

## CAN TROPES BE SEEN?

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The article deals with tropes as verbal and visual phenomena. It presents the new paradigm of cognitive studies concerned with conceptualization in terms of visual tropology, uncovers the universals of human language, specifies lexical and grammatical universals typical for all artistic texts and discourses.

**Key words:** tropes, cognitive studies, conceptualization, artistic texts and discourses.

У статті проаналізовано тропи як вербальні та візуальні феномени; представлено нову парадигму когнітивістики пов'язану з процесом концептуалізації в термінах візуальної тропеїки. Розкрито сутність мовних універсалій, виявлено лексичні та граматичні універсалії, характерні для художніх текстів та дискурсів.

**Ключові слова:** тропи, когнітивістика, концептуалізація, художні тексти та дискурси.

В статье анализируются тропы как вербальные и визуальные феномены; представлена новая парадигма когнитивистики, связанная с процессом концептуализации в терминах визуальной тропеики. Раскрывается сущность языковых универсалий, определяются лексические и грамматические универсалии, характерные для художественных текстов и дискурсов.

**Ключевые слова:** тропы, когнитивистика, концептуализация, художественные тексты и дискурсы.

**1. Opening remarks.** In one of my articles [8] I briefly discussed the neo-classical tropology of Giambattista Vico, expounded in *La Scienza Nuova Seconda* [33], revitalized in modern American literary criticism by Kenneth Burke [4] and extended to the studies of historical discourse by Hayden White [34–36]. The Vichian tetrad of *metaphor*, *metonymy*, *synecdoche* and *irony*, dubbed *master tropes* by Burke and *basic tropes* by White, represents – apparently universal – figures of language and mind (Burkian *mind-styles*, the foretokens of cognitive approach) that reflect the patterns and strategies used by the human consciousness to make sense of the surrounding reality and familiarize the unknown.

The claim that our conceptualization does not rely solely on metaphor and metonymy (as several authors of the cognitive denomination have implied in an unduly limiting manner) has found support in psychological and psycholinguistic theories. We should mention here the pronouncements of Sigmund Freud on the poetics of dreams [11], of Jacques Lacan on the figuration of the subconscious [20], of Jean Piaget on the developmental patterns of the child mind [26], and of Raymond Gibbs on the figurative design of human mind [12]. On this basis I have been proposing [7; 8] to additionally include in the list of *master tropes* (which we can also refer to as *megatropes*) of human cognition and linguistic expression such figures as, at least, *simile*, *antithesis*, *catachresis* (in the broad sense of semantic abuse), *euphemia*, *exaggeration (hyperbole)*, *suppression* and *defamiliarization* (Viktor Shklovsky's *ostraneniye*).

The query arises to what extent the master tropes, which shape the production of texts/discourses, qualify as instances of *semiotic figuration*, present not only in literary language but also in fine arts (painting, sculpture, installations), architecture, urban and garden design. Ever since the famous paper by Roman Jakobson [18] on the metaphoric-metonymic duality that underlies literary texts, painting and the cinematographic art, we have witnessed an ongoing debate among philosophers of language and art, linguists-stylisticians, literary critics and theoreticians of art on whether *visual metaphor* exists at all and whether it can actually be *seen* in the fine arts. In the present discussion I want to side with Ernst H. Gombrich [13; 14], Roland Barthes [2], and – in the Polish art criticism – Mieczysław Porębski [27] and Seweryna Wysłouch [37] in the claim that we are fully justified to talk about

metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony in painting (beside *symbol* and *allegory*, which have always been unanimously accepted as conspicuously present in visual arts). This goes against the pessimistic voices of such Polish linguists as Maria R. Mayenowa [23] and Jerzy Ziomek [39], who treat tropes exclusively as a phenomenon of natural language, thus strictly separating the linguistic and visual codes. In their opinion a *visual metaphor* has no physical existence and is a metaphorical expression par excellence.

By bringing together the ideas from such fields of study as literary semantics, poetics, theory of art and philosophy (especially the aestheticism of the eminent Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden), I wish to argue that it is reasonable to talk about the common, semiotic poetics of mind, language and the arts that extends well beyond metaphor.

## **2. Figuration in visual arts: pros and cons**

In contemporary Western semiotics the discussion about the so-called *convergence of the arts* was initiated in the 1970s within the tradition of structuralism and continued well into the poststructuralist and early postmodernist theorizing (Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, Gérard Genette are only the most prominent names in this debate). The subject was developed, at least in the Polish linguistic and critical circles for the next two decades, yet without a conclusive consensus as to whether we are justified to transfer or extrapolate the linguistic, stylistic and rhetorical terminology to the description of the fine arts. Nowadays, the topic has reappeared again, often under the terms of *intermediality* or *multimodality*. The limited scope of this article has prompted me to limit my ponderings to the area of painting as the epitome of visual arts and to recall some of the arguments raised by scholars from several disciplines which have not lost their interest for contemporary artistic semiotics. My discussion is centred exclusively on the issue of semantic figuration, that is *semiotic tropology*.

### **2.1. Verbal and visual arts as distinct modes of representation**

The pessimistic statements about the apparent lack of convergence between verbal and visual artworks is well exemplified by Michel Foucault's opinion voiced in the opening essay of *The Order of Things*, titled "Las Meninas", which analyses the content and the reception of one of the most intriguing paintings of Diego Velázquez. Here, Foucault explicitly takes up the subject of a marked disparity between natural language and painting, as most representative among the visual modes of representation: "[...] the relation of language to painting is an infinite relation. It is not that words are imperfect, or that, when confronted by the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other's terms: it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt to show by the use of images, metaphors, or similes, what we are saying; the space where they achieve their splendour is not that deployed by our eyes but that defined by the sequential elements of syntax" [10, p. 10].

Here, the philosopher defends language against the accusations of being impoverished in its expressive capacity in comparison with the pictorial arts. He also defends two closely related tropes: metaphor and simile as naturally pertaining to the verbal but not the visual mode of perception. This is an interesting claim in that metaphors are typically thought to be image-creating devices. Yet, it looks like Foucault treats the linguistically induced figurative imagery to be highly peculiar and distinct from the perceptually tangible imagery contained in plastic arts. Strangely enough, Foucault mentions the specificity of verbal figuration as pertaining to the intricacies of syntax. This is incorrect as metaphor and simile are tropes, i. e. semantic figures that depend on the shift of meaning and denotation and not on structural transformations visible in syntactic figures proper. Similar doubts are voiced by Wendy Steiner [31, p. 22], who cautiously admits that "verbal art achieves whatever iconicity and presence it can claim through relational, diagrammatic means, or, problematically, through metaphors".

The issue of visuality of poetic tropes reappears in the writings of the Polish stylistic school represented, among others, by Maria Renata Mayenowa and Jerzy Ziomek. Mayenowa, the author of the fundamental work *Poetyka teoretyczna* [23] counts among the first Polish linguists and literary scholars who in the 1970s approached the issue of similarities and discrepancies between the nature of “poetic sign constructions” (poetic expressions, that is) and visual iconic signs, mainly those used in painting. Basing her considerations on the Peircean definition of iconic signs, Boris Uspenski’s poetics of artistic compositions, as well as a classical iconographic theory of Cesare Ripa [28] and of Erwin Panofsky [24; 25], she was a pioneering modern Polish semanticist to discuss what nowadays goes under the name of *multimodality* of a text, viz. a close cooperation between the pictorial representation and the linguistic description appended to it (or vice versa). Her main claims can be summarized as follows. Firstly, the term *text* belongs properly to linguistic units only. Thus, she rejects a broad semiotic definition of text which would treat a painting as a textual realisation. Secondly, following Panofsky, she distinguishes two layers of representation in a pictorial artwork: 1) the *primary iconographic level* of the actually given content, realized through a specific form and 2) the *secondary, superordinate level of semantic value*, which we would call the work’s ultimate interpretation. Against this background she analyses what, after Peirce, she calls an iconic metaphorical sign. Her example, drawn from Ripa’s *Iconologia* [28, p. 4–5], is a representation of Academia in the guise of a mature woman, enthroned, wearing a golden crown and variegated dress. She holds a sharp file in one hand and a garland with pomegranates in the other. Mayenowa rightly realizes that the figure thus schematically rendered is allegorical rather than metaphorical and that this representation contains several symbolic signs. For instance, the file has been motivated by the classical tradition of referring through it to a well-prepared (polished) oration, while a many-coloured gown stands for different fields of learning practised in the Academy. (The file is additionally enwrapped in a band saying: *Detrahit atque polit*. This Latin inscription decides about the multimodality of this representation for it helps the viewer to identify not only the tool (as used for scraping or removing rust in order to give lustre to surfaces) but also, deductively, the allegorical figure). The golden crown symbolizes golden thoughts (a hidden reifying metaphor, we could add). The books scattered at the woman’s feet are a well-known symbol of learning. The garland woven from laurel, ivy and myrtle, as well as pomegranates all bear symbolic connotations, for which we have to check various dictionaries of symbols applied in the fine arts. It appears, then, that at the immediate level of contents we can distinguish visual symbols that support the allegorical reading. Mayenowa wavers in her decision to ascribe a metaphorical meaning to this image. If it exists, it will appear only at the higher level of interpretation. In an earlier version of this essay [23], Mayenowa discussed also the famed paintings by Giuseppe Arcimboldi (also Arcimboldo, 1527–1593), a mannerist Italian painter active at the imperial court of the Habsburgs in Prague and Vienna, who produced two series of unusual still lifes showing four seasons of the year and four elements. Mayenowa refused to grant them the status of visual metaphors in favour of treating them as collections of symbols ambiguous in their ultimate interpretation. Hence, it appears that in her view iconic signs ultimately fail to be metaphoric.

In turn, Ziomek [39], in an important article devoted to a taxonomy of major tropes in natural language, maintains that so far the old question [cf. 27] “Can metaphor be seen?”, lying at the core of the issue of correspondence of the arts, has not been answered conclusively. Ziomek extends this query into “Can tropes be seen?” (which I have borrowed to serve as the title of this article). Yet, his argumentation is focused on metaphor and leads to the final verdict: you cannot see (paint, draw) a metaphor. Methodologically, his reasoning is based on the tensive theory of metaphor in the spirit of Ivor A. Richards and Max Black, where the main principle of metaphoricity boils down to a strained interplay between the two parts of metaphor (vehicle and tenor). Ziomek refers to this mechanism as a partial suppression of irrelevant connotative significations followed by the highlighting

or foregrounding of their relevant aspects. Consequently, he claims that once we try to translate a linguistic sign into another medium (what Roman Jakobson called once *intersemiotic translation*), we are bound to transform the *signifiant* (name) into the image of the *signifié*. This leads to an annihilation of one part of a metaphor since, by definition, a metaphor requires an interactive presence of a dichotomous structure. In the contemporary cognitive parlance, Ziomek's argument hinges on the fact that the principle of metaphor lies in the mapping from a source onto a target domain. You need both domains in order to realise a metaphor (which is perceived as a dynamic transfer and activity), whereas in visual arts you cannot have the two domains shown simultaneously. The interaction/tension between the source and target (viz. vehicle and tenor) is of primary importance here. Thus, in Ziomek's opinion the "temptation" to treat the inner tensions (however strong and unusual) within a plastic artwork as instances of metaphor is a reflection of an excessively blown-up understanding of figuration in arts. This claim is debatable and does not reflect my personal views. Still, I think the argumentation is worth citing in summary.

As a sequel to his refutation of figurativeness in the fine arts, Ziomek rejects also the Jakobsonian bivalent subdivision of artistic styles into metaphoric and metonymic. I side with him in this respect since my own taxonomy of tropes briefly mentioned earlier assumes the existence of at least eleven (if not more) major tropes. However, I do not agree with Ziomek's statement that instead of talking about the metaphoric nature of surrealism, we should rather refer to the surrealistic nature of metaphor. This is because only some metaphors can be classified as surreal, especially the ones I treat as instances of Catachresis Two [cf. 5].

Controversially, Ziomek points out as well that Jakobson – while describing cubism as metonymic (in the sense of representing objects as composites of synecdoches) – committed an error based on inner contradiction (Jakobson, like several other scholars, treated synecdoche as a subtype of metonymy [9]). Namely, a multiplicity of synecdoches obliterates this figure entirely (synecdoche becomes cancelled out). In Ziomek's opinion, cubist painters purposefully tried to overcome the metonymic quality in artistic representation by providing a simultaneous inspection of objects from different vantage points. To sum up, he denies the existence of semantic figures in pictorial representation. He also reminds the readers that all these tropes when occurring in verbal texts require a cultural contextualization.

Interestingly, in the Polish semiotic research visibility of metaphor has been questioned not only by linguists and some literary scholars but also partly by an eminent art historian and critic Mieczysław Porębski (1921–2012) in the above-mentioned essay "Can metaphor be seen?". His caveat replicates some of Mayenowa's doubts for he rejects the existence of visual figuration at the first, iconographic level and believes only in the intentional presence of the tacit, underlying level of figuration (with the exception of symbols, which always belong to the first level of representation). He calls it the second or *connotative level* of a visual message.

The unclear status of metaphor and other tropes in visual art is, in my opinion, largely due to the fuzzy borderline that separates the related concepts of *symbol*, *allegory* and *metaphor*. Several writings on the subject frequently obliterate this distinction or use *allegory* and *metaphor* alternately, as largely equivalent terms. Importantly, it should also be realized that *verbal allegory* differs from *pictorial allegory*: whereas the former is usually a story that has two readings – one literal and the other one much more general (symbolic, abstract, moralizing, etc.), the latter lacks the narratorial structure, which is – by nature – missing from largely atemporal images. So long as we have not worked out a more clear-cut definitions of the above-mentioned pivotal terms, we shall continue to be unable to unambiguously describe artistic creations whether visual and non-visual. Neither is the difference between a visual symbol and allegory obvious. Andreas Baumgarten [3, p. 55] in his work devoted to the analysis of oneiric imagery and lexicon reminds the readers that the Greek etymology of the term *allegory* is a "symbolic image", in which an abstract signification is expressed through a concrete

representation. He provides an example of a skeleton, which functions as an allegory of death and whose attributes, such as a scythe and an hour-glass, are in turn symbolic. He also maintains that allegories, contrary to symbols, are never ambiguous since in a particular situation they refer to a uniquely specified abstract conception.

## 2.2. Tropes as verbal and visual phenomena

Despite all the above-listed qualms concerning the existence of visual figuration, a large group of scholars from various disciplines have opted to grant a regular figurative status to several pictorial representations. Since, personally, I side with their views, I now invite the reader to return to the famed mannerist *capriccios* of Arcimboldi, the painter whom Roland Barthes [2] explicitly dubbed a rhetorician and magician in one person and whose oeuvre he described as a “kingdom of metaphor”.

Let us then stop for a moment and have a closer look at two of his compositions. The oil painting titled “Summer” (in the collections of *Kunsthistorisches Museum* in Vienna) is generically a still life, but of a queer kind indeed. Classified as an “anthropomorphic” still life, it features a male figure, whom the title helps us (multimodally) to identify as a representation of a season of a year. If the title were not supplied, we would sooner or later arrive at this identification, despite the fact that standard representations of summer in Renaissance and Baroque painting were mature but attractive females, often with their breasts uncovered. Their attributes were primarily ears of corn and some fruit, associated with the harvest time. The females impersonating summer were often shown as the Greek goddess Demeter (the Roman Ceres). In this light, the male figure comes as unexpected but what is even more striking is the fact that it is a masterly combination of utterly non-human elements, mainly fruit, vegetables and ears of corn, that produce what looks like a living being. The selection of parts that compose this *totum* is heavily symbolic. In all likelihood, a 16th century educated and refined viewer at whom the work was targeted would have been more skilled in recognizing all the symbolic undertones related to the particular plants. The modern interpreter, who approaches this work as a semiotic text, will have more difficulties in naming certain vegetables and what is more, in recognizing their hidden meaning. Not without reason has Patrick de Rynck [30] titled his guide to masterpieces of European art *How to Read a Painting*. The Polish subtitle additionally emphasizes the fact that comprehending and relishing the works of old masters is more often than not an art of solving puzzles, a ludic but also a demanding task.

Upon a closer inspection, we can claim that Arcimboldo’s work, from the point of view of *semiotic construal*, is a *multi-layered iconic representation* [cf. 23, p. 166], in which the organization of meaning is multi-storeyed, so to say. On the primary (iconographic) level of physically represented objects we are faced with a set of fruit, vegetables and ears of corn woven into a dress covering the figure and bearing the date 1563 on its arm. Several of these objects are simply iconic but a few of them are symbolic attributes of Summer. In my opinion, Summer himself, at the secondary level of interpretation, functions as an *anthropomorphic metaphor*, in which plants taken together are infused with a semblance of life. Yet, from the historical and biographical sources we know that this strange effigy is also an *allegorical portrait* of Emperor Ferdinand I Habsburg, to whom Arcimboldi served as a court painter. This, then, is a *tertiary level* of interpretation in which allegory is couched. The golden garb of the figure points to his high status, while the hidden reference to solar cults combines the idea of the sun bathing the summer nature in gold with an archetypal idea of a king-sun. I propose to break this tertiary level of interpretation further into two distinct strata – the *particularizing* and the *generalizing* one. The former refers to a specific historical personage, Arcimboldi’s patron, while the latter becomes an allegory of a powerful but benevolent ruler in general, with all the strength and virtues appertaining to him (here, supplying his subjects with the abundance of the fruit of the earth, light and warmth).

Whereas the identification of the elements at the mere iconographic level should not be cognitively too strenuous, the recognition of the *interpretive superstructure* (secondary and tertiary in this case) requires a proper contextualization. At the metaphorical level the viewer must have access to a certain

shared cultural code (e.g. to be able to recognize a gilded artichoke on the figure's breast as a metaphor of abundance, fecundity and power); at the allegorical level a broader historical and biographical knowledge is additionally required. Barthes postulates a double articulation of visual signs in this representation. The symbolical and rhetorical *sens obvie*, dependent on the recognition of a culture-specific code and related to our primary and secondary level of interpretation, is contrasted with *sens obtus*. This is a tacit, underlying semantic reading at a higher level of philosophical, moral, historical, etc. reflection, which corresponds to our secondary (metaphorical) and tertiary (allegorical) level of reading. (Wysiouch [37] points out that this sense may also be very idiosyncratic, emotional and elusive). In this way Arcimboldo's creations are real pictorial puzzles or rebuses [cf. 19, p. 76–77; 21, p. 62–65]. It appears that the separation of the metaphorical (purely tropological) and allegorical (more complex) reading helps us to overcome an obstacle that Mayenowa encountered on her way and which she solved by “blending” metaphor with allegory. This appears to be not only a simplification but a mixing of two separate planes of semiotic analysis.

Even more rebus-like and imaginative is the second canvas by Arcimboldi to be compared with “Summer”, namely “Fire” from the series “Four Elements” (1566, on display in Vienna). This is again a personified still-life, which takes on a masculine shape and is composed of several objects connected with igniting or producing fire, such as chips of wood in flame (forming the figure's hair), a piece of flint (face), a ball of fuse (forehead), a candle (eye, ear, neck), an oil lamp with a burning wick (neck, chin, Spanish beard), firearms, guns and cannons (bust). At the primary level the majority of the just listed objects are not only purely iconic but also symbolic. Next, all these inanimate objects, skilfully combined, produce an appearance of a severe-looking personification of Fire, one of the most inspiring and feared elements. The tertiary level runs parallel to the representation of “Summer”, being again an instance of *allegorical portraiture*. On the particularized level this is Arcimboldi's consecutive employer and patron, Emperor Maximilian II Habsburg (this ruling dynasty is indicated by the Order of the Golden Fleece and the two-headed eagle on the monarch's breast). The generalized level becomes a glorifying allegory of a ruler who not only commands the battlefield fire but is a provider of peace to family hearths of his subjects [cf. 19, p. 77]. At a still higher *intertextual level of interpretation* (level 4, *quaternary*) we can claim a correspondence between the effigy of Ferdinand I as a personification of Summer, which has traditionally been associated with the intense light and heat of the sun, and the fiery aspect of the second allegorical image of his successor Maximilian II. Their colouring traverses a rich scale of golden hues, highly symbolic in themselves.

We can now return to the initial, slightly reformulated question: Can metaphor be painted? The enthusiastically positive answer provided by Barthes and, hopefully, supported by my analysis of pictorial levels of representation, reverberates in the writings of Seweryna Wysłouch, the author of the book *Literatura a sztuki wizualne* [37]. She admits the existence of painterly metaphor whose nature resides in a shift of connotations (mainly typified by personifications and reifications) at even the lowest level of pictorial representation. Porębski, who is not so generous and believes that visual metaphor is reachable beyond the primary level of content, discusses in addition the occurrences of other major tropes, i.e. metonymy, synecdoche and irony at a higher level of interpretation in Polish Romantic and modernist paintings. Thus, the Vichian tetrad of master tropes is successfully closed.

So let us return to Arcimboldi for a moment. In her commentary to “Summer”, Susanna Liscia [21, p. 62] notices that its composition, despite an initial impression of a chaotic amassment of vegetable motifs, upon a closer scrutiny strikes us as a harmony achieved through the attention to detail and an exquisite rendering of colour. But there exists one more aspect of this intricate jigsaw puzzle that she does not mention – all the components are objectively related to one another as the essence of summer vegetation, shown in an intricate contiguity. What Arcimboldi has achieved is an ingenious collection of *metonyms* that fill the space of metaphor, in which they are skilfully embedded. The figure

thus achieved in a masterly way, an emerging *totum* that consists of salient and highly relevant *partes*, is an instance of a generalizing synecdoche [cf. 39; 9]. But this is not the end of figurative play. The viewer will, in all likelihood, smile when contemplating this image. Though superficially meant to glorify the imperial persona, it is full of ironical undertones, for who would like to have their teeth resemble a peapod, their chin be pear-shaped, the nose like a cucumber and the ears bristling like a corn-cob? The aura of gentle *irony* hovers above the figure of Summer-Emperor. The same tropological strategy is visible in the pendant to this picture, that is the Allegory of Fire. Arcimboldi, even in his life-time was referred to as a magician. Quite correctly, for in his amazing portraits he managed to gather into a successful constellation the four Vichian master tropes in their pictorial version, as well as symbols and allegories that complete, support or ensue from the figuration applied.

Another sturdy believer in the physical and not merely “metaphorical” presence of metaphor in visual arts was an eminent historian and theoretician of art Sir Ernst H. Gombrich, whose writings are interspersed with several references to and illustrations of visual metaphor, by which he understands a transformation of an abstract metaphorical conceptualization into a pictorial representation [cf. 14, p. 60]. This opinion is of particular interest as it clearly implies the primacy of conceptual and linguistic metaphor over its translation into a visual representation. Gombrich, whose meditations on art are inseparably bound with a deep understanding of history and culture (hence a broadly conceived context) quotes several anecdotal incidents from the lives of various artists. As an example of a vastly *unrecognized pictorial metaphor* he adduces, for instance, van Gogh’s famous rendering of his bedroom in Arles. It is only on the basis of the painter’s letters that we gather the knowledge of the real *intentio auctoris*, namely that this image should connote (symbolically and/or metaphorically) an atmosphere of quietude, relaxation and safety. However, due to the application of intense colours and their bold arrangement on the canvas, this particular metaphorical meaning has been lost on the majority of its viewership.

While discussing another instance of visual metaphor, Gombrich [14, p. 474–475] provides an example of a beam of light entering Mary’s room during Annunciation on the painting by Petrus Christus (executed ca 1444–1450). He interprets this light as a metaphor of the immaculate conception of Christ. Yet soon after [14, p. 475] he claims the beam of light to constitute a “symbol that functions as a metaphor, which assumes a concrete signification in a given context”. This is yet another indication of the problem pointed out before for even an outstanding theoretician of art clearly hesitates in ascribing the uniquely specified status of either symbol or metaphor to a specific phenomenon in the picture’s content. Apparently, the borderline between the two concepts, especially in the pictorial rendering, has to be judged as blurred, awaiting further theoretical elaboration.

### **3. Closing remarks – philosophical underpinnings of semiotic figuration**

As far as some philosophical implications of artistic texts and semiotic figuration go, the phenomenological theory of the reception of a literary and visual artwork advocated by Roman Ingarden [15; 16] is of particular interest in this place, especially the process of *concretization* (called *actualization* by Wolfgang Iser [17]). Figuration is bound to participate, like other artistic means, in the phenomenon that Ingarden describes as the *gappiness/underdetermination* of a work of art. It is the role of an interpreter (whether a reader or viewer) to fill in the gaps in a particular context. What is worth comparing are the competing views of underdetermination in literary and the visual arts in the opinions of Ingarden and Gombrich. Whereas the former [16] thinks that a picture, as compared with a literary text, suffers from a heightened degree of underdetermination because it relies on one sensation only, namely that of sight, the latter [14, p. 460] claims that no linguistic description can ever be so rich in detail as a painting and that no verbal text is ever able to equal the visual potential triggered by the contemplation of a pictorial artwork. He also invokes the notion of *overdetermination*, when the interpreter of an artistic object relies too heavily on the speculations related to the biographical data of its creator.

Whichever of the two above-quoted opinions we ultimately opt to support, one thing can doubtlessly be ascertained: visual figuration calls for the same kind of intellectual effort on the part of its receiver as the verbal one, the effort that has been duly compared to a participation in a game. The idea of the author, the text (in the broad semiotic understanding) and the receiver as players in a huge game of interpretation is invoked by Porębski [27, p. 536] and extensively discussed in Chrzanowska-Kluczevska [6]. The supporting voices come also from other art historians, e. g. Liscia [21, p. 64] and the authors in the collective volume edited by Kaczorowski [19, p. 77], typically in their commentaries to the ludic aspects of Arcimboldi's oeuvre.

It seems more than proper to close this handful of remarks on the tropics of verbal and visual texts with a remark issued by Todorov [32, p. 235] in the opening paragraph of his essay devoted to synecdoche. After the investigation of the ideas formulated by Genette, Derrida, the rhetoricians of the *Liège* group (Edeline, Durand), Cohen, Benveniste and Barthes, Todorov feels justified to ascertain that "figures rule not only the linguistic usage but also other symbolic systems". Three decades later, this declaration has not lost its topicality for artistic semiotics. Neither has lost its value the title of one of Barthes's essays "The rhetoric of a painting", which has been borrowed by Michai Rusinek [29], a representative of the younger school of Polish rhetorical studies. I strongly share their belief in the existence of a common, rhetorical structure responsible for the construction of a cohesive and coherent semiotic text, whose core is almost always figurative and which – more often than not – possesses also a persuasive function. The new paradigm of cognitive studies concerned with human conceptualization, a marked return of interest in phenomenology, the continuing concern of linguistics to uncover the universals of human language, and – finally – the still unfulfilled semiotic dream to specify a common lexicon and grammar valid for all artistic texts and discourses create a promising shared ground for further exploration.

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