



## TH. HOBBS' VISIBLE RHETORIC: A CASE STUDY OF HISTORY OF POLITICAL IDEAS

Béla MESTER

Hungarian Academy of Sciences,  
Research Centre for the Humanities,  
Institute of Philosophy,  
53. Úri u., 1014 Budapest, Hungary  
E-mail: mester@webmail.phil-inst.hu

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In the topic of this article, it is the early modern intellectual history; it will be offered at first an overview of the approaches of the parallelism between the researches of words, pictures, and gestures, based on the author's personal experiences as a researcher of this epoch. The first examples will be several loci of English classics, John Milton, and John Locke; then it will be mentioned the significance of the methodology of the "Iconic Turn," with the concept of "pictorial (speech) act", and with the history of religious art. At the end of this overview it will be mentioned briefly the methodological contribution of the Cambridge school of intellectual history, and that of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* of Reinhart Koselleck.

Second part of this article will offer a historical example from the early modern age. The first one is an analysis of several details of Thomas Hobbes' ambivalent relationship with the antique tradition of rhetoric, and their consequences for the visual sphere.

Keywords: gestures, Iconic Turn, rhetoric, speech act, Thomas Hobbes, writing act.

### Introduction

A historian of political ideas used to interpret the *words* of political communities, *pictures* shown by them, and their *gestures* as *political acts*. During the interpretation, the switches between the analyses of the abovementioned three categories are often problematic. Interpretation of the *words* causes the fewest problems, and we have several methods for the interpretation of *pictures* from the history of arts. In the intellectual history, the Cambridge school had offered a method for taking "the text in context", using the term of "writing act" in the historical analysis, based on the philosophies of "speech acts" (in Koselleck's approach, human acts were not restricted to speech acts: "every speech is act, but any act is not a speech", see Koselleck 1998. This view has made open Koselleck's approach for the visual sphere). Deep researches of the Cambridge school have re-established the authority and role of rhetoric in political philosophy, at least in its historical concern. "Pictorial turn" has offered the term of "pictorial speech act" for the theory and history of the religious and secularized

fine arts. However, the terms of “writing act” and “pictorial act” are relatively new tools for the intellectual history, and their usage is abundant in theoretical problems; they have not offered solutions for a more serious question, which has emerged, when the picture starts moving, or the talking person makes *gestures*. At first we suppose that the cause of the trouble is hidden in the authors of our *written sources*; later we understand that it is in our own point of view; finally, we recognize that the theories of the history of philosophy about the relationship between the picture and word are often useless for our aims. The solution is hidden in a would-be theory of gestures, developed independently from the theories of pictures, and languages. In the present paper it will be shown an early modern instance from the history of religion and political ideas, with an analysis of the parallel reasoning by *words*, *pictures* and *gestures* in historical situations of early modernity.

### Approaches of the dichotomy of words and pictures in the early modern intellectual history

The author of this paper has met this problem at first in his researches concerning early modern English classics, Milton and Locke, and their *Areopagitica*, and *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (see Mester 2010). Milton, in his argumentation against the censorship, based on the traditions of the Protestant reading of the Scriptures, and a Platonic interpretation of the relationship between the spoken and written words, and the pictures, has realized the special medial context of the modern censorship. However, their contemporaries have a debate on the freedom of, or the rule over the printed books, only; the main public sphere of the socially relevant opinions is out of the scholar domain of the printed books, both in the oral and pictorial fields. Milton has formulated his analysis of the social communication, using *pictures*, writing about *words*:

“The Windows also, and the Balcone’s must be thought on, there are shrewd books, with dangerous Frontispieces to sale” (Milton 1950: 696).

Later, he links a rural form of the public utterances with a classic genre of the elite culture:

“The villages also must have their visitors to enquire what lectures the bagpipe, and the rebbeck reads” (Milton 1950: 696).

Locke, following partly the model offered by Milton, argues directly for the freedom of gestures, without any comparison with the theoretical culture of the elite, incarnated in university lectures, or printed books:

“Let it not be unlawful to eat bread, drink wine, or wash with water in church; and let whatever else is free by law in ordinary life remain free to every church in divine worship” (Locke 1946: 159) (In the original Latin text: “In ecclesia nefas se sit panem comedere, vinum bibere, aqua se abluere; reliquaue quae in communi vita lege libera sunt, in sacro cultu libera cuique ecclesiae permaneat”).

Both examples describe public, partly non-verbal expressions of people's identity, formulated a new model of the communication in the public sphere, in a comparison with the previous scheme, which has reduced it to the freedom, or prohibition of well-formulated theoretical theses. For Locke and Milton, this new type of public sphere has appeared as an insignificant composite of utterances of uneducated people, far from their own elite culture; and the needed freedom of these gestures is based on the unimportance of these communicational forms in their interpretation.

We can observe that Milton and Locke have automatically described this public sphere in pictures. However, they have talked about activities of living people, their point of view is that of an uninterested scholar spectator, and from this position all the living persons are frozen in ironic pictures. The rural musicians in the role of university professors, or people who make senseless gestures during their worship; they presuppose a frame of interpretation, where every non-verbal element must be a picture, and every picture can be interpreted theoretically. Earlier, the author of this paper has evaluated the analyses of Milton and Locke as a sign of their intellectual bias: what is out of the sphere of well-formed theoretical thinking, it has no real importance for them. In the same time, he thought that these early modern examples show the dilemmas of *homo typographicus* in the rise of the epoch of typography. Both are true, but not enough to explain the culturally embedded difficulty of escaping from the trap of the interpretational dichotomy of *words* and *pictures*.

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Dichotomy of the words and pictures in the history of epistemology is as ancient as Plato's distinction is in his *Phaedrus*; where he describes the functioning of the human mind by the parallelism of the *eikographos* (painter of mental pictures), and *logographos* (writer of mental words). His solution is the concept of a *nonverbal* and *non-pictorial* truth in his *Seventh Letter*. Plato's direct impact on the topic of the present paper was mentioned above, in Milton's case, and will be discussed again below, concerning the modern interpretation of early modernity in Belting's theory of art. Let see he modern methodological tools for solve of this problem in the historical disciplines.

Modern classics of pictorial philosophy offer a new possibility of the interpretation. With the eliminated borders of the works of art in our age, and the praxis of artists departed from producing well-defined objects has emerged the need of a new theoretical tool for interpretation. By the first glance this trend of pictorial philosophy, focused on meaningful human moving and gestures, and on the production and presentation of pictures, as communicational act, can helpful for the solve of our problem. It is the conscious parallel of the "speech acts" of the oral communication. W. J. T. Mitchell's well-known article (Mitchell 1994) is based on the analysis of the debate between Erwin Panofsky and Louis Althusser, on the verbal and pictorial interpretation of the salutation as a basic societal situation. Søren Kjørup clearly formulates the relationship between the theory of speech acts and his own theory, saying that every utterance is an act, and *humans* can make acts, only, *sentences*, or *pictures* cannot (Kjørup 1978), and his followers had offered detailed analyses of the artists' behav-

our. Explanation of the artistic praxis is elementary for the pictorial philosophy, but marginal in the history of political ideas. We can search new approaches in the field of history of religious art, which cannot avoid the meaning and usage of the pictures in the cult, and its historical changes.

A modern classic of this topic, Hans Belting has focused his researches on the dichotomy of *picture* and *word*, with the background of the visible and talking person (see Belting 1990). The historical corn of the problem by him is Plato's logo-centric critique of pictures, interpreted in a religious framework. In here, Plato's "mute pictures and statues" are theoretically desacralized idols, in parallel with the really destroyed ones in the Old Testament. Plato's hidden question is the potential communicative power of a person behind the pictures, and words. In Belting's interpretation, the process of desacralizing pictures has been repeated in the Reformation. In this field, Belting is more cautious; and he focuses on the dichotomy of *picture* and *word*, or *idol* and *verb*; acting persons have remained in the background. From the point of view of the history of art it is satisfactory, because the end of the interpretation is the rise of the modern, secular art: the triumph of the *Lord's verb* in the church takes the pictures into desacralized public and private spheres. In the reconstruction of the thinking of the people of the age of the Reformation it is insufficient: we are not interesting in the pictures, only, but in the *usage* of pictures in the church and in the secular sphere. The crucial point is, of course, the interpretation of the teachings on the Lord's Supper. At first, Belting declares that *believers of every Protestant denomination want to feel the experience of presence of Jesus Christ in the congregation, by the act, the common rite, and not by the curious regard*. Later, he has almost forgotten about the *acting believers*, and has reduced the problem to the well-known dichotomy of the Protestant logo-centrism and the Catholic "idolatry". In the detailed explanation, he has focused on the pictorial, and sometimes on the verbal codes of the expression of theological dogmas about the Lord's Supper, and not on the method of the personal participation as an expression of the identity of the self. It is the point of view of the uninterested spectator, like in Milton's and Locke's cases. For them, acting believers are just a *tableau vivant*, equivalent with the work of arts in the church, both of them illustrating theoretical theses. But, in here, we are interested more in acts, then in theses.

By the first glance, insufficiency of the interpreting frames is a phenomenon of the past; and the trends of history of ideas based on the "speech act theory", especially the Cambridge school have solved the problem. However, the Cambridge group has inevitable merits of establish a new conceptual frame of intellectual history, with its known slogan, "text in context", and with an application of the "speech act theory" to the sphere of the written communication; the large volumes from Cambridge have left several open questions. We have now an approach of political history of ideas, applied mainly to the early modernity, which is not restricted to the theories of the past on the one hand, and the "pure historical data", on the other and it is closer to the interpretation of the *political acts* of the people of the past. (It is mirrored in the *importance of rhetoric* in the interpreted writings, and in the concept of the "writing act".) In the Cambridge interpretations it is not clear sometimes

that what is “speech act” (or “writing act”), in the analyzed discourse, and how can we interpret the political acts out of the “speech acts”. (It was mentioned above that other approaches, for instance the Continental *Begriffsgeschichte* can be a little bit more open for the evaluation of the visual sphere.) In the case of the Cambridge researchers, their background of the philosophy of language highly determinates the possible objects of their analyses. Quentin Skinner in his programmatic article (Skinner 1988) has made clear that his aim is the interpretation of text as political acts. Later, in his masterpiece on Hobbes he has declared his engagement for the philosophical background of the speech act theory: “I attempt to take seriously the implications of the fact that, Wittgenstein puts it in *Philosophical Investigations*, ‘Words are also deeds’” (Skinner 1996: 8). It is mirrored in an influential debate on Skinner’s opinions that the methodological discussion is within the framework of the interpretation of *texts* (Bevir 1999; Palonen 2000). The final aim of the well-known methodological tools from Cambridge is first of all to help selecting the relevant texts, and interpret them. The abundant pictorial environment of the early modern political activity has mainly an auxiliary role in the interpretations of intellectual history, only: symbols of the frontispieces of the relevant publications, and *paintings* are used for a better interpretation of the *writings*.

Telling the truth, Skinner himself, despite of his theoretical background of philosophy of language, is sensitive for the visual sphere during his deep and detailed interpretation of texts. For example, in the years of preparation of his monograph on Hobbes’s rhetoric he has published an article on the political significance of the pictorial symbols (Skinner 1994). Mental pictures, relationship between spectators and auditors are an important topic of his analysis of the rhetoric of Hobbes’s lifetime (Skinner 1994, 1996: 180–211).

### Hobbes’ opinions about rhetoric, with a relationship of the pictures

In the original *context* of the early modern *texts*, the role of visualization, and the relationship of *words and pictures* are much more complex than that is emerges in the models of their modern interpreters. It can be exemplified here by a single, but classical case, Hobbes’ relationship with the antique rhetoric, in context of the relation of the visual forms of expression. At first we should consider that the mostly estimated theoretical works of this tradition of rhetoric are focused on the speaker’s words as a *written text*, and disregard the *spectacle* of the speaker, with his *gestures*. However, this logo-centric tradition of the theoretical rhetoric is not equal with the *practice* of any culture of rhetoric, for Hobbes and his contemporaries this abstract intellectual model of rhetoric was identical with the rhetoric itself. The radical turn to this logo-centric model is as ancient as Aristotle’s ideas in this field. The Greek philosopher in his well-known comparison of the genres of *tragedy* and *epic*, disregards the different possible performances of these works, and refers to the *reading* of them as books, in his *Poetics* (Aristotle 1995: 1461b–1462a). It is the first case in the history of the Western thought that works of literature are regarded as identical with their written text. In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle reduces the words of the speaker to

a system of *enthymemes* (special forms of syllogisms) of a *written text*, connecting the possible effects of the performance with the weakness of an uneducated audience (Aristotle 1991: 140a). For a correct evaluation of Hobbes' opinions we should remember this hidden connection of the antique tradition of theoretical rhetoric with the standards of the written culture.

The antique rhetorical tradition was a common idiom of the authors of politics of his epoch. Hobbes' unique negative opinions on it in his age were rooted in his endeavor to formulate a modern concept of liberty, different from its antique ancestor. We can see these opinions in context, embedded in the daily political discourse in his *Behemoth*. By his description, the best speakers of the Long Parliament had studied Aristotle and Cicero in youth, and "from the love of their eloquence, fell in love with Politics [and this made them] great Haranguers" (Hobbes 1969: 39). The dark description of his *Leviathan* is formulated more generally; in

"these western parts of the World, we are made to receive our opinions concerning Institution, and Rights of Common-wealths, from *Aristotle*, Cicero, and other men, Greeks and Romans, that living under Popular States, derived those Rights, not from the Principles of Nature, but transcribed them into their books, out of the practice of their own Common-wealths, which were Popular; <...> And by reading of these Greek, and Latine Authors, men from their childhood have gotten a habit (under a false shew of Liberty) of favouring tumults, and of licentious controlling the actions of their Souveraigns, and again, of controlling those controllers, with the effusion of so much blood; as I think I may truly say, there was never any thing so dearly bought, as these Western parts have bought the learning of the Greek and Latine tongues" (*Leviathan*, Chapter II. 21. Hobbes 1651: 110–111).

Hobbes in here has made a personal choice, which has concerned the core of his cultural identity; he had sacrificed the antique intellectual and political ideas of his youth for the conceptual clearness of the contractual model invented by him. He clearly did not want to risk the harms of the strictness of his system of ideas in this point of his masterpiece.

In spite of this formal exclusion of the antique tradition, earlier, within the same chapter of the same work, he needs the force of the rhetoric for the foundations of the same social covenant. It can be here exemplified by a single classical *locus* of his *Leviathan*:

"But as men, for the attaining of peace, and conservation of themselves thereby, have made an Artificial Man, which we call a Common-wealth; so also have they made Artificial Chains, called *Civill Lawes*, which they themselves, by mutual Covenants, have fastned at one end, to the lips of that Man, or Assembly, to whom they have given the Sovereign Power; and at the other end to their own Ears. These Bonds in their own nature but weak, may nevertheless be made to hold, by the danger, though not by the difficulty of breaking them" (Hobbes 1651: 108–109).

In here Hobbes describes the nature of the *social covenant*, using a Hellenistic classic, wellknown description of *Gallorum Hercules*, or *Heracles Ogmios*, written by Lucian, what is a wide-spread symbol of the rule of the words over humanity. This Celtic figure is identical with *Ogam*, or *Ogma*, the god of writing in the Irish mythol-

ogy; *Heracles* has become his *interpretatio Graeca* by just mere iconographical reasons, based on his stock and lion-skin. His function is closer to *Hermes* in the Greek mythology; it is clear from the beginnings, from the classical, but probably fictional description of Lucian:

“This old Hercules is seen drawing a vast multitude of people after him, who are all linked by the ears. The chains are extremely light, and finally wrought of gold and amber; and resemble the most slender necklaces worn by our ladies. It would therefore have been easy for them to have broke loose from such brittle chains, and run away: but that never occurred to them: nor did ever any one of them shew the least resistance, or endeavour to get free, but they follow their leader with pleasure and alacrity, bestow praises upon him, and are so delighted with their condition, that as far as the length of the chain will permit, they run together before, that they would be sorry to be set at liberty. But what seemed to me most absurd in this picture, was that the painter, in perplexity where to fasten the ring at the extremity of the chain, as both hands of his Hercules had enough to do with the club and the bow, could discover, as it appeared, no better contrivance than to hang it to the tongue of the god, which to that end was bored through at the tip. Moreover he is so represented, that the turns back his head to those he leads, and smiles amicably upon them. <...> We Gauls do not, like you Greeks, attribute eloquence to Mercury, but to Hercules, who in strength far surpassed the other. <...> That however this old Hercules, or rather eloquence, which is personified in him, draws his audience chained by the ears to his tongue, should not excite your wonder, as the affinity between the ears and the tongue is not unknown to you” (Lucian 1820: 430–431).

Hobbes probably has used here visual sources for the formulation of social covenant as well, well known ones in his epoch; they are several pictures from the collections of *emblems*, which were parts of a popular genre of his epoch. (By the recent book of Jan Assmann, the genre of *books of emblems* in the early modern Europe is rooted in a misinterpretation of the system of the hieroglyphs; consequently it is a phenomenon on the margin of the words and pictures in itself. See Assmann 2010: *passim*.) However, Hobbes did not mention the name of Lucian in here, it is known in the Hobbes-studies that the master of Samosata was a favorite, often quoted antique author of Hobbes, and the quoted locus is based on Lucian’s version of the *mythologema* of *Heracles Ogmios*, with the use of two known early modern pictorial expression of this scene of mythology. (For a detailed analysis see Skinner 1996: 232, 249, especially 389–390. For the most widespread early modern pictorial expressions see Laurentius Haechtanus 1579: figure 43; Alciati 1621: 751, figure 181. The later one is the most popular edition of a work of its 16th-century author, probably known by Hobbes, as well.) By the opinion of an eminent researcher of this topic, Skinner, who was quoted above as well, Lucian’s version was established in the early modern thought was based on the abovementioned widespread pictorial expressions: “Lucian’s account is finely illustrated in emblem 43, ‘Gallorum Hercules’, in Haechtanus 1579” (Skinner 1996: 92). It should be mentioned here that this crucial picture has been used for the illustration of the frontispiece of Skinner’s great monograph on Hobbes’ rhetoric (Skinner 1996). Regarding the visual background of Hobbes’ formulation, the verbal essence of the social cov-

enant is not so evident that before, calculating with the texts, only. An interpretation based on the writings can create a model of the social covenant as a socio-linguistic construction, which can be described satisfactorily by the rules of the usage of language, only. An interpretation based on pictures can create a model of the structure of the political community after its foundation by the social covenant; it is a sketch of a hierarchical network, with a distinguished figure, the ruler of this community in the centre of the model. Both approaches are insufficient for the *human act* of the creation of a political community, what is more complex than a mere picture, or word. The dominant logo-centric and existing icono-centric approaches of history of ideas need a new component. Hobbes who knew well the value of “words without swords”, could not establish his robust Leviathan merely on the force of words, nor on the picture painted about the power of the words. His endeavor was to formulate the essence of the human acting behind the *words* and *pictures* spoken and shown by them. (Skinner in his recent researches on Hobbes adds more relevance for the visual elements in Hobbes’s thought, especially the visual roots of the key-concept of *representation*, and the symbolic of the frontispiece of the *Leviathan*. See Skinner 2005.) This human acting in itself and as a foundation of the social covenant is not identical with its verbal and pictorial descriptions. Not the mute and nor the talking gestures of people who participate in a collective action can be analyzed in the verbal-pictorial dichotomy; they need a new methodological tool.

## Conclusions

It was offered above an outlined overview of the problems of the interpretation of public acts. It has been quoted several instances for the insufficiency of interpretations based on the dichotomy of *words* and *pictures*, from the early modern history of ideas, and by an example of the history of religion. As a conclusion it can be observed that the insufficiency of every known method is based on their similar model of collective human acts. Every verbal utterance or shown picture in the public sphere can easily be simplified to a formal theoretical debate with discrete individual participants, and a well-defined set of the useful arguments, and possible opinions, in this model. It is a misinterpretation of the common acting in public sphere. People, when participating in similar action, usually do not search the truth as a logical value of a sentence; and their words can be interpreted much more as invitations in the participation of a common action, or a provocation for an engagement than a descriptive utterance about a part of the reality. From our above investigations we can derive a conclusion: a relevant interpretation of the social acting cannot avoid the *intentions* of the acting persons, incarnated in their gestures, which are not explainable satisfactorily by the vocabulary of “speech acts”, or “pictorial acts”.

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## T. HOBBESO VIZUALIOJI RETORIKA: POLITINIŲ IDĖJŲ ISTORIJS ATVEJO ANALIZĖ

Béla MESTER

### Santrauka

Šio straipsnio tema – modernųjų laikų pradžios intelektualinė istorija. Pirmoje jo dalyje pateikiama tarp mokslinių tyrinėjimų, skirtų žodžiams, vaizdams ir gestams, susiklostančių paralelių traktavimo bendroji samprata. Vienoks ar kitoks jų traktavimas priklauso nuo autoriaus, kaip toje epochoje gyvenančio tyrėjo, asmeninių patirčių. Pirmieji pavyzdžiai – tai keletas anglų klasikų, tokių kaip Johnas Miltonas ir Johnas Locke'as. Paskui pabrėžiama „vaizdinio posūkio“ metodologijos, „vaizdavimo (kalbėjimo) akto“ koncepto, religinio meno istorijos svarba. Galiausiai trumpai paminimas Kembridžo mokyklos indėlis į intelektualinę istoriją ir Reinharto Kosellecko *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*.

Antroje straipsnio dalyje pateikiamas istorinis pavyzdys iš ankstyvosios moderniosios epochos. Pirmiausia imama Thomaso Hobbeso ambivalentiško santykio su antikine retorikos tradicija keleto detalių analizės, o paskui aptariama šio santykio įtaka vizualumo sričiai.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: gestai, vaizdinis posūkis, retorika, kalbėjimo aktas, Thomasas Hobbesas, rašymo aktas.