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Visualizing the Unseen: Depicting the Abstract in German Media

Abstract In my paper, I will combine two methods of media discourse analysis in order to achieve new insights into not only power relations inherent in texts, but also into the manner in which collective memory is constituted. Firstly, I will critically examine the social semiotic method of qualitative multimodal discourse analysis developed by Theo Van Leeuwen and Gunther Kress as a resource for describing how verbal semiotic modes, together with mixed linguistic/non-linguistic modes, are used to establish and confirm power relations within pluricoded texts. Secondly, I will investigate the practicability of applying the concept of Key Visuals/Key Invisibles, postulated by Peter Ludes and Stefan Kramer, to multimodal compositions in order to gain a sociological and cultural understanding of the means by which certain content becomes part of collective memory and how it is manipulated. In this way, I hope to determine if an operationalization of Key Visual/Key Invisible is possible in order to view its associative potential as a semiotic resource.

I will apply this methodological device to video sequences of German news releases reporting on bonus payments to top bank managers during the world economic crisis in 2008. Thereby, I will examine if the discourse generated by these reports is characterized by a highly negative representation of managers: the news releases seem to hold them responsible for the economic crisis instead of investigating its causes. I will analyze which devices are used in the accusation of the managers and will attempt to determine if there are Key Visuals/Key Invisibles used to this end. If this is the case, I will analyze their use within the context of the truth imperative of journalistic reporting. In this section, I will focus on the connection between mediated content and the possibilities of depicting or recording the unseen processes of bonus payment.

Keywords Social Semiotics; Collective Memory; Media Discourse Analysis; Multimodal Composition; Bonus Payments; Bank Managers

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On September the 15th in 2008, Lehman Brothers Inc. announced that they are not solvent anymore. This declaration marked one of the largest bankruptcies in the history of the U.S. American market. As we will soon find out, it had also major consequences for the rest of the world. Europe, Russia, Japan – all these nations playing with the U.S. market system had experienced the big bang of world financial crisis.

The picture of the front of the main building of this bank, the moving text on its wall, people leaving the building with their packages, some of them even crying is not unfamiliar any more. These pictures are interrupted by shots of graphics and charts recorded on the stock market. There is a hustled crowd, busy people in business suits, we see their worried faces while telephoning or discussing something with their colleagues. In parallel, one also hears shocked, concerned or even indignant voices of TV moderators. News about the world economic crisis coming at full speed. All these visual and audio fragments are in the memory of many viewers of the media coverage of financial market events during the weeks following the 15th of September 2008. But, why does one recall these images when thinking about the world financial crisis? An answer could be found in the fact that the medially distributed content, and especially in TV broadcasts, is not a matter of viewer's choice. In other words the viewer's choice is reduced to a binary opposition between participation as an addressee or not participating at all in this kind of communication. Having in mind the popularity of TV programs and the more or less same global sources of the video footages, the number of people sharing the experience of the news content is not to be underestimated.

My task in this paper is to analyze the question of guilt for the crisis in its national framework[1] and its representation in German media releases. As every big catastrophe in human-made systems, for this one, too, some logical or – even better – human cause needs to be found, an evil or irresponsible individual or a series of individuals who sacrifice everything for their own interests, who need to be punished for the incidents they presumably caused. In case of the financial crisis one could see the bank manager as such a scapegoat. He or she is (represented as) a person who – so it seems – does everything for money, for special achievement rewards called bonuses, who gambles with other people's money, who is an egoist and immoral person. From this problem a new discourse arises: the bonus payments discourse. In Germany – in comparison to other European countries – this is a very large topic with a lot of material in the mass media.

This kind of construct helps keeping all events plain and simple as needed for public discourses. However, keeping an event plain and simple is not entirely the same as reporting the truth about the events. It is my deep belief that forced individualization, rationalization and significant reduction of context cannot be seen

[1] With national I also mean international content, which is being introduced in a special way to the domestic audience.

as a mean of trustworthy and fair presentation and reporting. [It doesn't make people understand, but only gives them plain information, which is completely worthless without knowing the context.] However, if we take the situation as it is, it is possible to observe certain standards and regularities in the news galaxy. Therefore, I will first try to determine a proper theoretical framework for the analysis of audio-visual collective memory and define its basic units. Afterwards, discursive construction of collective memory is to be examined with the help of an example of the mentioned bonus payment discourse. This will be done in the context of multimodal discourse analysis and within the framework of social semiotics.

Theoretical Framework

In this paper, my aim is to introduce a new unit into the analysis of multimodal discourse and combine it with achievements from research about the collective memory, which is immanent in cultural studies. The collective memory in one culture/cultural area/cultural community is being formed according to specific discursive rules, mainly by the means of different media practices. In order to analyze them plausibly, one has to be able to find the right tool from the palette offered by the study of media semiotics, which deal with all phases of media existence from production through distribution down to its reception (Hess-Lüttich 2001). The task of a discourse analyst is to pursue the ideological standpoint of the discourse's producer and to examine the position of power represented by these units. The objects analyzed here are not understood as verbal texts, but as pluricodic entities in a context of new media and in an even broader sense of new media networks.

On the one hand, the theoretical framework of this paper is based on works of Manuel Castells' theory of information networks. If we consider the pursuit of the position of power in a text intrinsic to discourse analysis, we will be able to find a similar notion in Castells' writings:

> [i]n a world of networks, the ability to exercise control over others depends on two basic mechanisms: the ability to program/reprogram the network(s) in terms of the goals assigned to the network; and the ability to connect different networks to ensure their cooperation by sharing common goals and increasing resources. I call the holders of the first power position the «programmers,» and the holders of the second power position the «switchers.» (2004:34)

I will not entirely share this terminology with regard to the power position holders. However, it is of use for this work to see the society as a network or rather as a number of interdependent networks. In this way, the discourse analyst establishes a connection between outer social actors and their interests embedded in the ideology of the media representation.

On the other hand, my theoretical tool is based on the social semiotic theory of multimodal discourse analysis, which has been developed in the works of Kress and Van Leeuwen. Social semiotics offers the tool to reveal the position of power hidden in the pluricoded text in an ideological or – in Castells' words – programmatic way (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001). Leaning on the discourse analysis as it has been done at the East Anglia school of linguistics on the one hand and within the older schools of semiotics on the other hand, they have come to their own concept of discourse analysis, which is especially oriented towards media content design. According to social semiotic theory, all semiosis is multimodal (Lemke 2002; Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006), whereas a mode is merely a code-like semiotic rule. The sign is not to be understood as a static unit, but much more as a result of a social action, which produces a palette of different semiotic resources (Van Leeuwen 2005). According to Fraas (2005), this process can be seen as a collective construction of meaning through different semiotic codes.[2] Therefore, semiotic resources are just a potential of meaning-making, whereas semiotic modes of representation, which exist in a given cultural area/space, are its realizations dependent of a respective communication goal (Jewitt and Van Leeuwen 2001; Kress et al. 2007; Meier 2008). Understanding texts always as a product of different modes (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1998), these texts can be defined as multimodal compositions (Van Leeuwen 2003), which are constituted depending on a medium they tend to exist in.

In cross-medially oriented research, the materiality of the medium is also seen as a semiotic resource, which allows the realization of a specific mode as participating in the meaning making process (Stöckl 2004). The conceptualization of a multimodal composition or the mode of a higher rank, which determines how the modes of the composition are brought into accordance, is called design in social semiotic theory (Kress et al. 2007). It is exactly this conceptual level, which shows the discursive techniques and tendencies through the value of specific semiotic choice.

With regard to their existence as production, reproduction and distribution, the role of multimodal composition in society can be seen from different perspectives (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001). These processes also have a certain semiotic capacity, although this is not their primary goal. The materiality and availability of the specific composition therefore has a respective and mass media specific semiotic potential, which should partly be taken into account during the analysis (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001; Stöckl 2004).

Social semiotics postulates common dimensions of meaning that all semiotic systems fulfill by creating a multimodal composition. On the basis of social semiotic communication theory, every mode should be able to have three dimensions of meaning: the *ideational*, which enables the connection between the semiotic system and the real world; the *interpersonal*, which establishes a connection between the sender, the mediated content and the receiver; and the *textual*, which relates to the coherence of the signs and modes within the complex

[2] Original quote: "die kollektive Konstruktion von Bedeutung über semiotische Kodes" (Fraas 2005:256).

multimodal unit and its suitability to discursive requirements (Stöckl 2004; Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006). It is these three dimensions that directly link to Manuel Castells' notion of shifting from virtual reality into real virtuality. And this is the way media networks function – communicating the real world through the flow of symbols, which is no more than a form of discursive praxis (Castells 1997).

Key Visuals – *Key Invisibles*

In order to better understand the concept of Key Visuals, some remarks on its history are needed. Although the term itself relates to Key Words (Kramer and Ludes 2010), its roots go back to the concept of Mnemosynes, which has been sketched out in the work of the German art historian Aby Warburg (Ludes 2001). In his writings, Warburg compares Mnemosynes with a kind of engram or rather with what he calls dynamogram, showing a specific motion (regardless of the type of image itself). Those are pictures, which should help us researching the expressive values of the representations of inner and outer moving life. Although his work relates to the period of the Renaissance and solely to art works, there are some considerations, which are of interest for our research.

Warburg speaks about the iconology of the *Zwischenraum* (middle or medial space: it could even be said *agora*) and sees it as a contribution to research in developmental psychology on examples of images and drawings of causes and their representation (2010). This notion is closely related to the goal of Key Visuals, which are supposed to document the history of a mentality (Ludes 2001). Even Warburg's mention of the *Pathosformel* (a form evoking pathos) is in many aspects related to the concept of infotainment in the sense of strong feelings being communicated through the medium content. Among other things, the main characteristic of this form is its repetitiveness in many different works, which becomes recognizable as a pattern, which in any case educates the viewer.

As Castells notes, the modern information society consists of different interdependent networks wherein media networks play a significant role. He points out: "image-making is power-making" and "flows of messages and images between networks constitute the basic thread of our social structure" (Castells 2000:507-508). In other words, the iconic turn represents the main shift in modern media and determines the social reality we live in. The study of visual semiotic systems should in so far be one of the dominant critical disciplines.[3] Within the context of the internet he notes that "[m]ainstream media, and particularly television, still dominate the media space, although this is changing fast. … People think in metaphors, and build these metaphors with images" (Castells and Cardoso 2006:14). This notion shows once again the need not to limit a research on one medium, but to expand its multimodal analysis to a variety of them – to do a cross-media/intermedia research in order to examine the discourse flow of visual elements.

[3] Additionally, the fact that we are only working on its establishment is devastating when we consider the long existence of visual communication in society in the broadest sense of the word. I mean thereby that there are no elementary or high school courses dealing with it in a way similar to how they deal with language.

Kramer and Ludes use Castells' notion of collective symbols, which have been remediatized through the networks and develop their own theory of constitutive units of collective memory: "Key Visuals are an essential element of all kinds of individual, group, and collective audio-visual memories" (2010:17). Ludes defines Key Visuals within the context of TV networks and notes that they

> ...are produced as regular[ly emitted], daily actualized means of orientation ..., so that the viewer can or must address to it at least in some of his life assessments. This form is the only one which has been emitted in the TV throughout of all the time of its existence. ... TV news are usually not only trusted to high extend by its special audience, but it also has a high respect by the persons of the public life... (Ludes and Schanze 1999:172; Kramer and Ludes 2010:59-60)[4]

[Note the similarity with the notion of repetitiveness of Warburg's *Pathosformel*.] Kramer, on the other hand, sees Key Visuals as hypermedial images perceived as pure truth, which at the same time produce identity in the context of specific hegemonial configurations of the memory. They condense the core of information in a picture or a video sequence or in linked websites. Key Visuals use the mechanism of modern media culture, which presupposes mimetic perception of the reality (Kramer 2008:98; Kramer and Ludes 2010:50).[5]

At the same time, Kramer and Ludes point out that aside from Key Visuals there are also relevant contents which do not participate in forming collective memory: "[t]he visual narratives are similar in terms of «who, what, when, where and how,» but any reference to the «why» is either very shortly sketched in the verbal commentaries or left out" (2010:68). Especially concerning our topic, the result of Ludes' research shows the fact that usually the carrier of democratically chosen positions are actors of Key Visuals constructed by media, whereas the economic "programmers" tend to define their own representation in media (Ludes and Schanze 1999:182; Kramer and Ludes 2010:69). As Ludes puts it: "the neglect of contexts is a further marker of the ever growing audio-visualization of news and information" (Ludes and Schanze 1999:183-184).[6] This means that the context of the event is being blanked out in favor of the impact that a single shocking incident makes. This is at the same time the very core of the mechanism that makes a Key

[4] Original quote: *...als tagesaktuelle, regelmäßige Orientierungsmittel ... so produziert [werden], dass sich die Zuschauerinnen zumindest in einigen wenigen Wertungen ihres Lebens danach richten können, ja müssen. [D]iese Form [ist] die einzige, die über den ganzen Entwicklungszeitraum des Fernsehens kontinuierlich ausgestrahlt wurde. ... Fernsehnachrichtensendungen [genießen] nicht nur eine außergewöhnlich hohe Glaubwürdigkeit bei ihrem speziellen Publikum, sondern auch ein hohes Ansehen bei Personen des öffentlichen Lebens...*

[5] Original quote: *...den spezifischen, hegemonial herausgebildeten Anordnungen der Erinnerung im Moment als identitätsbildende „Wahrheit" „wahrgenommen" verdichten den Kern einer Information etwa in einem Bild, einer oder mehreren miteinander montierten Filmeinstellungen oder sich aufeinander beziehender Seiten des World Wide Web.*

[6] Original quote: *[d]ie Vernachlässigung von Zusammenhängen ist also ein weiteres Merkmal der zunehmenden elektronischen Audiovisualisierung von Nachrichten und Informationen.*

Visual work. The context becomes apparently self-evident, although the *why*-question hasn't been discussed at all – it has become the Key Invisible because of the self-explanatory characteristic of this multimodal unit.

The main actors of the discourse analyzed in this paper are German bank managers and politicians who appear in the same context. This note is rather important because it displays the convergence of two more or less stable narratives, as Ludes puts it. Focusing on bank managers introduces a sort of economic turn in media discourse: usually invisible investment bankers, private entrepreneurs or bank employees are now being visualized and represented without their own will (or at least without any own staging of their appearance). However, this does not mean that the representation becomes more objective or that a broader context is taken into concern. It only shows a small shift from one field to another or rather a surface hybridization of different areas without taking into account the influencing background processes. The simplification of the representation within the media tends to show the binary logic of a respective event, which is a construct itself and which leads, as Ludes points out, to an unrealistically simplified political discrepancy (Ludes and Schanze 1999).

Methodical Consideration

Although Key Visuals do not stand alone, but are components of bigger texts and/or compositions[7] (for example, a TV show, an illustrated article, a website with photo series or a video with links to other similar material) in their main modes (a frame or video sequence), they can still be seen as relatively autonomous multimodal units. They can be defined as open, cross-medially/intermedially validated entities whose existence is not only based on their quotability (their repetitive appearance in different media and/or texts), but also on their pattern-wise form. On the other hand, Key Words, whose "functional equivalents" Key Visuals are, usually appear simultaneously and articulate and determine their verbal dimension. Key Visuals can therefore be seen as not only constitutive elements of collective memory, but also as those elements which closely determine the visual stereotypes/frames.[8]

Van Leeuwen (2008) offers a compendium of categories for the representation analysis in the verbal mode, based on categories proposed by him and for the analysis of pictures and visual design. This is strongly connected to and has common ground with the analysis of video sequences made by Iedema (2001). A slightly different terminology, but coinciding in the meaning, for classification of depicted actors is proposed by Ludes in his coding instructions for identifying Key Visuals (coding instructions – Ludes 2001 CD: chap. 17).

[7] The main concern in Ludes' research (2001) was to determine Key Visuals within the relationship between memorization and media praxis. He does not explicitly concentrate on multimodal discourse analysis in the above described sense.

[8] The connection between Key Words and argumentative patterns is as close as the one between Key Visuals and visual topoi, as I will try to show later.

The representation form of the social actors is hereafter differentiated into "Actor or Agent" / "passive Participant" (Ludes 2001) and "Actor" / "Patient" (Van Leeuwen 2008). As Ludes himself states:

> [a]ctors or agents are people, institutions, groups or organizations that actively pursue an aim, stipulate an event, or influence the succession of events. They play a central role in the report and are mentioned most often. There are some indicators that can help to decide whether somebody/something is involved actively: The option «actors/agents» can be chosen,
>
> - when analyzing words: if people are mentioned in the active voice (as opposed to the passive voice);
> - when analyzing images: if people are shown playing an active part in any event, or else, if they talk about action themselves, e.g., in a press conference. Their active role might be specified by way of a text insert, too. (coding instructions – 2001 CD: chap. 3.2)

On the other hand, Van Leeuwen (2008) describes three different dimensions of discursive construction of relation towards the viewer and a depiction of the person (Figure 1): social distance where the depicted person is on a different level of closeness and relationship to the viewer, which is made through long/close shots; social relation where different shooting angles provide a different kind of emotional detachment (horizontal angle: face to face, confronting, sideline) or a power position (vertical angle, from above or from beneath); and social interaction where a viewer can be addressed directly (if a depicted person looks at the viewer) or indirectly (if this is not the case). (Mis)uses of these three categories can be recognized in strategies of alienation (representing people as strangers), disempowerment (of the depicted person comparing to the viewer) or objectification (dehumanizing the person and reducing him or her to an object).

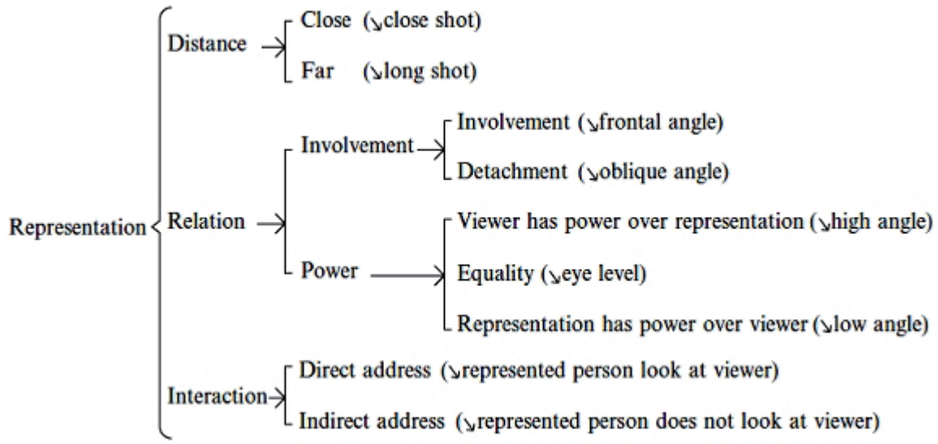

Figure 1. Representation and Viewer Network.
Source: Van Leeuwen (2008:141).

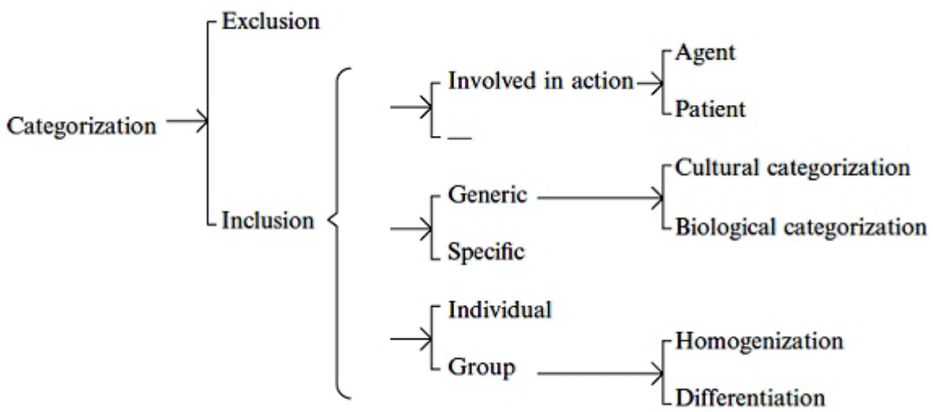

Figure 2. Visual Social Actor Network.
Source: Van Leeuwen (2008:147).

The other categorization of depicted persons concerns their representation as it is. Here, it is of interest for this research to mention the dichotomy of inclusion/exclusion (Figure 2) on the ground of some characteristics of the depicted person. In case of the first category I have the already mentioned binary division between agent and patient (depending on involvement in action), and individual and group concerning the social embodiment of the depicted persons. The category of group would then be what we have in our case, where the representation can either tend to a differentiation of the actors or to their homogenization.

For the identification of Key Visuals, I will try to slightly adapt Ludes' instructions for my requirements. As already stated, my main goal is to find out some of the most frequent Key Visuals and to determine their argumentative value in the discursive construct of the guilt of bank managers within the discourse about bonus payments. This differs in parts from the goal, which Ludes had in his research. In this work, I will try to concentrate on the patternability of the Key Visuals and try to estimate a certain mechanism, which takes part in the creation of frames of interpretation.

In his intramedia analysis,[9] Holly (2010) examines the secondary audio-visuality. He sees the concept of reciprocal transcriptivity of semiotic systems and the intrinsic intermediality of the language as closely related.[10] Just as for Iedema (2001), a camera shot (the shot size, the horizontal and vertical angle) is for Holly a semiotic resource of recontextualization in different TV genres. He shows that the verbal (in our case factual argumentative pattern) and the filmic mode (a dramatized, but credible movie sequence) together build a meaning of a higher level (Holly 2010). In other words, mediality and production (staging) of the verbal content, or more exactly its medial context, determine or at least significantly alter the meaning of its content, which is a different, but complementary process to the one intrinsic to Key Visuals. The verbal component is a trigger of the visual part of the multimodal unit, however, the meaning of the verbal part gets defined through other modes. So, in my opinion, it is not merely the naming of the video sequence, but a bit more – its verbal dimension. All this implies, as Holly (2010) himself states, that the frame analysis in the multimodal environment indeed is a required part of research when trying to examine the discursive praxis of a memory forming.[11] Hence, the verbal expression obtains the value of truth because it relates to a content outside of that specific semiotic system. In his interviews with media experts, Ludes asks questions about audio-visual stereotypes: "[d]o words explain pictures? Do pictures say more than words? Do words and pictures constitute two different realms? Are they almost inseparable and create something new, beyond words and pictures?" (2001: CD, chap. 17.2). I think, on the basis of the former issue, that the answer is properly given.

The Analysis

Even though there have been many discourses about top, investment and bank managers during a two-year period after the *Weltfinanzkrise* (the World Financial Crisis), it has actually set up or more precisely reanimated a special discourse in Germany, partly imported from Anglo-Saxon countries: the discourse about bonus payments. Many video excerpts concerning bank manager, give an impression that the guilt in this discourse has been very strongly personalized through the negative representation of the functionaries of the financial market and banking sector. The mechanisms which really caused the crisis are being rationalized and to a great extent simplified. Managers, already medially characterized through collective symbols and visual representation of conceptual metaphors (i.e., *Heuschrecke* [grasshopper] [Parr 2007; Ziem 2008]), are being denoted as the main culprits of the world financial crisis with aid of repetitively used argumentation patterns. However, the problem is that other, systemic, reasons are being disregarded (as, for example, the lack of legal regulation of the financial market, etc.).

The publicly expressed opinions of the minister, ministry officials and other relevant parties right after the Lehman collapse have been without exception against bonuses for managers. Similar demands regarding radical quitting of bonus payments for the managers (*Verzicht auf Bonuszahlungen* [Kreutzfeldt 2008]) have been intensified during the time. The fact that many of them received it in spite of bad results of their institutions has been commented in mass media in an extremely negative way on a daily basis. The comments and articles depicted bonuses as a question of morals, while the legal commitment of the bank to pay them was of less importance in that context. A movie about bank managers, which came out only shortly

[9] According to Rajewska (2002), a comparison between the products within one medium is named "intermedial" (German for "intermedia").

[10] His analysis of news films and political talk shows is additionally supplemental to identify Key Visuals.

[11] The persons in talk shows are frame-representants of different ideological positions.

after the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy,[12] can be seen as a clear articulation of the concept of the enemy, which bank managers present in the media.

Reports about managers in other big media agencies and TV stations in the Federal Republic of Germany showed more or less the same negative sentiment. The society and its system, where the existence of global financial market is possible, are very complex social models. It is therefore hardly possible, within a short TV format, to plausibly transfer the mechanisms of the financial market using every-day language and to comprehensibly represent and explain in the same manner its crisis and its consequences as the impoverishment and unemployment of large parts of the population. As Ludes (2001) points out, there is just not enough space in the new media updated at minute intervals and its presentation formats within the news for an extensive and considerable explanation of the background of an event. This can be seen as a consequence of the process of commercialization (Schütte 1998) which leads the informative media to the concept of infotainment (Krüger 1988). As an argument for this thesis we can consider the additional elements of this medium whose task is to create an emotional connection, for instance, an involvement into the content (Kroeber-Riel 1993; Stegu 2000). Among others, these include graphical design, audio effects, music, graphs, etc. As for the crisis representation, which is being connected with the failure of the bank managers, we can see this as a pattern which is always included into the explanation of the consequences of the global crisis and the guilt of managers (Figure 3-6).

Figure 3. Bonus payments in Wall Street Stock Market Crisis. *Source: "Made in Germany" [December 8, 2009], DW TV. Retrieved August 20, 2010 (http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4704666,00.html).*

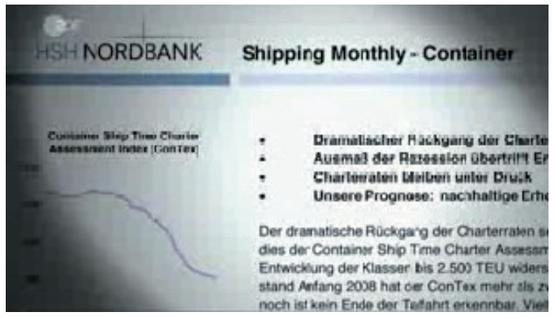

Figure 4. Nordbank in Crisis. *Source: "Frontal 21" [November 9, 2010], ZDF. Retrieved November 10, 2010 (http://www.zdf.de/ZDFmediathek/beitrag/video/1186270/HSH-Nordbank-in-Noeten).*

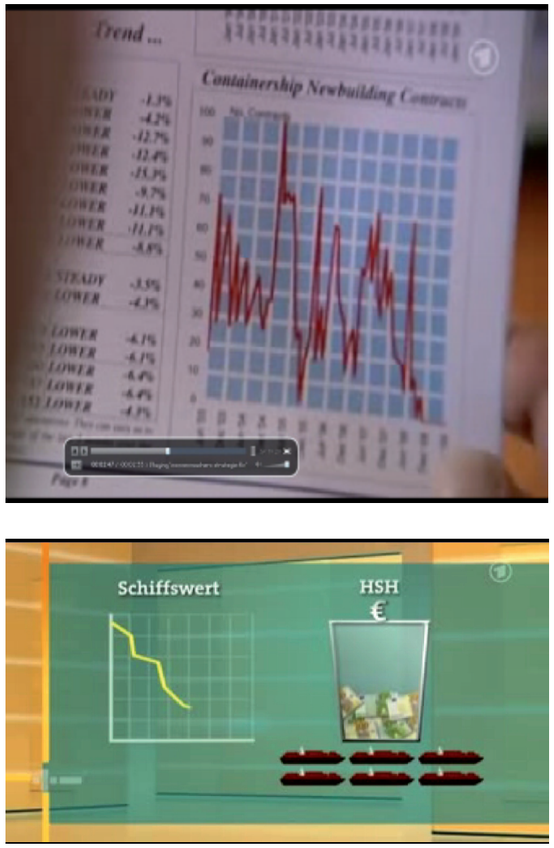

Figure 5. *Source: "PlusMinus" [July 27, 2009], Das Erste. Retrieved August 15, 2010 (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mnTlcppQB3s).*

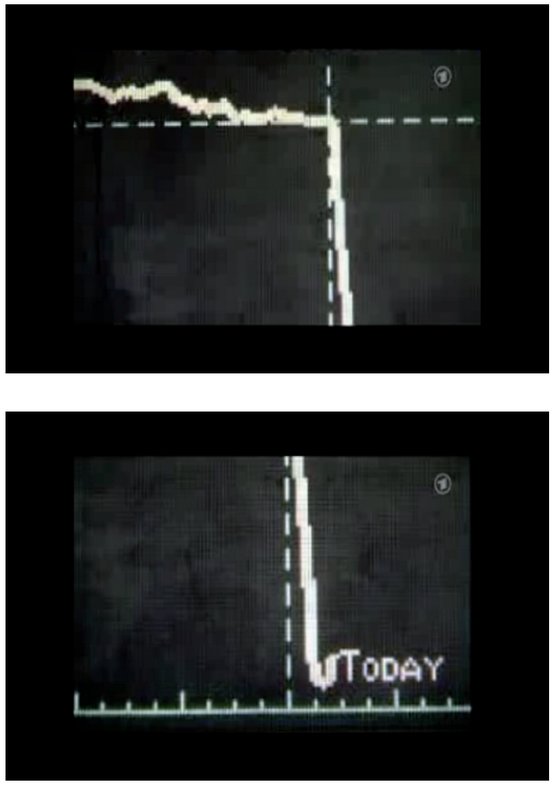

Figure 6. *City Boy. Source: "Report Mainz" [July 20, 2009], Das Erste. Retrieved August 20, 2010 (http://www.ardmediathek.de/ard/servlet/content/3517136?documentId=2782392).*

In spite of the complexity of the system, mass media offer a representation which makes it possible to believe that the bonus payments are a direct cause of the crisis. The use of the colloquial terms in the press as "fatty bonuses" (*fette Boni*) (Kröger 2008), "filled up loans" (*satte Gehälter)* (Friedrichsen 2009) and "fat money" (*dicke Gelder)* ("Sprudelnde Banker-Boni frustrieren Obama" 2010), in order to indicate the awards of managers, ascribes a very clear, negative emotional connotation. It is in a way a shift from an analysis of the real background (which should be one of the main tasks of the investigative journalism) to an abstract moral evaluation. This has contributed to the creation and further development of the bonus payment discourse. Very often, the media revealed connections between top politicians of the respective German federal state and the boards of the local banks ("Panorama" 2009) and treated them in almost the same way. The fact that affiliated enterprises had big investment projects outside of Germany and that top manag-

[12] The movie is about the author of the book *City Boy* and his life (Lamby 2009) and brings out insider information about the life of bank managers.

ers had secret accounts in the "tax-heaven-lands" (*Steueroasen*) ("Frontal 21" 2010) was also brought up with a clear conspiracy hint in this context. The formulation that is most common in this context is that managers are only trying to cash the money for themselves, to "gamble away the money of investors" (*Anlegermillionen verzocken*) ("Report Mainz" 2009) and "normal people" (Xdrei – NDR) and do not have to bare any consequences for that. In the same manner, some of the reports showed that managers do not feel the crisis at all, still living a life of luxury and that they get paid even for their bad job, whereas at the same time normal people have big financial and material problems. In order to show the extent of the guilt, a display of the amounts of their earnings and their comparison with the disaster of the "normal everyday person" caused by the crisis, is necessary. This is, for example, shown from the perspective of the mothers whose children are in kindergarten underfinanced by the city (Figure 7) or of the taxi driver (Figure 9).

Figure 7. Thanksgiving song for Nordbank. *Source: "Extra 3 – ARD/NDR Extra" [April 19, 2010], ADR 2010. Retrieved August 19, 2010 (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQRiay9Xk74).*

The contrast within the representation of the social actors is apparent. We have a repeated sequence of a close shot on the children from above and then a long shot on the bank managers (Figure 7). If we use Van Leeuwen's tool to analyze this sequence we could say that a certain level of closeness is being established within the shot of the children and a level of distance to the manager. This is then a position of power towards the children (which we see from a higher angle), and a position of equality with the managers. So, it is possible to interpret the message that the children are less powerful than the viewer, although they are actors. A person of great power, the bank manager, is being a patient. The viewer, however, is neither an actor nor a patient. He should, however, identify himself with one of the parties.

Figure 8. *Source: "Extra 3 – ARD/NDR Extra" [April 19, 2010], ADR 2010. Retrieved August 19, 2010 (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQRiay9Xk74).*

The second pattern also bases on a contrasting depiction (Figure 9). In this case, it is a social contrast between the taxi driver and the managers and/or brokers. First, we see the former stating that if the latter bring a profit they should get their bonuses, because it also helps him (since he will be able to earn more money in this case). The angle is from below, so he is the one with power, controlling the car and maintaining the contact with the managers. However, the closeness with him is evident, since it is a very close shot. Then we have a long shot of a business building from below, giving its peak the position of power. The next cut establishes a large distance between the viewer and the depicted persons with attributes of business people likely being managers (for example, the briefcase). Their action on the world financial market is being depicted through

the graph on the monitor of the Frankfurt Stock Market. Eventually, we see them from the distance, without any interaction with the viewer, having attributes of the higher class (expensive clothes, drinking wine in front of the Frankfurt Stock Market). The understanding of this unit could be seen as the distance between the "normal person," the taxi driver, and the managers as from "another world." We see the clear exclusion of them as a special group. Even if we are at eye level in the last sequence, we see that their world is where the power is positioned, because in order to see where they are, we need to look upwards.

Figure 9. View of a taxi driver on bonus issue. *Source: "Made in Germany" [December 8, 2009], DW TV. Retrieved August 20, 2010 (http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4704666,00.html).*

The guilt is being constituted firstly through the verbal mode by bringing the token of the metonymic term "bonus" always in connection with the clearly negative terms as "greed" (*Gier*), "flagrance" (*Schamlosigkeit*) and "voraciousness" (*Unersättlichkeit*). These biblical and very much archaic notions of sin are being connoted with the process of a highly modern, virtual and nearly invisible bank transaction process. Only after it has been verbally established, there is an attempt to exemplify this also by visual means (Stegu 2000).

As we can see in Figures 10-13, the visual argumentation pattern of the escape and refusal to answer to the journalist (which is an active social actor) is used very often to exemplify the guilt of the politician and/or the bank manager (who is in this case a patient). Note the repeated motion from right to left (which is by no mean rule, however appears more often than the other way around).

Figure 10. HSH-Nordbank in trouble. *Source: "Frontal 21" [November 9, 2010], ZDF. Retrieved November 10, 2010 (http://www.zdf.de/ZDFmediathek/beitrag/video/1186270/HSH-Nordbank-in-Noeten).*

Figure 11. Managers beg for tax money. *Source: "Report Mainz" [July 20, 2009], Das Erste. Retrieved August 20, 2010 (http://www.ardmediathek.de/ard/servlet/content/3517136?documentId=2782392).*

Figure 12. Managers beg for tax money. *Source: "Report Mainz" [July 20, 2009], Das Erste. Retrieved August 20, 2010 (http://www.ardmediathek.de/ard/servlet/content/3517136?documentId=2782392).*

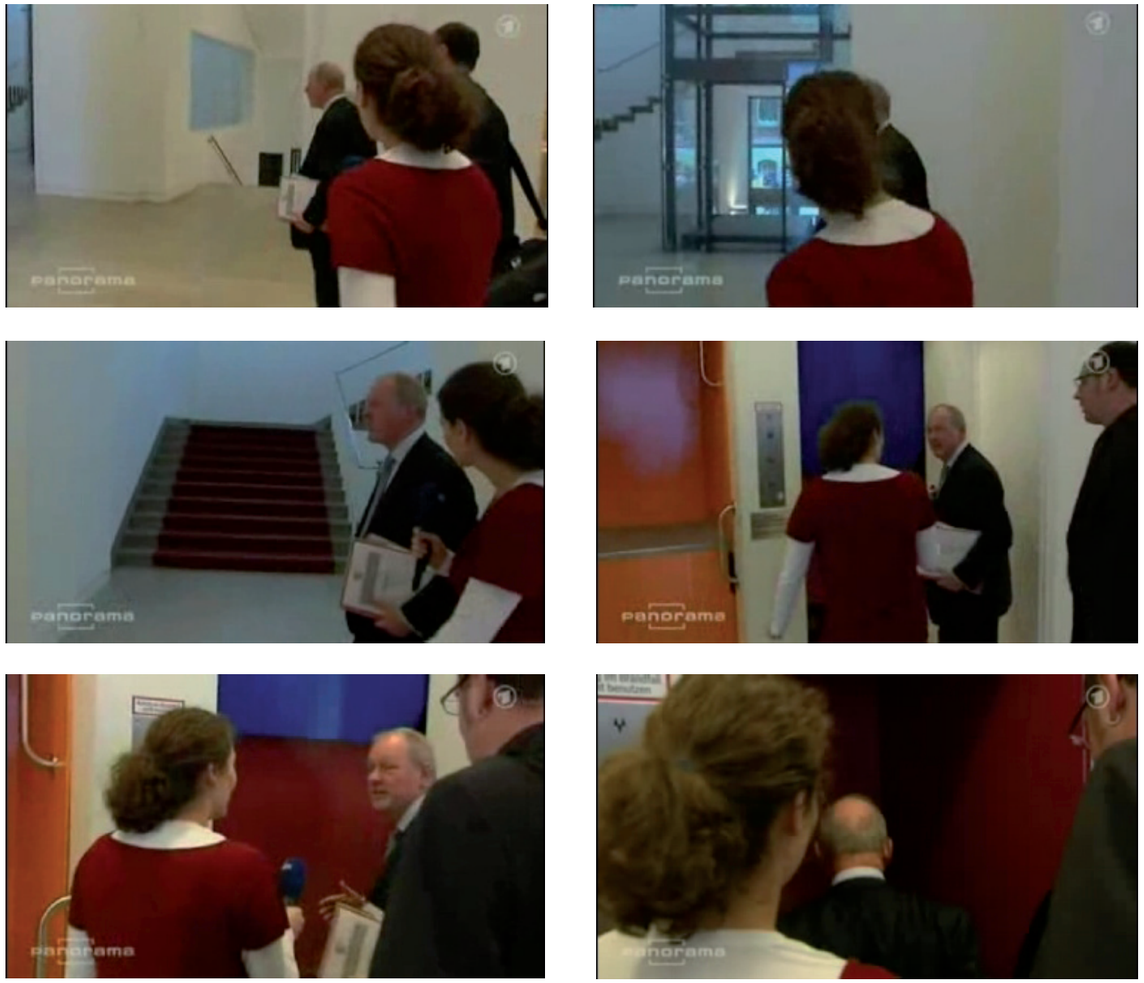

Figure 13. Luxurious loan despite of Governmental Aid. *Source: "Panorama" [July 16, 2009], Das Erste. Retrieved June 19, 2010 (http://daserste.ndr.de/ panorama/media/panorama282.html).*

This visual argumentative pattern in Key Visuals gives an impression of a visual stereotype – the visiotype (Pörksen 1997). Every time the patient is being chased by the journalist, the viewer shares the point of view of the actor and it occurs that an identification is suggested (note the similarity with the 3D video games). Through this device, a strategy of negative stereotyping is being pursued. There is also a strong impression of the dynamicity made through the moving and trembling hand camera. The mere mentioning of the *Bonuszahlungen* or bonus payments drives away the patient from the actor. As we see, the abstract term *Bonus* is connected with the way guilt or dishonesty are being represented through means of other modes (in this case it could be said it is a kind of evoked acting).

Findings

As already stated in the beginning, the way how meaning is realized in other modes depends on the mode itself, on the creativity of the author, on the ideology that the author stands for and on the chosen medium. It also gets a specific connotation through other modes, which determine significant parts of its entire meaning field (Stegu 2000; Stöckl 2004). By doing it they actually develop their own devices of constructing an abstract entity (cf. Barthes 1977; Van Leeuwen 2005). In the presented cases we had a chance to see how these tools are being developed and stabilized in their use.

The analyzed Key Visuals are, in my opinion, examples of different arguments used in application of relatively abstract concepts of reflecting on the problem of the financial crisis. These concepts do not answer, but should, as already stated, implicitly relate to the question of "why" and "how" in this matter, forcing the one who adopts them to think only within these concepts. The questions are then seen only through the scope of discursively facilitated frame research (with its emotional distraction and thematic attention restraints) and not on the ground of investigation or background research. The fact, that they are not explicit, is of even bigger interest for a discourse analyst.

In our case, the questions of how the crisis could have happened and why it happened have implicitly been answered in terms of "it is a human factor – a group of people misused their power" and "because these people are bad." These concepts also imply the need for measures, which will assist in preventing such developments in the future. In other words, it is a call for a system adjustment. Therefore, the represented concept of "human badness" foresees and appeals for some changes, but not for a change of the system itself. It does not relate to the power positioned in the upper floors of skyscrapers of bank centrals itself. Instead, it implies that their present inhabitants need to be punished because of the bad results of their work. The immanent system-orientation of these patterns is at the same time revealed through its repetition regardless of the actors taking part in it. The conflict the viewer is witnessing or the representation of journalists asking unpleasant questions is to be seen as a part of the composition design just as directing or special effects are.

The repetitiveness, as one of the devices how Key Visuals determine the collective memory, is to a great extent responsible for adopting this type of concept. Their presence in different kinds of media networks[13] also helps to transmit the same point. The contexts in the sense of a broader composition (as the TV show or the program) or medium make their role as Key Visuals possible. It is traditionally the context which provides the ideological embodiment of a visual element.

[13] Examples used in this paper are excerpted from websites, but they were originally shown on TV. However, being available at the same time on the official websites of the media houses and on TV programs, one can't hold them for TV content only. Apart from that, they are also to be found on private user's websites and YouTube profiles, which represent a significantly broader network.

Insofar as we see, the fruits of the use of social semiotic analytic tools for the examination of Key Visuals. They offer a possibility to analyze the argumentation devices used in the design of the composition. We see that Key Visuals are more than a neutral unit of the common memory, which depend solely on their contextualization. The shift towards the research of argumentative patterns/topoi is made possible through the very root of the Key Visual in the idea of Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne. The form evoking pathos (*Pathosformel*), with a clear and unequivocal emotional message constructed in the composition, delivers concepts in an intrinsically similar way.

The future research of Key Visuals using the methodical tool of social semiotics has the aim of examining other aspects of the meaning of construction. One of them relates to the depiction of objects as or instead of social actors. Another task is the direct comparison of simultaneously used modes (the transcript and/or the musical score of the sequence examined within the visual sequence itself). Deeper insights are also needed in the studies of the representation of abstract entities and concepts through non-verbal modes. I am convinced that this field is of special interest for all researchers in the field of visual communication and culture and that this work is not the last one to deal with it.

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