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POLISH MEDIA ABOUT 9/11: THE RHETORIC AND METAPHORS OF THE DISCOURSE

Media discourse functions in a dual system of reference: it describes events that have actually taken place, but at the same time creates them in a certain way, presenting them in accordance with the genre conventions of writing for the press. In media reports and political commentaries about 9/11, Polish media and the public figures appearing in them most often use a figure of speech that one could call the trick of forced rectification, as well as metaphors taken from the vocabulary of mass culture (film, television, press commentaries on recent history). These kinds of stylistic measures are a means of psychologically taming the unprecedented historic events of 9/11, making them more comprehensible in cognitive terms belonging to the common image of the world, preserved in language among other things.

Introduction

Media discourse, which today is probably the most important variety of public discourse, primarily serves the communication of information, but it also shapes opinion on events and facts. It presents these in a certain way, most often as sensational, judges them tendentiously, and all this chiefly for the purpose of catching the reader's interest, which is the primary consideration in the commercial media. Informing, but also judging is part of the essence of many typical genres of press and television reporting, such as news stories, editorials, interviews, flashes, chronicles of events, commentaries, which offer different proportions between information and judgment as elements of the message. A journalistic text refers to reality, mentions facts which – processed through the medium of language – by necessity become “linguistic facts”, they are a report from somebody's point of view, similarly to what happens with narratives of historical events (Barthes, 1967). Focused on market success, competing against one another, in their fight for an audience the media make use of a broad repertoire of well-tested methods, among which is also the use of specific language and styles. Gaining the greatest possi-

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ble readership or viewership sometimes becomes a goal in itself. Specialists on mass communication even say that in today's media the rhetoric of communicating information has been replaced with the rhetoric of phatic bonds, whose main purpose is the "mediation" ("mediatyżacja") of presented facts – using various means to maintain audience interest in a given press title or television program (Pisarek, 2000).

From the perspective of media attractiveness, the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York is material for a great news story. Seemingly, the attack on the WTC does not require any "mediation", the scale of the event is large enough in itself so that no textual procedures are necessary to attract the audience's attention. However, for a fact to exist socially it has to be communicated, which obviously implies the necessity to use one of the many available stylistic and genre conventions in statements by means of which the information is communicated.

Reports on 9/11 are dominated by: correspondents' reports, statements from eye-witnesses, chronicles, commentaries, interviews with specialists (on combating terrorism, building sky-scrapers, aviation), press reports. The dominating elements in the statements of journalists, politicians and commentators are amazement, dread, indignation, horror, articulated directly or by way of metaphors and similes. Informing people about this unique event requires a previous intellectual processing of this fact, assigning it to a specific class of events, placing it in the string of previous experiences – in a word: an intellectual and emotional taming. In the context of such phenomena, psychology and cognitive linguistics use such concepts as profiling (Langacker, 1983, 1991), prototypicality (Rosch, 1997) and categorization, as mental and linguistic processes shaping the image of the world inscribed into a statement (Bartmiński, 1999).

The Polish media about 9/11

At first, the Polish media unthinkingly copied the expressions used in Reuters reports. In a huge red-letter front-page headline, *Gazeta Wyborcza* (No 213.3817, p.1) informs its readers: "War With the USA". Other newspapers also write about war. A sign saying "War With America" appears against the background of pictures of the devastation of Manhattan at the start of news programs, for example, on the Polish television TVN24.

The statements of Polish politicians, reports from Manhattan, and commentaries on the attack express the conviction that it is extremely hard to give a name to what has happened. Such a statement is usually constructed according to the scheme: the speaker informs people (or this follows from the context) that he/she cannot find a name for the events about to be described, after which he/she names what has happened with the help of a metaphor or simile. Comparisons involve reality as well as the world of fiction (literary, cinematographic), which in effect leads to the conclusion that the relations between these two orders have changed.

"There is no doubt that we are witnessing an unimaginable terrorist act, the kind we only read about in novels, which in fact we usually accuse of exag-

geration.” (Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski, *Trybuna*, No 213 [3506], p. 9)

“Nobody could believe it wasn’t a movie [...] The attacks looked like a movie, but it was all really happening. A nightmare, tragedy, no words for it.” (Marta Zemke, an eye-witness, *Życie*, No WW/213/1506, p. 7)

“What happened can be described with one word: shock. Everybody watching the scenes playing out before our eyes had the impression that this was science fiction.” (Jolanta Kwaśniewska, wife of the Polish President, *Viva! Wydanie specjalne*, No 3 [9]/2001, p. 25)

Statements about the attack on the WTC are dominated by the belief that these events are unique, and it is so hard to find an appropriate name for them. Thus, there is speaking about the facts, and speaking about speaking. Regardless of whether the descriptions of the tragedy stress the cognitive aspect (“it was like a movie”, “reality goes beyond anything that can be imagined”) or the psychological, emotional aspect (“shock”, “no words for it”), the event is in fact ultimately named, which has important semiotic consequences. Firstly, what has been named exists; it is a fact. Secondly, assigning a name means creating order. The name refers the experience back to similar events, tames the unimaginable that has actually happened.

Classical rhetoric, able to describe any verbal behavior, would have no problems with naming the quoted statements. Their syntax does not violate the syntactic rules of the Polish language, so this is a figure of thought rather than a figure of speech. The point is to find the most accurate stylistic expression for thoughts, to find such an organization of the thinking process that its linguistic counterpart will allow one to best express the experiences connected with the event being described. The point is to assign sense to them.

Rhetorical definitions described figures of thought as structures consisting in operations carried out on sense, which are the domain of the mind. Figures of thought create a way of speaking whose essence is contained in the characteristic organization of the thinking process (Ziomek, 2000) – an organization all its own. Admitting the difficulty of describing what has happened while precisely naming this allegedly undescrivable phenomenon can be treated as a variation of the rhetorical paradox, which is essentially a correction of the earlier enthymeme. The paradox lies in the thought that what has happened has no name in language; the enthymeme is the view that this could not have happened, as such events belong to the world of fiction, and under no circumstances do they belong to reality. The premise (“nothing like this has ever happened before”) leads to a false conclusion (“this cannot happen”), making it an error of conclusion corrected by reality. If such a differentiation is valid, then I think it entitles me to call the way of speaking which dominates in statements about 9/11 a figure of reversal and forced rectification of thinking. This figure appears as the stylistic determinant of a personal attitude to the events. One can only speak about such a great tragedy by indicating one’s own attitude to this event, describing it from a personal point of view, from the perspective of someone who has an individual, emotional attitude toward what has happened.

Press reports on the attack widely present the conviction that the world has changed fundamentally after September 11 (“After this blind revenge the World will never be the same”, *Trybuna*, No 213 [3506], p.1), that it has been divided anew. The taming of the tragedy is accomplished by describing the event with the help of a matrix of universal oppositions and by finding a system of reference that will make it comprehensible. The opposing forces become labeled with the pair of pronouns *they* and *we*, where *they* are the forces of evil, Islam, an alien culture, barbarianism, evil, religious fanaticism, while *we* denotes Christianity, Western culture, civilization, a world of lasting values.

For the media, the American tragedy is a case of fiction come true. In an article with this idea as its headline, *Gazeta Wyborcza*'s journalist Wojciech Orliński quotes titles of movies, computer games and books that tell stories of the United States being destroyed by the forces of evil. The popularity of the motif of the United States' annihilation and the image of the enemy fixed in press discourse suggests that the tragedy is being tamed and understood through references to popular stereotypes of mass culture and patterns of propaganda talk, including formulas from years past.

Old formulas, new meanings

Straight after the attack, television and the press posed a question whose style evokes associations with the times of communist newspeak. This question is “who's behind this?” and its variations: “who did it?”, “who could have done it?”, “who's behind the attack on the United States?”

“With this attack, terrorism has declared war on the civilized world. Since the Americans are being so careful and aren't saying who's behind this, let's wait for the facts.” (Bronisław Geremek, former Polish minister of foreign affairs, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, No 213.3817, p. 8)

It seems striking that the dailies mentioned here, representing different political options (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Życie*, *Trybuna*), print linguistic variations of the question about the effective cause of the attack which are all maintained in a similar stylistic convention.

In this case the informational properties of a specific stylistic pattern (which is usually an indexical sign of a communication situation) are different for different reader groups. The style of the reading matter is clearly correlated with age. For those aged forty (and older), the formula “who's behind this” may be associated with the public discourse in the years of communism, and for younger people, more likely with the speaking patterns disseminated by mass culture (the dialogues of gangster movies, jargon, colloquial speech).

The propaganda of People's Poland times was dominated by practically one kind of formula: “who's behind them?”, stemming from the well-known ideological interpretation. Michał Głowiński wrote:

“(...) formulas taken straight from the storehouse of stereotypes that remember Stalinist times are especially jarring, conspicuous and arouse bad emotions. Today that is how the formulas I heard on the radio news struck me (...): who’s behind them. (...) This formula, typical for communist language, originates from a communist perception of history. Under this concept, nobody who has gone against the authorities one way or another is acting alone, there are evil forces behind them.” (Głowiński, 1993, p. 167)

The analyzed formula refers to the “conspiracy” theory of history, according to which all unexpected political or social events have to be the result of the activity of hostile forces. Using a word with a distinctive stylistic character in a statement does not automatically or necessarily mean referring back to the discourse in which that word gained specific connotations. The term “conspiracy” does appear in reports concerning 9/11, but – obviously – in a different sense than in the 1970s.

“The search for the perpetrators of the Tuesday attack on the United States (...) involves 4,000 FBI agents (...). From the hundreds of reports there emerges the picture of a conspiracy that was prepared over many years in many corners of the world.” (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, No 215.3819, p.1)

The similarity of the formulas turns out to be misleading. Stylistic analogies do not necessarily have to imply the same points of view, the same image of the world; or an identical, however broadly understood, political ideology. Style refers to certain patterns of speech, to familiar forms of discourse, but its ideological affiliation is determined first and foremost by the context of the statement. I think a more in-depth analysis of stylistic formulas will help explain any arising doubts.

The formulas “who’s behind them” and questions like “who’s behind this?”, “who did it”, differ in their function, their role in a statement, which is the effect of the use of the pronoun. The Stalinist formula is in essence a rhetorical question, using the pronoun of the 3rd person plural. According to Emil Benveniste, the pronoun of the third person is a “non-person”; it is a negation of the relation between “I” and “you” in the act of verbal communication, it refers to someone who is situated outside this relation, which makes it an excellent means of pointing to an enemy, an alien (Benveniste, 1974). In the discourse of communist propaganda it was clear who the form “them” referred to – the imperialists, troublemakers, enemies of the system.

In press reports from 2001, one needs to find the answer to the question “who’s behind this?”. In the propaganda discourse of People’s Poland the answer was known, while the discourse of the democratic press has yet to determine the answer.

“Who’s behind this? CIA representatives say the evidence points to the infamous terrorist Osama bin Laden, who directed many attacks from Afghanistan.” (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, No 213.3817, p. 1)

The change from personal pronoun to demonstrative pronoun is the main determinant of the difference. It is the function of the demonstrative pronoun to set apart someone or something, in other words, to draw attention to a person or thing whose name is not necessarily known; it is the question posed in this way that allows it to be determined (Benveniste, 1971; Okopień-Sławińska, 1998). The demonstrative pronoun can suggest a point of view inscribed into the text, place a statement within the discourse of a political party, or not refer the statement to any specific ideology. Thus, the demonstrative pronoun is an “empty” linguistic form to an even greater extent than the personal pronoun.

Different linguistic categorizations lead to different images of the world. The stylistic similarity of used forms does not necessarily indicate their genetic sameness. In Bronisław Geremek’s statement, the question about who’s behind this can be treated as a modified formula from past times; expressions and linguistic stereotypes do not disappear from language straight after the political system changes, they often continue in the language, though they usually undergo de-semanticization. In *Gazeta Wyborcza*’s reports about the attack on the WTC, I would be inclined to treat the formula “who’s behind this?” and questions like “who did this?” as the effect of hasty translation of agency reports. On September 11, the question “Who Would Do This?” appeared in Reuters dispatches, to find its way to the front pages of the American press. The sources of this kind of stylistic pattern also include gangster movies, where this question is posed quite often in dialogues. It is also sometimes used in television news programs. In Poland, in a report about the latest bomb outrage in Israel, the station TVN24 reported that it wasn’t clear yet “who is behind this” (TVN24, 9:07 a.m. and subsequent editions, August 4, 2002). This formula disappeared from the air as soon as the agencies named those responsible.

At this point it is worth outlining more precisely what I mean here by ideology. Firstly, ideology (ideologization) in the context of media discourse is usually mentioned when pointing to the discourse’s dependence on political views to which statements and actions are subordinated. This kind of dependence of a statement on ideological texts is obvious and requires no further comment. Secondly, ideology in media discourse can be manifested through a set of views that, though they organize the author’s conduct and the shape of the statement, are not linked to any party doctrine, but in themselves can be counted a part of politics/policy in a broad sense: publishing, editorial or propaganda-related. This would be communication ideology, as opposed to political ideology. This second way of understanding the ideologization of media discourse could be helpful when analyzing its communication strategies, for example the use of metaphors.

Metaphors in the discourse about 9/11

Unique events are often described with the help of banal metaphorical formulas. This is also the case with 9/11. The battle for audiences on the competitive press market leads the media to try and use the language of the readers.

“By their very nature mass media are susceptible to repeated patterns, in terms of both content and language. Repetitiveness serves (at least to a point) to maintain the audience’s interest” (Pisarek, 2000, p. 15).

Metaphors used in the press play an important role in building communication with the reader. Metaphors allow readers to notice the aspects given prominence in the described phenomenon, while those that have been ignored, hidden, are treated as not worthy of interest. The motivation behind the choice of a name suggests the point of view from which the event is being described, it reveals the linguistic image of the world inscribed into the statement. A world described metaphorically cannot be a world described objectively. A metaphor is somebody’s statement, it is the linguistic expression of a describable consciousness (Ziomek, 2000; Dobrzyńska 1984).

The metaphors in the media discourse outlined here present the world in a state of war or on the eve of destruction. This is the case with press reports and picture captions on the Internet, and in books on the attack on the WTC (Skinner & Wallace, 2002). The metaphors in the media discourse in question are supported by widely recognized signs of mass culture, symbols of Mediterranean culture processed by mass culture. The terrorist attack is commented upon with the use of historical and war vocabulary or by references to biblical images of the end of the world, an apocalyptic triumph of evil on the day of the Last Judgment. I have already mentioned that the attack was referred to as war. Talking about what happened in the context of Pearl Harbor belongs to the same group of associations. Mentioning the Japanese air attack of 1941 on the U.S. base in Hawaii as an analogy of the terrorist attack of 2001 has several stylistic forms: metaphor-riddle, periphrase, meta-statement – in the last case, the justness of the metaphorical motivation is questioned. Thus, reports speak of a “second”, “terrorist” or “another” Pearl Harbor, or “Pearl Harbor 2”.

“America has stopped in its tracks – the United States has not experienced such an attack on its own territory since 1941, when the Japanese destroyed the fleet in Pearl Harbor.” (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, No 213.3817, p. 4)

“The popular expression is a ‘new Pearl Harbor’, only to the second power, because it’s in the very heart of America.” (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, No 213.3817, p. 4)

“I have before me *The Washington Post*, where on the front page, in huge letters, the single word INFAMY stands out – the word used by Roosevelt after the attack on Pearl Harbor. In the context of what has happened, it should be translated as MORTIFICATION.” (Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, *Viva, Wydanie specjalne*, No 3 [9]/2001 p. 19)

Pearl Harbor as a metaphor for what happened on September 11, 2001 is motivated by a simple analogy. The expression “a second Pearl Harbor” reveals the belief that history is a repeatable process, that it is a succession of events in the spiral of time. In this case war analogies are obvious, comprehensible, known from experience, offered in films. In statements of this sort time can undergo mythologization, be repeated, keep returning.

“The residents of New York kept repeating one word: war.” (*Viva! Wydanie specjalne*, No 3 [9] 2001, p. 15)

To those who have never been in a war nor have ever seen war close up, the New Yorkers covered in dust from the disintegrating towers, fleeing from Manhattan, looked like people from old films about the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. Journalist Karolina Kowalska writes in her report from New York:

“On the bridge the panic escalates. I see tough guys crying. (...) Some jump onto passing trucks. All this looks like old films from the evacuation of Warsaw after the Warsaw Uprising.” (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, No 213.3817, p. 5)

Writer Janusz Głowacki says in an interview:

“When they closed the tunnels and bridges, I felt as if I were in a city under siege, I’d experienced something similar in the Warsaw Uprising.” (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, No 214.3818, p. 11)

The difference in identifying different historical events with each other, the difference between exact and approximate analogy, is in essence a difference of consciousness inscribed into the text. In short: between different points of view and their corresponding images of the world.

An analogy is sought that would motivate the metaphorical expression, but there is a sense there that the compared facts are not quite identical. That is how I would interpret the expressions “a second”, “terrorist”, “new” Pearl Harbor, which the press uses in reports from America. With time, the commentators begin questioning the sensibleness of the comparison, noting that the attack in 1941 was directed against military targets, while the terrorists in 2001 killed several thousand innocent civilians. The point of view of a witness, a participant in events, a person tested by the circumstances of history, is present in the comments of Jan Nowak-Jeziorański. He does not perceive events as being completely analogous, only as similar. He speaks of historical experience and its verbalizations, and not of simple identification that has a linguistic equivalent in the metaphor-riddle.

Intertextuality of mass culture

A metaphor based on analogy of events can also be motivated with the help of cognitive schemes used and popularized by mass culture. *Trybuna*’s headline “Pearl Harbor 2” carries the same poetics as the titles of Hollywood thrillers (*Die Hard II*, *Rambo II*, *Rocky II*). This formula used in the headline of a story about the world’s reactions to the tragedy, paradoxically, brings a true event down to the level of media facts. I believe the cultural connotations linked to this headline refer the reader to movie fiction, to the patterns of experiencing of tragedy popularized there. “Pearl Harbor 2” – links associations with Michael Bay’s movie *Pearl Harbor* (USA, 2000).

Trybuna is not the only paper with a tendency to use headlines associated directly with movies or with other repertoires of signs tamed by mass culture. The headline “Apocalypse Now” underneath the gloomy face of George W. Bush on the cover of a

special edition of *Viva* weekly is an obvious reference to Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, though the Polish title of this movie was "Time of the Apocalypse".

There is a similar poetics in the metaphors relating to different variations of the end of the world – headlines and headings of reports from America such as "Armageddon", "The Last Judgment", or expressions used in the reports, like "the devil has appeared in New York", "a new empire of evil", "America engulfed by fire". *Trybuna* consistently (even a year later) metaphorically labels stories from America "Armageddon". The front-page headline printed above a photo is repeated centrally at the top of every page of the issue, thus playing the role of the issue's logo, with the enclosed pictures documenting the accuracy of the expressions used.

In relation to the image contained in the photo, the caption fulfills a metatextual function, directing the way the photo to be read. The verbal text thus models the readers' perception of the iconic text, suggesting an interpretation of what is shown in the photo.

Reporting on the news from America, *Gazeta Wyborcza* mainly uses captions in their purely informational function: "Firefighters carry an injured man from the World Trade Center in New York. A moment later the towers came crashing down." The photo with this caption is legible and unambiguous. *Trybuna* expands the informational part of the comment-caption in such a way as to suggest a moment of reflection to the reader, or deliberations on what they see in the picture. The caption "After the plane hit it, the World Trade Center went up in flames. The two towers collapsed like a house of cards" contains information and suggestion. One may wonder why the greatest achievement of skyscraper construction technology of the 1970s collapsed "like a house of cards," a structure that is precarious by its very nature. *Życie* goes even further in modeling the interpretation of pictures. In this daily, the captions clearly suggest the symbolic meanings of photos from 9/11. I quote a caption under a picture of the blazing Pentagon: "The Pentagon is a symbol of the United States' military power." A picture of a few people standing next to a car, looking at the smoke over Manhattan, received the commentary: "New York is shrouded in smoke. America plunged in grief."

The headlines of stories or dispatches refer to familiar intertexts, easily recognizable cultural associations. Sometimes they refer to several intertexts simultaneously.

The headline "Armageddon" prominently displayed in *Trybuna* can certainly be recognized as a reference to the Bible. Armageddon is the place where the final battle between the forces of good and evil will take place, as prophesied in the Book of Revelation. But this word also means a bloodbath, devastating fighting, war. Armageddon is also the title of a catastrophic movie which tells the story of yet another victory over a danger from space. "Alienness" can be a gradational category; "aliens" can mean both travelers from outer space and representatives of another religion. The *Trybuna* headline introduces several contexts (intertextual references), and the editors themselves suggest to the reader what the actual allusions are:

"*Armageddon* is a movie showing the destruction of the United States. What occurred in the United States yesterday looked like shots from that movie."
(*Trybuna*, No 213 [3506], p. 1)

The references to symbols and signs of serious literature that can be found in reports from 9/11 are usually processed through the filter of mass culture and common language. The evil that happened is described with the help of expressions of common usage, which though they originated from the cultural tradition of old, are used in meanings known from everyday linguistic contacts. In this way, the biblical concept of the Last Judgment is used by the press in its secondary metaphorical meaning of a particularly difficult day, a decisive task.

“The U.S. special services were sure they were prepared for the day of the Last Judgment, but they didn’t believe it would ever come.” (*Trybuna*, No 213[3506], p. 2)

Most of the expressions used by the press in describing the tragedy of 9/11 are rooted in the element of commonality and in the semantic space of war and ultimate cataclysm. A large number of similar headlines constitute personifications: “America holds its breath”, “Terrorists attack the heart of America”, “America is grieving”. Personification humanizes, transforms the abstract into the concrete, translates things difficult to imagine into images that are often quite common and well known. Calling America a woman in mourning is certainly not a very original idea, but it facilitates communication by referring to familiar linguistic and emotional stereotypes.

Personification is sometimes accompanied by hyperbolization: “The world is going to its grave”, “The whole world is afraid”. This can be perceived as one of many possible ways of expressing the belief that the attack on the United States is a traumatic experience for all of mankind:

“September 11, 2001, 8:48 a.m., New York. From this moment on, nothing will be the same again.” (*Trybuna*, No 213[3506], p. 9)

The source of press stories is usually an information agency, and it is the agency that is in fact the main transmitter of the message, the distributor of content, and sometimes also of stylistic conventions. The press multiplies the transmitting institutions. Different newspapers and television channels usually offer the same information, but the style of their comments depends on a given paper’s/station’s political profile – on ideology in both of the senses given earlier.

In their issues dated September 12, *Trybuna* and *Życie* inform readers about the measures undertaken by the Polish authorities in connection with the terrorist attack on America. Both papers state that “For the first time during his term, the president came to the prime minister’s office.” (*Życie*, No WW/213/1506, p. 7)

Other papers did not emphasize this fact so strongly. For *Trybuna*, a meeting between the president and the prime minister is treated as an element of the image of Aleksander Kwaśniewski, “the president of all the Poles,” who ignores personal animosities in the face of a possible threat to the country; for *Życie*, the “anti-crisis measures” are a pretext for criticism. The same information about the meeting has to gain a

different stylistic expression, because style is the linguistic feature that most clearly presents the ideological involvement of the discourse.

Trybuna:

“President Aleksander Kwaśniewski assured yesterday: all [public] services in Poland are in a state of emergency readiness, and public facilities are being protected. There is no cause for anxiety (...).” (*Trybuna*, No 213[3506], p. 8)

Życie:

“Aleksander Kwaśniewski: there’s no cause for panic. (...) Poland is safe – officials assure. But, they have already squabbled over who will head the anti-crisis staff. (...)” (*Życie*, WW/213/1506, p. 7)

Reported news are a pretext equally often to voice support for and to criticism of the authorities’ actions. In *Życie*’s report, information about the facts is dominated by commentary whose character is revealed through the style of the story. The word used here for officials (“oficjele”) is, according to the latest edition of Dictionary of Correct Polish Usage (Markowski, 1999), classified as contemptuous, and that is how it is used by modern-day Polish speakers.

Conclusions

Media information is quite often offered together with the viewpoint – inscribed into the text – of press communication organizations, which give the discourse an ideological bias to a lesser or greater degree. They create an image of the world that is desirable from the point of view of the goals that a given title’s publishers have set themselves. Descriptions of the tragic events of 9/11 could not escape this rule. The reports apply their own topic and rhetoric corresponding to the nature and scale of the event, but they are also subject to all the rules governing contemporary media discourse. This discourse is usually firmly set in the practices of everyday speaking, and it also exhibits the symbols and signs of mass culture, whose products are its natural intertextual space. This allows the media to communicate information on unique events in cognitive terms belonging to the everyday image of the world, fixed in ethnic language.

The media describe evil in conventional ways, according to the patterns governing press communication (Głowiński, 1992). Contrary to their ambitions, postulates and declarations, large-circulation press titles do not aim for in-depth and original analyses of events, but for the speediest possible information about them, often presented as sensational. In fact originality is not the domain of the media, but of artistic languages. It is they that are capable of bearing the weight of extraordinary moments and experiences. In Wisława Szymborska’s poem about a photo from 9/11 (*Fotografia z 11 września*) published in the press and also in the book (*A Photograph from Sept. 11*; Szymborska, 2002, p. 35), which is in essence an *ecphrasis*, we read:

They jumped from the burning stories, down
(...)

A photograph captured them while they were alive and now preserves them
(...)

There are only two things I can do for them
- to describe this flight
and not to add a final word

[translation : www.pgf.cc/Arts/poetry.htm; Copyright 2003 Polonia Global Fund]

The line “and not to add a final word” can be treated as the equivalent of such expressions as “to save” or “to stop”. But, it can also be understood as the poet’s desire to avoid speaking directly about the death of the people in the photograph. In both cases, salvation once more turns out to be the domain of poetry; only in the language of poetry can it come about – symbolically.

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