, which means that the staging of things is so hidden as to create the effect of spontaneity and improvisation. Live broadcasting is also responsible to a certain extent for stretching the present and for the community's experiencing spontaneousness. This spontaneity effect allows communicative contact to be made and maintained with the viewer. The strength of the impact made by a live broadcast on the viewer is proved by the fact that contemporary mediatised events are supplanting traditional ones. On the one hand, the process of the televisual reproduction of reality is related to its being reduced, transformed and de-

formed, while on the other we are dealing with a process of compensating for these visual and auditary stimuli, which reality alone is not capable of providing us with. In television both hearing and seeing are easier, for the camera enriches the visual effect thanks to changes in shots, points of view and various lenses.

What is essential to television rhetoric is the streamed nature of broadcasting (analysed in the chapter entitled "From Sequence to Stream: the Experience of Streaming"). The majority of today's television channels are created with streaming in mind, which is the consequence of planning in television networks focused on guiding the viewer's attention in such a way as to maximise the viewer's attachment, bearing in mind the immense competition on the media market, and also the diffuse nature of television reception. Streams should therefore be regarded as a consequence of rhetorical choice. Paratexts perform the special function of guiding the reception in the televisual stream. Their role is to grab and retain the viewer's attention.

The process of constructing the television programming format is also rhetorical in its nature (cf. the chapter "The Whole and Parts: Structuring the Programming"). This is a strategic task: the broadcaster is required to arrange numerous suggestions from one channel in a way that will result in the best possible viewing figures among a particular target group. In accordance with the rhetorical *dispositio* the criteria for selecting and arranging programme units are their relationship to the viewer. Order in programming is focused on creating and consolidating its own routine in television viewing, to programme the viewers, to accustom them to watching at particular times of the day, which is why the fundamental principle of programming is cyclicality, which from the rhetorical point of view fulfils several functions: arranging, displaying, bonding and identifying.

The chapter entitled "Panaceum for Transience: Repeats in Television" focuses on an analysis of the primary quality of television, namely transience. This means that the performance of a televisual text takes place in real time, and cannot be stopped nor repeated, and can only be received by the viewer at the moment of broadcasting. This has consequences for broadcast rhetoric. The viewer's brief and superficial contact with the televisual text in a situation where attention is not focused leads to television being more oriented towards the phatic function, hence the need to prepare texts in a way that is clear and unambiguous for the recipient. This is in turn related to simplified arguments, recourse to ellipsis as a principle in shaping logical arguments, and a tendency to repeat images and particular constructions and fragments of a message. Therefore, the strategy for overcoming transience in television is repetition. What this means in terms of television rhetoric is firstly a repeat of a programme that has been broadcast; secondly, repetition in the form of citing excerpts from programmes, images, and statements; and thirdly, repetition of narrative patterns.

Finally, looking at televisual texts from the rhetorical perspective requires one to focus on the fact that television structures belong to certain genres and formats (cf. the chapter entitled "Between Convention and Creation: Television Genre and Format"). A genre, as a conventionally determined manner of formulating a mes-

sage, is a tool that makes it easier to understand what is happening and therefore serves as a basic interpretative filter. The persuasive power of a genre lies in the combination of what is conventional with the inventive, i.e. the new, surprising and unexpected. However, in television texts the creative part cannot dominate over the conventional. This is because rhetorical success depends on the ability to adjust the message to the audience and television is an egalitarian medium, therefore the convention is the best option. Firstly, because it refers to the knowledge resources that are seen as common to the whole audience and people find it easier to accept what is in congruence with their own knowledge and experience. Secondly, this is because convention is safe and does not trigger controversy.

Part Four of this book entitled "Project: Audience" is devoted to the issue of the rhetorical design of the target television audience. The aim of the art of rhetoric is to convince, which means to create an impact on the audience's mind, will and emotions with the aim of triggering a particular reaction on their part (i.e. a perlocutionary act). Therefore the focal point of the rhetorical process is the audience and their needs. Television engages in the rhetorical design of its audience on the level of the television programme structure, the genres and topics of the television station as a whole, but also on the level of the topic and genre structure of its particular television programmes, whose design is determined by the needs and preferences of a particular target audience. The essential element in this process seems to be an attempt at breaking the barrier stemming from the communicative situation, i.e. the fact that the sender and the receiver are separated in space (but also most frequently in time) through the utilisation of the interactive strategy and getting closer to direct and bidirectional communication. A particular dimension of this strategy is para-social interaction, which makes it possible to harness mediated communication in a way that resembles the rhetorical potential of face-to-face communication (cf. the chapter on "Interactivity as a Rhetorical Strategy"). Another important dimension of designing the audience is the focus on *pathos*, i.e. the emotional engagement of the audience (cf. the chapter on "*Pathos*. The Emotionalisation of the Message"), and the strategy that does engage the audience in a particularly emotional manner is dramatisation. Dramatisation is understood here firstly as the build-up of tension, presentation of events in the context of a conflict or a problem that needs to be solved, and secondly, as hyperbolisation, i.e. exaggeration and endowing an event with dramatic or tragic features. From the rhetorical perspective another important strategy of television presentation is also personalisation. The rhetorical potential of personalisation lies in the switch in reception on the part of the audience from observing abstract facts to emotional engagement in the communicative situation. The audience is called on to feel with the people they observe on the screen, as well as to evaluate them, the consequence of which is engagement in the discourse. This type of engagement strengthens the experience of intimacy created through focusing on the individual and singular, coincidental fate of an ordinary person. This mechanism is presented with the example of TV news, but is also relevant for other TV programmes, such as reality shows or intervention programmes. Personalisation

can be interpreted as a reflection of the impact of the media's anthropocentric dimension and the result of the shift in television from the public to the private.

The last chapter of this monograph is devoted to the simplification strategy used on television. The rhetorical requirement to adjust the message to the audience determines the choice of the topic and the manner in which it is presented. The television broadcaster is, on the one hand, a hostage of the communicative competence and needs of its audience, i.e. a very broad, heterogeneous public frequently characterised by basic communicative competence. On the other hand, the determining factor are the communicative tools. Television is an audiovisual medium, so images can reveal events and determine attitudes towards them, but it struggles to create a narrative in order to provide arguments or to explain relations. Film reduces the complexity of the actual state of affairs and it also requires secondary symbolic code to present abstract concepts. Therefore simplification, i.e. the strategy of simplifying, is the most common and inevitable feature of television. This happens at the level of content and form, and is the consequence of the broadcaster's actions on the level of invention (the information selection, stereotypisation), disposition (composition) and elocution.

All the features described in this monograph are intended as part of a comprehensive presentation of the phenomenon of television, irrespective of the era in which it functions. Regardless of whether we are dealing with black and white television and a limited range of channels, or with colour television, or talking about specialised, thematic television and television on demand, in all those different cases there are features, strategies and mechanisms that can be analysed in a uniform manner and that can be described from the perspective of the rhetoric of television. This is because rhetoric provides tools that allow for an equally efficient description of the various types of television, such as broadcasting, narrowcasting and slivercasting.

Translated by Rob Pagett