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5. VISUAL COMMUNICATION IN CULTURAL MEDIA. THE RASHOMON EFFECT IN THE IMAGE GLOBALIZATION PARADIGM

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Abstract: *The nowadays communication paradigm shifts in the context of new media emergence, as we consider the internet and social media as sovereign communicative mediums. From cinema to press, advertising, art, or new-mediatic context, we assist to a global communication process which encompasses both the technological virtues of digitality, and the subjective truths of a collective cultural memory process. Based on the active principle of "the Rashomon effect," we will investigate the advertising patterns, the news dissemination, and the everyday culture of images, and we will attempt to summarise the outcome of our position as (inter)active players in this globalised media environment. Since we are both creators and consumers of cultural information in the "global village," we work with a wide array of communication supports which define our very identity as "information matrix processors." We are creating both the context and the vehicle of this paradigm where the information is the main currency, and the visual communication become a medium by itself which opens a variety of directions of analysis for critical understanding of today's cultural phenomenon*
Key words*: visual communication, media, advertising, Rashomon effect, visual culture*

1. Introduction

This article addresses today's mediatic paradigm which reflects the cultural understanding of objectivity in the communication process, how the truth is reflected in the message, and questions the way the meaning is formed at the intersection of personal subjectivities and collective objectivity. Since we are both creators and consumers of cultural information in the "global village", we consume advertising, and we digest news in ways inconceivable a few years ago. We talk about information, we read images, we look at texts, we listen to videos, and we understand a wide array of communication supports which define our very identity as information processors and "matrix" workers[171]. We are creating both the context, and the vehicle of this paradigm where the information is the main currency, and the visuals are dominating the news exchange market.

While analysing the forms of the contemporary communications media, we will investigate the advertising patterns, the news dissemination, and the everyday culture of images, and we will attempt to summarize the outcome of our interactive position as active players in this globalized media industry. As a critical and conceptual tool, we will address the Rashomon effect, a principle which allows us to investigate the communication process in its multiple perspectival dimensions, questions the values and the validity of the memory and recognition as cognitive processes, and provides a multi-perspectival tool of digesting the communication content.

2. The Rashomon effect

The Rashomon effect is a term attributed to the popularity of the Japanese

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[171] The McLuhan's "global village" concept and the artist as "information processor" were discussed by Lev Manovich in his analysis of "The language of new media" from 2001 (Manovich 2001).

director Akira Kurosawa's film, "Rashomon." In this movie from 1950, the narrative storytelling involves a dialogue of the participants to the event of a murder in the forest, involving a samurai, his wife, a wood cutter, a priest, and a commoner, discussed by the participants which are taking shelter from a storm under the Rashomon Gate in Kyoto (figure 1). As they are trying to understand the facts (the phenomenon) based on their (different) perceptions or memories of it, we notice that each account of the event is different and contradictory, and the film ends ambiguously without a clear resolution of what occurred.

The Rashomon effect term[172] transcended cinema and has been defined in a modern context with the contribution of various academic researchers (Davis, Anderson and Walls 2018). This idea of multiple understanding from different perspectives of the reality became, in time, a prolific application in psychology, media, advertising, art, press, legal studies, and other domains of contemporary culture, where the communication and its meaning are the result of a constant negotiation of our subjective cognitive methods[173]. The Rashomon effect embodies the idea that a singular truth can be always discussed from different perspectives, based on personal/subjective perception, and understanding, which creates a multitude of directions of critical digestion for the very single idea of communication. The result is a narrative parabola which plays the concepts of truth and false, and objectivity versus subjectivity. It also involves the idea of the unreliability of multiple witnesses whose subjectivity is factual and is the result of situational, social, and cultural differences – all these adding up to the understanding of the message as a fact, based on the contextual communication (McElhinney 2022).

In terms of psychological effect, the Rashomon effect also deals with the processes of thinking, rationalizing, knowing, and remembering, with the memories and the recollection of memories in a cycle which affects the meaning each time[174]. These underlying psychological phenomena mean that the Rashomon effect can be identified and applied in almost any domain where the perception of a fact leads to different interpretation of the truth. In this article, we will exemplify with case studies from film, media, advertising, and visual arts, which we found relevant for the diversity of approach solutions in debating and obtaining differentiated subjective truth as multiple sides of an objective reality.

3. Perspectives of critical narratives

In terms of communicational objectivity and information truth, the Rashomon Effect provides us with the idea of a multitude of perspectives, points of view, directions of critical analysis from both author and lecturer, as well as the idea of

[172] The term is attributed to Valerie Alia who originally called this "The Rashomon Principle" and used the term extensively since 70s, inviting readers to examine current media practices while developing strategies for the different ethical problems we encounter nowadays. (Alia 2004).

[173] A description of the literary lineage for the film script and its echoes in film critique, as well as in other domains such as law, ethics, anthropology or media can be found in the collective volume "Rashomon Effects: Kurosawa, Rashomon, and their legacies" (Davis, Anderson and Walls 2018),

[174] Detailed by Peter Coy in his article from 1971 "A Watershed in Mexican Rural History: Some Thoughts on the Reconciliation of Conflicting Interpretations" (Coy 1971), mentioned by Sheila Marie Orfano in her TED talk "How do you know what's true?" (Orfano 2021), based on the original ethnographic study of Karl G. Heider published in 1988, where the author discusses the effect of the subjectivity of perception on recollection, with the observers of an event being can "produce substantially different but equally plausible accounts of it". (Heider 1988).

subjective definition of communication value. We can investigate distinct characteristics of the communication process from the perspective of the Rashomon Effect, with topics such as the contradictory interpretation by different people, the subjective versus objective, the fractured truth, subjective realities, the unreliable source versus the unreliable narrator, the story within a story as a metaphor of human memory. In this way, these principles can serve our analysis of examples in domains such as cinema/film, in visual arts and new media manifestations, in advertising and press[175].

The communication channels, the media, is in constant evolution. As we are introducing the idea of media and mediums of expression, we favour the understanding of new media today as the absorption of contemporary communication technologies in the process of communication. What we call today new-media is a multitude of cultural phenomena which are - today - digitally conditioned (created, distributed, and consumed). Today's new media is the echo of any technological solution which facilitated the communication process in each major technological shift in the last century: cinema and film in twenties, radio in thirties, television in fifties, video in seventies, internet in 90s – and digital content today. And, as McLuhan observed, the medium is the message, hence the current understanding of the computer-based communication in press, art, or advertising (McLuhan 1964).

Echoes of the Rashomon Effect can be observed in the film or cinema industry, where the story telling works at its best. It is no surprise that this particular analysis direction which involves the idea of a hidden (or not visible) plot, a storyteller which is unreliable, multiple opinions of different event participants and also the strong ambiguity of the recollected memories and points of view (without knowing which is the truth), became the main ingredients for movies such as "Reservoir Dogs" (1992) directed by Quentin Tarantino, Brian Singer's "The Usual Suspects" (1995), "Vantage Point" (2008) directed by Pete Travis, or "Gone Girl" (2014) by David Fincher. Each of these cinematic constructions deal with the Rashomon Effect in both perspectives – as cinematic storytelling, and as visual constructions supporting this story telling multiplicity. They develop narrative structures where the general plot is revealed from multiple perspectives, with characters presenting their own personal perception of the truth, and the plot builds gradually with the incertitude of a descriptive reality which addresses the audience's critical opinion (DeGuzman 2022).

The cinematic story is often doubled by specific cinematography language elements (such as camera movements, framing, montage, light, and colour), where we can clearly see how each of the perspectival stories is treated in a distinct colour, and the camera movement and the montage are adjusted to sustain that plot. The concept of different subjective perspectives of characters over the same thing can be also identified in productions such as "Hero" directed by Zhang Yimou (figure 2), or "Parasite" (original title: "Gisaengchung"), the Korean movie from 2019 (figure 3) directed by Bong Jong Hu[176], with both the visual constructions of the

[175] A wide area of domains where the Rashomon effect can be identified is detailed on pop-culture wiki website TV tropes, ranging from animation to media, radio, comics, or religion (tvtropes.org 2022).

[176] Bong Joon Ho is a South Korean filmmaker who also directed the "Snowpiercer" in 2013, and "The Host" in 2006; online source: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6751668/?ref_=nm_knf_t_3, accessed 2022.01.12

movie and the storytelling structure following the Rashomon Effect perspectival directions (Yang 2022). They are projecting social and class differences and discrimination, economical disputes, personal intentions, and solution over each of the movie characters, transforming it into a metaphor of today's society where symbiotic relations coexists, in multiple consecutive layers (between the wealthy Park family, the destitute Kim clan, or the basement-hidden Moon-gwang family).

4. Objectivity and truth: from press to advertising

Since The Rashomon effect is based on contradicting reports of the same event, with yet an undecided result of it, strong examples of visualizing the Rashomon effect in today's communication can be perceived in both media and press, where the communication is realized in terms of reflected objectivity and truth. Press is the predilection medium which opposes journalistic objectivity, the subjectivity of presentation and, sometimes, can contribute to the creation of particular or subjective truths, propagating an idea or a point of view which can be, sometimes, ideological, and political. Media is also viewed as the truth-maker: the way the communication is done, the media itself and the language of it often weighs more than the content of the communication (McLuhan 1964).

An example of observing the Rashomon effect as reflected in press is the Dziekanski affair, Vancouver (2007–2015), in October 2007, when four police officers from Canada's national police force, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police – RCMP had hurriedly arrived on the airport at Vancouver, confronted, and then caused the sudden death of Robert Dziekanski, a Polish immigrant (figure 4). The case, widely debated in law and press, offers similarities to the Rashomon principle in both terms of concept (each involved policeman provided different stories, and the press also reflected the situation in different ways) but also in terms of cinematic load (victim body on the ground, attackers around, unreliable storyteller involved) (Anderson 2016, 261-262)[177].

The recent Russian-Ukrainian war is another example of how the media can reflect the same event in different angles, with different perspectives. As one of the contemporary wars which are transmitted live on internet and TV channels (after the Golf war in the 90s), this major conflict between an imperialist Russia and a nationalist Ukrainian resistance shows dramatically different images on each of the combatant's media sides. Russia calls it „ a military operation", almost ignoring the subject in the internal press, and Ukraine shows it as a territorial war aiming to destroy the national identity and resources, with dramatic imagery from the war theatre[178]. Western media is also fractured between the two points of view, yet with a major tendency of supporting Ukraine's defensive attitude. On May 9th of 2022, Russia held its national parade, while Ukrainian media provided in-war images with destroyed cities and abandoned areas. In this case, the media is clearly used as an ideological tool, as a propaganda medium. Such a major event which is happening nowadays, when everything becomes public and gets maximum visibility through

[177] Anderson argues that the Rashomon effect occurs particularly when the absence of evidence (to elevate or disqualify any possible version of the truth) ads to the social pressure for closure on the matter (Anderson 2016, 265).
[178] Both the text and visuals of the news content was compared from two main news agencies' websites from Russia (Russian News Agency https://tass.com/) and Ukraine (Ukrainian multimedia platform for broadcasting, https://www.ukrinform.net/).

social media, transforms each person with a smartphone into a soldier, a news reporter, or an influencer. And, while the events are largely political or ideological, the support of the population is critical, hence the strong tendencies of altering, adjusting, or reflecting only the partial truth which serves the interests of the involved powers.

Similarities with the Rashomon Effect debating strategies can be found in advertising, and we can specifically address Oliviero Toscani's advertising. Toscani is a contemporary photographer, with more than 20 years of collaboration with Benetton, an Italian clothes manufacturer company, for whom he managed the advertising process, the branding, and the corporate image. Toscani opted for an extended brand awareness solution, reduced to ads printed in publications and on billboards, with an imagery either created by him, or – not surprisingly in postmodernist practices of artistic appropriation – borrowed from media, specifically from journalists and news reporters. In his campaign from 1992, titled "Shock of reality", the images of his advertising products (the ads) were visual constructions which clearly avoid using the company products, working instead with shocking images from media, images depicting realities from todays' economic, political, or social world.

We can discover images from Liberia war with a soldier holding a human bone in his hands, an Italian mafia execution photographed in Palermo in eighties, press photos with Albanian migrants' boats or African trains, attempting to run for a better life, or AIDS activists sufferance, such as David Kirby photographed by Therese Frare in 1990 (figure 5) (Soreanu 2016).

This artistic solution, which offered new fresh lecturing perspectives of the same content, appropriated, re-signified and inserted in an advertising product, questions the public perception of truth, understanding, and attitude. On one hand, you have different realities brought under the pseudo-commercial umbrella of advertising. On the other hand, you have multiple reading perspectives of situations, events, places which had a different initial meaning (Sofron 2015). Operating with the conflict, with the existing preconceptions, with biased attitudes, Toscani's solution develops the framework for a public recollection and understanding of today's realities, where the Rashomon "effect" almost becomes the Rashomon "cause": Toscani urges everyone to take a side, to visualize, to understand, and to become aware of a status-quo clearly avoided in the conventional advertising solutions or mainstream media (Soreanu 2018).

5. Subject, form, and creative content in new media communication

We are accustomed to thinking of art in terms of the relation between subject, form, and creative content. But when it comes to new media forms of communication it is imperative to extend this chain by adding the most present components: the public, the medium and the message. The communication, either artistic, social, or cultural, involves the participants on a very personal and empathic level, through the means of its most characteristic processes. Because of distinct types of manifestation of new media, the complexity of processes that characterize it and the multiplicity of responses, we face a rashomonian situation: each person (public or artist) develops personal subjective realities and understanding, adding

new perspectives of interpretation to the communication process (Gheorghe, German, et al. 2020, 15-17).

In the two paradigms in understanding new media and mediums (the artistic theory and the media theory), from an artistic theory perspective, we understand that medium means method, materials and tools used in creating an artwork, an approach that sets historically structural and material determinants. In media theory (apparatus-based media of production and reception), the medium becomes means for communication, so the purpose of all modern technologies is to create new modes and models by which the message/content is sent and enhances the power of critical reflection on art. Thus, new media is self-reflexive because it is always returning to the point of understanding the role of the medium as a communication process.

So, we can argue that new media is not just about the technologies we use, but it is about the forms of communications it creates using these technologies as tools for production and dissemination. The impact of new media communication should consider this multiperspective Rashomon effect view on how the "truth" either artistic, cultural, or social, is being presented and perceived. Not about what media we use, but how we use it. Not about what truth we say but how the truth can be said. And all these mediums and methods change the way we connect with direct realities. It is about how the new mediums have changed our way to look, understand and communicate in contemporary mediatic culture (Gheorghe 2010). Opposite to old media forms of representation, the use of technologies somehow translates the reality we look at into an abstract synthetized image of it and obliges us to rethink and interpret what we see. In new media art, we do not look at represented realities, but at synthetized personal observations over the same reality.

We do not show the truth, but we create multiple images of it. For instance, all the images of Beate Gütschow's photography series are completely fictional. The photographs are digital montages, made by combining a large number of image fragments taken by the artist into a single picture in Photoshop, by the process of "sampling." The result is a final composite image of a place that does not exist but possesses all the characteristics of a represented place. The "LS series" of images (1999-2003) is reminiscent of the traditional format of landscape painting from the 17th and 18th centuries (figure 6). Gütschow reconstructs these landscapes following strictly the conventions of the landscape genre tradition: composition and visual balance, the size of the characters in the frame, the perspective of the gaze replicates the passive position of the easel, the visual tensions and the photographic details dominate the whole frame. The represented space is digitally reconfigured, composed by using several hundred images taken from the artist's personal archive. Gütschow builds a romantic, idyllic landscape (the Arcadian city), questioning the reality of photography (Gütschow 2021).

Similarly, the "S series" (2004-09) digitally composes multiple fragments into a single photograph, images of architectural structures from various cities (such as the historical Wall of Berlin). Even if the fragments are photographed in various geographical areas, the resulting ensemble is a new reality, a surreal, artificial, post-apocalyptic, which reflects a dystopian urban scenario, monumental but failed, abandoned, desolate. The cities composed by Gütschow are imaginary cities, with

confusing temporality, which are caught in the past and, at the same time, cut off from the future. Every element used in the image is photographed, it is real. Some elements seem familiar to the public, but the whole cannot be contextualized, creating an effect of alienation, failure and helplessness. Gütschow extends the rashomonian unreliable narrator aspect as the main feature of her post-photographic practice: she combines singular visual stories and photographic truths to obtain a subjective utopic reality (German and Teodorescu 2016), (German 2018).

"No Ghost Just a Shell" is a multimedia collaborative project initiated by Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno who invited thirteen artists over a three-year period to create works starring a generic virtual avatar named AnnLee (Huyghe and Parreno 2003). They purchased the copyright to this unpublished and unsuccessful unfinished character, doomed to disappear in the infinite bin of over-production and unaccomplished marketing criteria. This multi author exhibition project consists in various animated films, sculptures, paintings, neon works, screen-print posters, and wallpapers that position the character AnnLee in complex narratives reflecting on self-identity, contemplating her existence as a generic sign of imagination, a melancholic state of self-awareness as a failure product. The character receives different narratives, depending on different creative approaches of each artist that worked within the project. All these subjective artistic scenarios conclude in the creation of one real AnnLee individual, because of multiperspectival contribution of each individual artistic project (figure 7).

The project "Auditions for a revolution" created by the Romanian artist Irina Botea Bucan in 2006, revisited the collective memory of the events from 1989 Romanian revolution, when the dictatorial regime of Ceausescu was replaced with a democratic political one (Dánél 2017). The entire revolution was broadcasted live on Romanian public television. The artist (studying in Chicago at that time) created a video project in which she re-enacts the events, with the help of volunteer American students that played the roles of the revolutionaries, as seen in 1989 on TV. Irina Botea Bucan juxtaposes these images with original footage of the actual revolution, to allow the viewer to compare the students' performance with the original of 1989 (figure 8) (Teodorescu 2012). In this case, history, collective memory, and media objectivity are paradoxically subjective. The strange scenario and the apparent incoherent outcome of the film, becomes an impressive metaphor for the difficulties of reading history, making the historical truth even more difficult to observe since it combines the multiperspectival memories of both the nineties society and mediatic witness (the Romanian television).

6. Conclusions

Although the Rashomon effect is the effect of the subjectivity of perception on recollection, by which observers of an event (or potentially participants) can produce different - but equally plausible accounts of it, the concept opens a variety of directions of analysis for critical understanding of today's cultural phenomenon. From cinema to press, advertising, art, or new-mediatic context, we assist to a global communication process which encompasses both the technological virtues of digitality, and the subjective truths of a collective memory process.

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