

TOPOI IN CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), pioneered by Ruth Wodak (see Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl, Liebhart, 1999; Wodak, van Dijk, 2000; Wodak, Chilton, 2005; Wodak, Meyer, 2006; Wodak, 2009), is one of the major branches of critical discourse analysis (CDA). In its own (programmatic) view, it embraces at least three interconnected aspects:

- »1. 'Text or discourse immanent critique' aims at discovering internal or discourseinternal structures.
2. The 'socio-diagnostic critique' is concerned with the demystifying exposure of the possibly persuasive or 'manipulative' character of discursive practices.
3. Prognostic critique contributes to the transformation and improvement of communication.« (Wodak, 2006: 65)

CDA, in Wodak's view,

»is not concerned with evaluating what is 'right' or 'wrong'. CDA ... should try to make choices at each point in the research itself, and should make these choices transparent.¹ It should also justify theoretically why certain interpretations of discursive events seem more valid than others.«

»One of the methodical ways for critical discourse analysts to minimize the risk of being biased is to follow the principle of triangulation. Thus one of the most salient distinguishing features of the DHA is its endeavour to work with different approaches, multimethodically and on the basis of a variety of empirical data as well as background information.« (Wodak, 2006: 65)

One of the approaches DHA is using in its principle of triangulation is argumentation theory, more specifically the theory of *topoi*. Being a philosopher by formation, working within the field of argumentation theory

and pragmatics, I will concentrate on this specific aspect: how *topoi* (and, consequentially, argumentation theory, are used in DHA as one of the most influential schools of CDA (curiously, other approaches (e.g. Fairclough (1995; 2000; 2003) or van Leeuwen (2004; 2008; van Leeuwen, Kress, 2006)) don't use *topoi* at all).

Within argumentation theory, Wodak continues,

»*topoi* or *loci* can be described as parts of argumentation which belong to the obligatory, either explicit or inferable premises. They are **the content-related** warrants or 'conclusion rules' which connect the argument or arguments with the conclusion, the claim. As such, they justify the transition from the argument or arguments to the conclusion (Kienpointner, 1992: 194).« (Wodak, 2006: 74)

We can find the very same definition in *Discourse and Discrimination* (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001: 75), in *The Discourse of Politics in Action* (Wodak, 2009: 42), in Michal Krzyzanowski's chapter »On the 'Europeanisation' of Identity Constructions in Polish Political Discourse after 1989«, published in *Discourse and Transformation in Central and Eastern Europe* (Galasinska and Krzyzanowski, 2009: 102), and in John E. Richardson's paper (co-authored with R.Wodak) »The Impact of Visual Racism: Visual arguments in political leaflets of Austrian and British far-right parties« (manuscript, p. 3), presented at the 2008 Venice Argumentation Conference². In addition to the above definition, Richardson (2004: 230) talks of *topoi* »as reservoirs of **generalised key ideas** from which specific statements or arguments can be generated«. Surprisingly, both definitions take the concept of *topos/topoi* as something self-evident, generally known and widely used, as, for example, *bread, table, engine, to write, to clean up*, and many other everyday obviousnesses.

Also, one could wonder about the purpose of the two definitions: are *topoi* »content-related **warrants**« or are they »generalised key **ideas**«? Because warrants are much more than (just) ideas, they demand much more to be able to secure the transition from an argument to a conclusion than just being »generalised ideas« (namely, a certain structure, or mechanism, in the form of an instruction or a rule). While ideas, generalised ideas, lack (at least) a kind of mechanism the warrants seem to poses in order to be able to connect the argument to the conclusion.

But, let us proceed one step at a time.

In the publications I've mentioned above³, we get to see the lists (reservoirs?) of the(se) *topoi*. In the chapter »The Discourse-Historical Approach« (Wodak, 2006: 74) we read that »the **analyses** of typical content-related argument schemes can be carried out **against the background** of the **list of *topoi*** though incomplete and not always disjunctive«, given in the following table:

1. Usefulness, advantage
2. Uselessness, disadvantage
3. Definition, name-interpretation
4. Danger and threat
5. Humanitarianism
6. Justice
7. Responsibility
8. Burdening, weighting
9. Finances
10. Reality
11. Numbers
12. Law and right
13. History
14. Culture
- 15 Abuse.

In Richardson (2008, p. 4) we get exactly the same list of *topoi*, but this time they are characterised as »the most common *topoi* which are used when **writing or talking about 'others'**«, specifically about migrants.

In *The Discourse of Politics in Action* (Wodak, 2009: 44) we get the following list of »the most common *topoi* which are used when **negotiating specific agenda in meetings, or trying to convince an audience of one's interests, visions or positions**«:

1. *Topos* of Burdening
2. *Topos* of Reality

3. *Topos* of Numbers
4. *Topos* of History
5. *Topos* of Authority
6. *Topos* of Threat
7. *Topos* of Definition
8. *Topos* of Justice
9. *Topos* of Urgency

In *The Discourse of Politics in Action* we can also find *topos* of challenge, *topos* of the actual costs of enlargement (of EU), *topos* of belonging, and *topos* of 'constructing a hero'. Here the analyses of typical content-related argument schemes (as found in discourse) are not just carried out »against the background of the list of *topoi*«, but some parts of discourse »gain the status of *topoi*« (*topos* of the actual costs ...). So, as far as the (ontic) status of *topoi* is concerned, we got a bit further: there isn't just a list of *topoi* that can serve as the background (for the analysis), more *topoi* can be added to the list. And, presumably, if *topoi* can be added to the list, they can probably also be deleted from the list. Unfortunately, in the publications I am talking about, we get no epistemological or methodological criteria as to how this is done, i.e. why, when and how certain *topoi* can be added to the list, or why, when and how they can be taken off the list⁴.

The most puzzling (and, for the very same reason, illuminating) list of *topoi* can be found in Krzyzanowski (2009: 103). In his article we get the »list of **the topoi identified** in the respective corpora« (the national and the European one - IŽŽ). Here they are:

Topoi in the national corpus

1. *Topos* of national uniqueness
2. *Topos* of definition of the national role
3. *Topos* of national history
4. *Topos* of East and West
5. *Topos* of past and future
6. Modernisation *topos*

7. *Topos* of the EU as a national necessity
8. *Topos* of the EU as a national test
9. *Topos* of the organic work
10. *Topos* of Polish pragmatism and Euro-realism

***Topoi* in the European corpus**

Topos of diversity in Europe

Topos of European history and heritage

Topos of European values

Topos of European unity

Topos of Europe of various speeds

Topos of core and periphery

Topos of European and national identity

Topos of Europe as a Future Orientation

Modernisation *topos*

Topos of the Polish national mission in the European Union

Topos of joining the EU at any cost

Topos of preferential treatment.

How these *topoi* were »identified«, and what makes them »**the** *topoi*« (not just simply »*topoi*«), we don't get to know; Krzyzanowski just lists them as such. Is there another list that helped them identify? If so, it must be very different from the lists we have just mentioned. Maybe there are several different lists? If so, who constructs them? When, where, and especially, **for what purpose and how?** Is there a kind of a grid, conceptual or in some other way epistemological and/or methodological that helps us/ them do that? If so, where can we find it? And how was it conceptually constructed? And if there isn't any grid, how do we get all these (different) lists of *topoi*? By casuistry, intuition, rule of a thumb? And when we (finally) do get those lists, do they ever change (and how), or are they here to stay (and why)? Are they universal, just general, or maybe only contin-

gent? Judging from the lists we have just seen there are no rules or criteria, the only methodological precept seems to be: »anything goes«!

In philosophy (of science), from 14th century onward, we have something called Occam's razor. It could be phrased as *Entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*, which could be roughly translated as »entities must not be multiplied beyond necessity.« Or in alternative version: *Pluralitas non est ponenda sine necessitate*, which translates as »plurality should not be posited without necessity.«

In the lists of *topoi* we have just browsed (through), Occam's razor was, no doubt, left without work. We've seen identical/similar bundles of *topoi* for different purposes or occasions, we've seen different bundles of *topoi* for identical/similar purposes or occasions, we've seen different bundles of *topoi* for different occasion, and we've seen pretty exotic bundles of *topoi* for pretty particular/singular purposes. Which leads us to a key question: can **anything** be or become a *topos*? And, consequentially, what actually **is** a *topos*?

But before we try to answer these questions, let us have a look at how these *topoi* are used in the respective works.

In *Discourse and Discrimination* (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001: 75) as well as in »The Discourse-Historical Approach« (Wodak, 2006: 74), we can find the following definition of the *topos* of advantage (many more *topoi* are listed, of course, but for the purpose of this article, I can only discuss a few):

»The *topos* of advantage or usefulness can be paraphrased by means of the following conditional: if an action under a specific relevant point of view will be useful, then one should perform it (...) To this *topos* belong different subtypes, for example the *topos* of 'pro bono publico' ('to the advantage of all'), the *topos* of 'pro bono nobis' (to the advantage of us'), and the *topos* of 'pro bono eorum' ('to the advantage of them').«

And then the definition is illustrated by the following example:

»In a decision of the Viennese municipal authorities (...), the refusal of a residence permit is set out as follows:

Because of the private and family situation of the claimant, the refusal of the application at issue represents quite an intrusion into her private and family life. The public interest, which is against the residence permit, is to be valued more strongly than the contrasting pri-

vate and family interests of the claimant. Thus, it had to be decided according to the judgement.»

If a *topos* is supposed to connect an argument with a conclusion, one would expect that a reconstruction would follow, namely, what is the argument (in the quoted fragment), what is the conclusion (in the quoted fragment), how the above mentioned *topos* is connecting the two, and where is the analysis (of the quoted fragment). Unfortunately, all these elements are missing (including the analysis); the definition and the quoted fragment are all there is.

It is also interesting to follow, how the working of *topoi* is described (especially in *Discourse & Discrimination* which is the most thorough in this respect): *topoi* are mostly »employed« (p. 75), or »found« (p. 76), when speaking about their supposed application in different texts, but also »traced back (to the conclusion rule)« (p. 76) or »based on (conditionals)« (p. 77), when speaking about their possible frames of definitions. How *topoi* are »based on (conditionals)«, or »traced back (to the conclusion rule)«, and how these operations relate to argument(s) and conclusion(s) that *topoi* are supposed to connect is not explained.

Let us have a look at another example, this time from *Discourse of Politics in Action* (Wodak, 2009: 97):

*»Among MEPs⁵ no one cluster characteristics is particularly prominent; however, most MEPs mention that member states share a certain cultural, historical and linguistic richness that binds them together, despite differences in specifics; **this topos of diversity occurs in most official speeches** (Weiss, 2002). Among the predicational strategies employed by the interviewees, we see repeated **reference** to a common culture and past (**topos of history, i.e. shared cultural, historical and linguistic traditions; similar social models**) and a common present and future (i.e. European social model; ‘added value’ of being united; a way for the future). Moreover, if identity is to some extent ‘based on the formation of sameness and difference’ (**topos of difference; strategy of establishing uniqueness**; Wodak et al., 1993: 36-42), we see this in the frequent referral to Europe, especially in terms of its social model(s), as not the US or Asia (most prominently, Japan).«*

Let us try to reconstruct the »topological« part of this analysis.

Three *topoi* are mentioned: *topos* of diversity, *topos* of history and *topos* of difference. Surprisingly, only the *topos* of history is listed and explained in the list of *topoi* on p. 44: »*Topos* of History - because history teaches that specific actions have specific consequences, one should perform or omit a specific action in a specific situation.« The absence of the other two should probably be accounted for with the following explanation on pages 42-43:

»These *topoi* have so far been investigated in a number of studies on election campaigns (Pelinka and Wodak, 2002), on parliamentary debates (Wodak and van Dijk, 2000), on policy papers (Reisigl and Wodak, 2000), on 'voices of migrants' (Krzyzanowski and Wodak, 2008), on visual argumentation in election posters and slogans (Richardson and Wodak, forthcoming), and on media reporting (Baker et al., 2008).«

But in the study »on visual argumentation in election posters and slogans«, for example, the(se) *topoi* are not discussed at all, they are presented as a **fixed list of names (of *topoi*)**, without any explanation of their functioning, while the authors (Richardson and Wodak) make occasional reference to their names (not to the mechanism of their functioning), just as Wodak does in the above example from *The Discourse of Politics in Action*. In argumentation theory, such an »approach« would be called *fallacy of circular reasoning (petitio principii)*.

Furthermore, *topoi* are characterised as (Wodak, 2009: 43) being applied »to justify and legitimize positions by **providing 'common-places'**, instead of substantial evidence«, or »some *topoi* are **used as appeals** to human rights, to democracy or to justice«, or »*topoi* are used to **promote** such **typical ambiguities**, which serve as quasi-argumentative shortcuts linking unclear moves in negotiations, decision-making and so forth.« How all these rather different characterisations are linked to the definition of *topos* as a warrant connecting the argument with the conclusion is, once more, not explained, that is all the analysis we get (as far as *topoi* are concerned).

If, again, *topos* is to serve the purpose of connecting an argument with a conclusion (as respective works emphatically repeat), one would expect at least a minimal reconstruction, but there is none. What we see could be reconstructed as referring to *topoi* or evoking them or simply mentioning them, which mostly serves the purpose of legitimating the (already existing) discourse and/or text analysis, but gives little analytical or theoretical added value in terms of argumentation analysis.

When I speak of reconstruction, what I have in mind is (at least) a minimal syllogistic or enthymematic structure of the following type (as an example, I am using one of the topics from *The Discourse of Politics in Action* (Wodak, 2009: 132-142), namely the problem of EU enlargement):

- 1) If a specific action costs too much money, one should perform actions that diminish the costs. (*Topos* connecting argument with conclusion)⁶
- 2) EU enlargement costs too much money. (Argument)
- 3) EU enlargement should be stopped/slowed down ... (Conclusion)

A real case in point of such hunting for *topoi* is the analysis we find in Krzyzanowski (2009: 104). First he gives an example from one of his corpora, then he provides an analysis:

Example:

»As General de Gaulle said, 'one's geography cannot be changed and one can only change one's geopolitics'. Two dictators, Hitler and Stalin, changed our geography. Yet, with help of democratic institutions of the West and also thanks to a democratic rebirth in the East, we have been changing our geopolitics on our own in the recent years. Our current endeavours to join NATO and the European Union, our efforts to create new shapes of the regional politics, shall be seen as crucial, yet only as fragments of construction of a new, just and solid-based European order (PS-13: 2).«

Analysis:

»The fact that it is the *national* and not any other form of history which is eventually invoked in discourse constitutes an attempt typical of the constructions of national identities and identifications. In turn, the *topos of East and West* emphasises another strictly national aspect of the first corpus in question. It includes a set of elements of pre-1989 political language which very strongly emphasised the differences that existed between Europe's East and West and which reinforced the divisions introduced by the post-Second World war geopolitical order. Accordingly, this *topos* **seeks** (!) a unique placement of Poland above the divisions of East and West, and thus (**heading back** (!) into

the *topos of national uniqueness*) reinforces Poland's attractiveness *vis-a-vis* the European Union: it **argues** (!) that Poland has a unique role as a 'bridge' between Europe's East and West. Then, the *topos of past and future* also **constructs** (!) Polish national identifications, yet within the dichotomy between collective 'scope of experience' and 'horizon of expectations' (Koselleck, 1989). While this *topos* is used to emphasize that the Polish past might have been troubled and negative (...), it **insists** (!) that the Polish 'European' future will be almost entirely positive and peaceful.

Unlike the previously **elaborated** (sic!) *topoi*, the *topos of modernization* clearly stands out and **reaches beyond** (!) the constructions of national identification. It **focuses** (!) mostly on presenting the European Union as carrying some unique modernising force which would help reform Polish state and society. The *topos* of modernisation is therefore frequently tied to the *topos of the EU as a national necessity* and to the *topos of the EU as a national test* of which both construct the 'power' of the Union over Poland in a similar way. By implying that the Union is characterised by some unique principles and standards of social and political organisation (...), the *topos* of modernisation, contrary to the previous ones, constructs a very positive image of the Union to the detriment of Poland, which is portrayed in a negative way.«

Surprisingly, we learn that *topoi* in this rather long excerpt are »elaborated«, while Krzyzanowski doesn't even gloss (on) them, let alone define them or give a possible pattern of their functioning (as Reisigl and Wodak do in the first part of *Discourse and Discrimination*). In his analysis, the words and phrases that are labeled *topoi* not only do not serve to connect the arguments and the conclusions, but act on their own: they can be arguments and conclusions, sometimes even both (actually, it is rather difficult to identify what arguments and conclusions could be in this text). Even more, they are clearly and openly antropomorphized, since they »seek«, »head back«, »argue«, »construct«, »insist«, »reach beyond« and »focus« (if we stay with the quoted part of the article).

In their seminal work *Traité de l'argumentation - La nouvelle rhétorique* (1958/1983: 112-113), Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca bitterly commented on the degeneration of rhetoric in the course of history, but what we have just seen in the above quote is not just degeneration, but pure vulgarisation and abuse of one of the most important rhetorical

concepts, the concept of *topoi*. So, it is probably high time that we answer the crucial question: what **are** *topoi*?

It is quite surprising that none of the quoted works even mention the origins of *topoi* (theory), their extensive treatment in many works and the main authors of these works, namely Aristotle and Cicero. And I have already mentioned that the definition, borrowed from Kienpointner, does not come from them either (i.e. Aristotle and Cicero)..

All this is even more surprising because it is today almost a commonplace (a *topos* of its own, if I may say so) that for Aristotle a *topos* is a **place** to look for arguments (which is true), a heading or department where **a number of rhetorical arguments** can be easily found (which is true as well), and that those arguments are ready for use – which is a rather big misunderstanding. According to Aristotle (and above all, according to many of his commentators), *topoi* are supposed to be of two kinds: general or common *topoi*, appropriate for use everywhere and anywhere, regardless of situation, and specific *topoi*, in their applicability limited mostly to the three genres of oratory (judicial, deliberative and epideictic; but we will come to that later). Or, as Aristotle (Rh. 1358a31-32 1.2.22) puts it: »By specific topics I mean the propositions peculiar to each class of things, by universal those common to all alike«.

The Aristotelian *topos* (literally: ‘place’, ‘location’) is an **argumentative scheme**, which enables a dialectician or rhetorician to construe an argument for a given conclusion. The majority of Aristotle’s interpreters see *topoi* as the (basic) elements for enthymemes, the rhetorical syllogisms.⁷ The use of *topoi* or *loci*, as the Romans have called them, can be traced back to early rhetoricians (mostly referred to as *sophists*) such as Protagoras or Gorgias. But, while in earlier rhetoric *topos* was indeed understood as a complete pattern or formula, a ready made argument that can be mentioned at a certain stage of a speech (to produce a certain effect, or even more important to justify a certain conclusion) – an understanding that also prevailed with the Renaissance –, most of the Aristotelian *topoi* are **general instructions** allowing a conclusion of a **certain form (not content)**, to be derived from premises of **a certain form (not content)**. That is why I emphasized that a rather widespread conviction that Aristotelian *topoi* were places where ready to use arguments could be found was a big misunderstanding. In fact, it is even more the other way round.

If we look at the list of common *topoi*, usually attributed to Aristotle⁸:

Common <i>Topoi</i>	Special <i>Topoi</i>
Definition	Judicial
Genus / Species	justice (right)
Division	injustice (wrong)
Whole / Parts	Deliberative
Subject / Adjuncts	the good
Comparison	the unworthy
Similarity / Difference	the advantageous
Degree	the disadvantageous
Relationship	Ceremonial
Cause / Effect	virtue (the noble)
Antecedent / Consequence	vice (the base)
Contraries	
Contradictions	
Circumstances	
Possible / Impossible	
Past Fact / Future Fact	
Testimony	
Authorities	
Witnesses	
Maxims or Proverbs	
Rumors	
Oaths	
Documents	
Law	
Precedent	
The supernatural	
Notation and Conjugates	

and if we compare them with the list of his categories (from *Metaphysics*):

Substance

Quantity

Quality

Relation

Place

Time

Position

State

Action

Affection

it becomes pretty obvious that Aristotle derived his common topics from his categories. While categories represent the most general (and basic) relations between different entities in the world (and are, therefore, metaphysical in nature), the common topics (i.e. *topoi*) represent the most general (and basic) relations between concepts, notions, or words representing (or denoting) these different entities in the world. That is why Aristotle **could** present them as a »list« (though it really wasn't a list in the sense DHA is using the term): because they were so very general, so very basic, that they **could have been** used in every speech or writing. Intentionally or not. Which is not the case with the DHA lists of *topoi* we have been discussing above: these *topoi* can not be used in just any situation, but in rather particular situations, especially the *topoi* »identified« by Krzyzanowski (in that regard they could be classified not as common *topoi*, but more likely as specific *topoi*, something Aristotle called *idia* (*idia* could be roughly translated as »what is proper to...«; »what belongs to...«)). Also, this »list« of common *topoi* wasn't there for possible or prospective authors »to check their arguments against it«. This »list« was there for general use, offering a stock of (possible and potential) common *topoi* for (possible and potential) future arguments (and speeches).

Here is a short (and schematic) overview of how Aristotle defines the mechanics and the functioning of *topoi* and their parts in his *Topics*, a work that preceded *Rhetoric*. We have to start with a few definitions.

Problems (what is at stake, what is being discussed) are expressed by *propositions*. Every *proposition* consists of a *subject* and *predicate(s)* that belong(s) to the subject. These *predicates* (usually referred to as *predicables*) are of four kinds: *definition*, *genus*, *property*, and *accident*:

»*Definition* is a phrase indicating the essence of something.« (T. I. v. 39-40)

»A *genus* is that which is predicated in the category of essence of several things which differ in kind.« (T. I. v. 32-33)

»A *property* is something which does not show the essence of a thing but belongs to it alone and is predicated convertibly of it.« (T. I. v. 19-21)

»An *accident* is that which is none of these things ... but still belongs to the thing.« (T. I. v. 4-6)

And here is how Aristotle describes the role of these *predicables* and their interdependence:

»Now the bases of **arguments** are equal in number and identical with the subjects of **reasonings**. From **arguments** arise '**propositions**', while the subjects or reasoning are '**problems**'. Now every proposition and every problem indicates either a **genus** or a **peculiarity** or an **accident**; for the **differentia** also, being **generic** in character, should be ranged with the **genus**. But since part of the **peculiarity** indicates the **essence** and part does not do so, let the **peculiarity** be divided into the two above-mentioned parts and let that which indicates the **essence** be called a '**definition**', and let the remaining part be termed a '**property**' in accordance with the nomenclature usually assigned in these cases.« (T. I. iv. 15-23)

These are the theoretic and methodological **preliminaries that lead us to *topoi***, not yet the *topoi* themselves! To be able to select subject appropriate claims (premises for concrete (context-dependent) reasonings) from this pool of (potential) propositions, we need *organa* (tools). Aristotle distinguishes four:

»The means by which we shall obtain an abundance of **reasonings** are four in number:

- 1) the provision of **propositions**,
- 2) the ability to distinguish in how many senses a **particular expression** is used,
- 3) the discovery of **differences** and
- 4) the investigation of **similarities**.«

(T. I xiii. 21-26)

Strictly speaking, we are still not dealing with *topoi* here, though very often and in many interpretations⁹ the four *organa* as well as the four *predicables* **are** considered to be *topoi* (in the case of *predicables* maybe even **the *topoi***).

Another complicating moment in this respect may be that Aristotle described *topoi* as »empty places« where concrete arguments, for different purposes, can be found. And even if it sounds paradoxical, it is quite logical: if those places weren't empty, allowing for each concrete matter to be moulded in them, but already filled up, they just wouldn't be common anymore, and we wouldn't be able to use them for each and every subject-matter, but just in that one described and defined with the concrete content of a particular premise.

As one of Aristotle's ambiguous characterizations of *topos* says – and he has given many, not always very consistent one with another – (Rhet. 1403a17-18 2.26.1): »I call the same thing element and *topos*; for an element or *topos* is a heading under which many enthymemes fall«. It is important to emphasize that by 'element' Aristotle doesn't mean a proper part of the enthymeme, but a general form under which many concrete enthymemes of the same type can be subsumed. According to this definition *topos* is a general argumentative form or pattern, and concrete arguments are instantiations of this general form. Or as *Auctor ad Herennium* puts it (3-29.15ss): *loci* are the background, and concrete arguments are *imagines* (images) on that background.

In the *Topics* Aristotle actually established a very complex typology of *topoi* with hundreds of particular *topoi*: around 300 in the *Topics*, but just 29 in the *Rhetoric*¹¹. Two important sub-types of his typology are;

- a) *topoi* concerning opposites, and
- b) *topoi* concerning (semantic) relationships of 'more and less'.

Here are two examples:

Ad a)

If an action Y is desirable in relation to an object X, the contrary action Y' should be disapproved of in relation to the same object X.

This is a *topos* (as Aristotle would have formulated it). And **this is its application to a concrete subject matter** that can serve as a general premise in an *enthymeme* (*topos* can't):

»If it is desirable to act in favor of one's friends, it should be disapproved of to act against one's friends.«

Ad b)

If a predicate can be ascribed to an object X more likely than to an object Y, and the predicate is truly ascribed to Y, then the predicate can even more likely be ascribed to X.

Once more, **this is a *topos***. And **this is its application to a concrete subject matter** that can serve as a general premise in an *enthymeme* (*topos* can't):

»Whoever beats his father, even more likely beats his neighbour.«

These examples may sound kind of square and flat nowadays. But here are a few Aristotelian *topoi* that could well be used in critical discourse analysis (instead of just checking the possible arguments »against the background of the list of *topoi*«). They are not »common truths«, or »generally accepted probabilities«, but a kind of precepts for finding and testing these »common truths« or »generally accepted probabilities«:

»For **philosophic** purposes we must deal with propositions from the point of view of **truth**, but for purposes of **dialectic**, with a view to **opinion**. Propositions must always be taken in their **most universal form**.« (T. I. xiv. 30-31)

»One commonplace is to look whether »your opponent has assigned as an **accident** something which belongs in some other way.« (T. II. ii. 34-36)

»Another commonplace is to make **definitions** both of the accident and of that to which it belongs, either of both separately or one of them, and then see if anything untrue has been assumed as **true** in the **definitions**. For example, to see if it is possible to wrong a god, **you must ask, what does 'wrong' mean?**« (T. II. ii. 30-34)

»Furthermore, if a term is used with more than one meaning and it has been stated that it belongs to or does not belong to something, we ought to demonstrate one of the several meanings if it is impossible to demonstrate both.« (T. II iii 23-26)

It should be pretty clear by now, I think, that we can distinguish two ways in which Aristotle frames *topoi* in his Topics. Even more, *topoi* in the Topics would (usually) be twofold, they would consist of an instruction, and on the basis of this instruction a rule would be formulated:

- 1) Instructions (precepts): »Check whether C is D.«
- 2) Rules (laws): »If C is D, then B will be A.«

Instructions would (usually) check the relations between the four *predicables* (*definition, genus, property, accident*), and upon this check up, a kind of a rule would be formulated that could - applied to a certain subject-matter - serve as a general premise of an *enthymeme*.

Topoi therefore serve as heuristic devices, and can be of three types:

- 1) Some *topoi* instruct one to examine, for instance, whether »the contrary of A holds of the contrary of B«, if B is A is to be proved.
- 2) Other *topoi* consist merely of such an introductory label and an example of the type of argument in question. Here the introductory label

is apparently meant to guide as associative process that might lead to an argument rather than to give a precise description of a premise to be used in a rhetorical syllogism.

- 3) A third group provides no logical analysis or characterization of a possible type of argument. Aristotle occasionally acknowledges that he is drawing on useful material he found in contemporary handbooks.

What is especially important for our discussion here (i. e. the use of *topoi* in critical discourse analysis) is that though they were primarily meant to be tools for finding arguments, ***topoi* can also be used for testing given arguments**. Which seems to be a much more critical and productive procedure than testing hypothetical arguments »against the background of the list of *topoi*«. But to be able to do that, DHA analysts should

- 1) **clearly (unequivocally) identify and formulate arguments and conclusions in a given discourse fragment**, and
- 2) show how (possible) *topoi* relate to these arguments.

In the DHA works quoted in the first part of our article, neither of the two steps was taken.

This is how *topoi* were treated in the *Topics*. But when we turn from the *Topics* to the (later) *Rhetoric*, we are faced with the problem that the use (and meaning) of *topos* in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is much more heterogeneous than in the *Topics*. Beside the *topoi* which perfectly comply with the description(s) given in the *Topics*, there is an important group of *topoi* in the *Rhetoric*, **which contain instructions for arguments not of a certain form, but with a certain (concrete) predicate** (for example, that something is good, honorable, just, etc.).

In *Rhetoric* 1358a2-35 I.2 Aristotle distinguishes between general/common *topoi* on the one hand and specific *topoi* on the other. In that same chapter, he explains the sense of 'specific' by saying that some things are specific to physics, others to ethics, etc. But **from chapter I.3 on he makes us think that 'specific' refers to the different species of rhetoric, so that some *topoi* are specific to deliberative, other to epideictic, and still others to judicial speech**. While he is inclined to call the general or common *topoi* simply *topoi*, he uses several names for the specific *topoi* (*idiai protaseis*, *eidê*, *idioi topoi*). Therefore, it may be tempting to call the specific *topoi* 'material' and the common *topoi* 'formal'. But in doing so we may easily overlook that **some of the common *topoi* (in chapters II.23-24) are not all based on those formal cate-**

gories on which the *topoi* of the *Topics* rely (the four predicables). **Most of them are ‘common’ only in the sense that they are not specific to one single species of speech, but to all of them** (Aristotle calls those *koīna*, »what is general, common«). Some of them offer strategic advice, for example, to turn what has been said against oneself upon the one who said it. For this reason, it would be completely misleading to say that the functions of common *topoi* and specific *topoi* (i.e. *idia*) are complementary, insofar as the common *topoi* **offer the logical form to a content that has been provided by the specific ones** (*idia*).

With Romans *topoi* became *loci* (which is a great »improvement« for the speakers of Romance languages ...), and Cicero literally defines them as places, as »the home of all proofs« (De or. 2.166.2), »pigeonholes in which arguments are stored« (Part. Or. 5.7-10) or simply »storehouses of arguments« (Part. Or. 109.5-6). Also, their number was reduced from 300 hundred (in *Topics*) or 29 (in *Rhetoric*) to up to 19 (depending on how we count). Here is a list of Cicero’s *loci* corresponding to the *topoi* in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* B 23 (Rubinelli, 2009: 143):

Topos from opposites: *Locus ex contrario*

Topos from correlatives

Topos from grammatical forms of the same word: *Locus ex coniugatis*

Topos from the more and the less: *Ex comparatione maiorum*

Ex comparatione minorum

Topos from the belonging on a similar degree: *Ex comparatione parium*

Topos from definition: *Definitio*

Topos from division: *Partium enumeratio*

Topos from induction: *Ex similitudine*

Topos from a [previous] judgement: *Loci extrinseci*

Topos from the parts: *Partitio*

Topos from the consequence: *Ex adiunctis*

Topos from analogy: *Ex similitudine*

Topos from looking at contradictions: *Ex repugnantibus*

Topos from the cause: *Ex efficientibus rebus*

Topos from the meaning of a name: *Notatio*

Although the list correlates pretty much (though not completely) with Aristotle's list from the *Rhetoric* B 23, there is a difference in use: this is a **list of concepts** that may trigger an **associative process** rather than a collection of (implicit) rules and precepts reducible to rules, as the *topoi* in Aristotle's *Topica* are (as we have seen). In other words, Cicero's *loci* mostly function as **subject-matter indicators** and ***loci communes***¹². Or, in Rubinelli's words (2009: 107):

» A *locus communis* is a ready-made argument that, as Cicero correctly remarks, may be transferable (...) to several similar cases. Thus, the adjective *communis* refers precisely to the extensive applicability of this kind of arguments; however, it is not to be equated to the extensive applicability of the Aristotelian *topoi* /.../. The latter are 'subjectless', while the former work on a much more specific lever: they are effective mainly in juridical, deliberative and epideictic contexts.«

But being ready-made, doesn't mean that they prove anything specific about the case that is being examined, or that they add any factual information to it. As Rubinelli puts it (2009: 148):

»... a *locus communis* is a ready-made argument. It **does not guide the construction of an argument**, but it can be transferable to several similar cases and **has the main function of putting the audience in a favourable frame of mind**.«

Which brings us a bit closer to how *topoi* are used in DHA. In the works quoted in this paper, the authors never construct or re-construct arguments from the discourse fragments they analyse by invoking *topoi* - despite the fact that they are repeatedly defining *topoi* as connecting arguments with conclusions -, they just hint at them with short glosses (not even definitions). And since there is no reconstruction of concrete arguments on the basis of *topoi*, hinting at certain *topoi*, referring to them or just mentioning them, can only serve the purpose that could be described as »putting the audience in a favourable frame of mind.« »Favourable frame of mind« in this respect would mean invoking or directing reader's attention to a »commonly known or discussed« topic, but without explicitly phrasing or reconstructing it, so the reader can never really know what exactly the author had in mind and what exactly he/she wanted to say.

Let us jump from the old rhetoric to the new rhetoric now, skipping more than 2000 years of degeneration of rhetoric, as Chaim Perelman puts it in his influential work *Traité de l'argumentation - La nouvelle rhétorique*.

Commonplaces (*topoi*) are characterised by their extreme generality, says Perelman (1958/1983: 112-113), which makes them usable in every situation. It is the degeneration of rhetoric and the lack of interest for the study of places that has led to this unexpected consequences that »oratory developments« - as he ironically calls them - against fortune, sensuality, laziness, etc., which school exercises were repeating *ad nauseam* became qualified as commonplaces (*loci, topoi*), despite their extremely particular character. By commonplaces we more and more understand, Perelman continues, what Giambattista Vico called »oratory places«, in order to distinguish them from the places treated in Aristotle's *Topics*. Nowadays, commonplaces are characterised by banality which doesn't exclude extreme specificity and particularity. These places are nothing more than **Aristotelian commonplaces applied to particular subjects**, concludes Perelman. That is why there is a tendency to forget that (common)places form an indispensable arsenal in which **everybody who wants to persuade others** should find what he is looking for.

And that is exactly what is happening in DHA approach to *topoi*. Moreover, the works quoted in the first part of the article give the impression that DHA isn't using the Aristotelian (or Ciceronian) *topoi*, but the so called »literary *topoi*« as developed by Ernst Robert Curtius in his *Europäische Literatur und Lateinisches Mittelalter* (1990: 62-105). And what is a literary *topos*? Well, already oral histories passed down from pre-historic societies contain literary aspects, characters, or settings which appear again and again in stories from ancient civilizations, religious texts and even more modern stories. These **recurrent (and repetitive) motives** or *leitmotifs* would be labeled literary *topoi*. »They are intellectual themes, **suitable for development and modification at the orator's pleasure**«, argues Curtius (1990: 70). And *topoi* is one of the expressions Wodak is using as synonyms for *leitmotifs* (2009: 119):

»In the analysis of text examples which were recorded and transcribed I will first focus on the **leitmotifs, which manifest themselves in various ways: as *topoi***, as justification and legitimation strategies, as rules which structure conversation and talk, or as recurring lexical items ...«

For the *New Rhetoric* (Perelman/Olbrechts-Tyteca 1958/1983: 113) *topoi* aren't defined as places that hide arguments, but as very general premises that help us build **values and hierarchies**, something Perelman, whose background was jurisprudence, was especially concerned about. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca therefore distinguish two main types of

techniques of argumentation: **schemes of association and schemes of dissociation** (a dichotomy that turned out as very handy in latter applications and analyses within argumentation theory). Let us have a quick look at the associative schemes:

Associative schemes

I. Quasilogical arguments:

1. Contradiction and incompatibility
2. Identity and definition
3. Tautology
4. Rule of justice
5. Argument of reciprocity
6. Argument of transitivity
7. Inclusion of the part in the whole
8. Division of the whole into its parts
9. Argument by comparison
10. Argument by sacrifice
11. Probabilities

II. Arguments based on the structure of reality

A. Sequential relations

1. Cause-effect
2. Pragmatic argument
3. Means-ends
4. Argument of waste
5. Argument of direction
6. Unlimited development

B. Relations of co-existence

1. Person-act
2. Argument from authority
3. Speech-speaker
4. Group-member
5. Act-essence
6. Symbolic relation

C. Double hierarchy

D. Differences of degree/order

An attentive reader will no doubt notice that most of the subtypes of class I are based on well-known semantic relationships from the Topical tradition: opposites, identity, similarity and part-whole/genus-species. However, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca introduce an interesting case of identity-relationship called ‘rule of justice’. The rationale of this special/new argument scheme is in a warrant that asks for identical treatment of entities or situations that can be subsumed under one and the same category.

Another novelty is to be found under I.10: arguments of sacrifice are supposed to increase the value of a goal by comparing it with the great effort, which has been invested to achieve it. And the gist of subtype I.11 lies in a presumption that some entities are considered to be similar enough to justify quasi-probabilistic inferences.

If we turn to the class II, we find three innovations: II.4 is used to argue against stopping before the goal of an action has been reached because of the energy already invested for performing the first stages of the action. II.5 is used to predict a definitive (disastrous) endpoint of a chain of causes and effects. And finally, II.6 also concerns predictions about chains of causes and effects, but in a positive way (unlimited development). So, in a way, the *New Rhetoric* is moving from (more) formal to less formal use.

But, in opinion of many argumentation theorists, *The New Rhetoric* has three main deficiencies:

- 1) Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca do not develop sufficient criteria for the distinction between sound and fallacious arguments.
- 2) They rarely provide explicit reconstructions of arguments, despite their clearly expressed intention to reconstruct their internal structure.
- 3) They don’t develop systematic criteria for the demarcation of argument schemes, and they don’t even claim that they are mutually exclusive.

In other words, Perelman left *topoi* on a somewhat descriptive level, and exactly the same could be said for the *Discourse-Historical Approach* within CDA¹².

But, in contrast to DHA, Perelman has made some very interesting and important observations regarding the role and the use of *topoi* in contemporary societies. He argued that (Perelman 1983: 114) even if it is the general places that mostly attract our attention, there is an undeniable interest in examining the most particular places **that are dominant in different societies and allow us to characterize them**. On the other side, even when we are dealing with very general places, it is remarkable

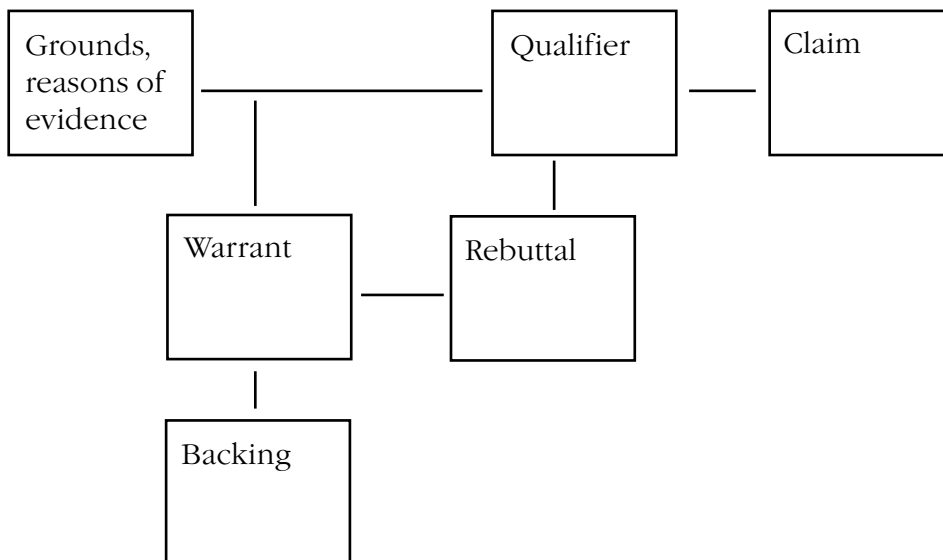
that for every place we can find an opposite place: to the superiority of lasting, which is a classic place, we could oppose the place of precarious, of something that only last a moment, which is a romantic place.

And this repartition gives us **the possibility to characterize societies**, not only in relation to their preference of certain values, but also according to the intensity of adherence to one or another member of the antithetic couple.

This sounds like a good research agenda for CDA, as far as its interest in argumentation is concerned: to find out what views and values are dominant in different societies, and **characterize these societies by reconstructing the topoi that underlie their discourses**. But in order to be able to implement such an agenda - an agenda that is actually very close to DHA's own agenda -, DHA should dismiss »the list of (prefabricated) *topoi*« that facilitates and legitimizes its argumentative endeavor somehow beforehand (the *topoi* are already listed, we just have to check our findings against the background of this list of *topoi*), and start digging for the *topoi* in concrete texts and discourses.

How does it achieve that?

Curiously enough, the same year that Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca published their *New Rhetoric*, Stephen Toulmin published his *Uses of Argument*, probably the most detailed study of how *topoi* work. I say »curiously enough« because he doesn't use the terms »*topos*« or »*topoi*«, but the somewhat judicial term »warrant«. The reason for that seems obvious: he is trying to cover different »fields of argument«, and not all fields of argument, according to him, use *topoi* as their argumentative principles or bases of their argumentation. According to Toulmin (1958/1995: 94-107), if we have an utterance of the form, »If D then C« - where D stands for data or evidence, and C for claim or conclusion - such a warrant would act as a bridge and authorize the step from D to C (which also explains where Manfred Kienpointner's definition of *topos* comes from: not from Aristotle but from Toulmin). But then, a warrant may have a limited applicability, so Toulmin introduces qualifiers Q, indicating the strength conferred by the warrant, and conditions of rebuttal (or Reservation) R, indicating circumstances in which the general authority of the warrant would have to be set aside. And finally, in case the warrant is challenged in any way, we need some backing as well. His diagram of argumentation looks like this:



It is worth noting that in Toulmin's diagram, we are dealing with a kind of 'surface' and 'deep' structure: while data and claim stay on the surface, as they do in everyday communication, the warrant is – presumably because of its generality – »under the surface« (like the *topos* in enthymemes), and usually comes »above the surface« (only) when we try to reconstruct it. And how do we do that, how do we reconstruct a warrant?

What is attractive and useful about Toulmin's theory is the fact that he is offering a kind of a guided tour to the center of *topoi* in six steps, not just in three. All he asks is that you find/identify the claim or the standpoint of the text or discourse you are researching, and then (mostly for the beginners) he provides a set of five questions that lead you through the process.

If we return to our semi-hypothetical example with the *topos* of actual costs (of enlargement) (Wodak, 2009: 132-142):

- 1) If a specific action costs too much money, one should perform actions that diminish the costs.
- 2) EU enlargement costs too much money.
- 3) EU enlargement should be stopped/slowed down ...

and »translate« it into the Toulmin model, we could get the following:

Claim EU enlargement should be stopped/slowed down ...
What have you got to go on?

Datum EU enlargement costs too much money.
How do you get there?

Warrant If a specific action costs too much money, one should perform actions that diminish the costs.
Is that always the case?

Rebuttal No, but it generally/usually/very often is. Unless there are other reasons/arguments that are stronger/more important ... In that case the warrant doesn't apply.
Then you can't be so definite in your claim?

Qualifier True: it is only *usually*... so.
But then, what makes you think at all that if a specific action costs too much money one should perform actions

...

Backing The history (of EU) shows...

If the analysis (text analysis, discourse analysis) would proceed in this way¹³ - applying the above scheme to concrete pieces of discourse each time it wants to find the underlying *topoi* - the »lists of *topoi* in the background« would become unimportant, useless and obsolete (as they, actually, already are). Text mining (if I may borrow this expression from computational linguistics) would bring text's (or discourse's) **own *topoi*** to the surface, not the prefabricated ones. And these *topoi*, which would be the product of a concrete empirical analysis, could **then** indeed be compared with a (possible) list of »historical« *topoi* in the background. For contrastive or other reasons, depending on the analysis in question.

Therefore, if DHA really wants to make choices at each point in the research itself, and at the same time make these choices transparent (as it claims it does), taking all these steps (in finding the *topoi*) would be the only legitimate thing a credible and competent analysis should do. If DHA wants to incorporate argumentation **analysis** in its agenda, of course.

Notes

- [1] All emphases (bold) in the article are mine (IŽŽ).
- [2] The paper was recently published in *Critical Discourse Studies* 6/4 (2009), under the title »Recontextualising fascist ideologies of the past: right-wing discourses on employment and nativism in Austria and the United Kingdom«. In this article, I will be referring to the manuscript version.
- [3] There are many more, I've just limited my analysis to the most recent ones.
- [4] Let alone the fact that there is no (theoretical) explanation why there should be list(s) at all.
- [5] Members of the European Parliament (IŽŽ).
- [6] It is worth noting that each *topos* can (usually) have two »converse« forms. Therefore the phrasing of this *topos* could also read: »If a specific action costs too much money, this action should be stopped«, depending on the context, and/or on what we want to prove or disprove.
- [7] An important and more than credible exception in this respect is Sara Rubinelli with her excellent and most thorough monograph on *Topoi, Ars Topica, The Classical Technique of Constructing Arguments from Aristotle to Cicero*, Argumentation Library, Springer, 2009.
- [8] This table is an extrapolated and reworked version of the *topoi* listed in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* B 23. It was taken from an excellent website on rhetoric, *Silva Rhetoricae* (<http://humanities.byu.edu/rhetoric/Silva.htm>).
- [9] See Rubinelli, 2009: 8-14.
- [10] The 29 *topoi* in the *Rhetoric* cannot all be found among the 300 *topoi* from the *Topics*. There is a long-standing and heated debate about where these 29 *topoi* come from, and how the list was composed. Rubinelli (2009: 71-73) suggests that their more or less »universal applicability« may be the criterion.
- [11] Which is probably due to the fact that Cicero was selecting and using *loci* in conjunction with the so-called *stasis* theory (or issue theory). What is *stasis* theory? Briefly (and simplified), the orator has to decide what is at stake (why he has to talk and what he has to talk about): 1) whether something happened (or not); 2) what is it that happened; 3) what is the nature/quality of what happened; 4) what is the appropriate place/authority to discuss what has happened. And Cicero's *loci* »followed« this repartition.
- [12] It should be emphasized, of course, that DHA is not an argumentation theory *per se*, it is just using argumentation (or some parts of it).
- [13] Our sample analysis is, of course, purely hypothetical.

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