

Ahead of the “5Ws” Model: *The Art of Letters* (1674) as a Communication Handbook

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Abstract

Emanuele Tesauro's treatise on *The Art of Letters* (1674) can be considered an underestimated modern manual of communication as it deals with epistolary techniques and informative narrative patterns, in both private and public interactions. The definition of narration as a communicative process founded on eight “circumstances” or questions causes the scholar to probe the rhetorical framework of the so called “5Ws” theory, as it became popular in the first half of the twentieth century thanks to Harold Lasswell in reference to coeval propaganda techniques. Assuming that Tesauro cannot be considered a precursor of contemporary structural models of information flow, nonetheless his work can provide a situated analysis of the necessary elements constructing reliable messages in terms of clarity, completeness and informative reliability ahead the rise of mass communication. The analysis of *The Art of Letters* emphasizes the author's attention upon the principles of effective communication pursued by contemporary “gazetteers” at the time of the “printing revolution in early modern Europe”, in line with a rhetorical legacy inspiring effective communication and profitable linguistic exchanges, starting from the Aristotelian legacy and its semantic and communicative track also probed by Umberto Eco and Roland Barthes.

Keywords: communication, rhetoric, epistles, information, gazettes

1. Introduction: A Modern Communication Handbook

This paper examines how Tesauro's narrative architecture offers a proto-structural approach to communicative reasoning, starting from his theory of the “8 circumstances” in XVII century epistolary communication as described in *The Art of Letters*, published in 1674, twenty years after his main work, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico* (*The Aristotelian Telescope*).

The eight “circumstances” ruling the strategies of narration (“Che? Chi? Con chi? Con che? Come? Dove? Quando? Perché?” / “Who, says What, in Which Channel, to Whom, with What effect?” / “quid, quis, quo, quibus auxiliis, ubi, cur, quando, quomodo”), described in chapter 2 of Tesauro's treatise, may sound anticipatory of Lasswell's theory of the “5Ws”, even though Tesauro cannot be considered a direct precursor of such a theoretical approach to contemporary communication. This is why the paper highlights the historical depth of communicative form and reframes literary rhetorical techniques as potential precursors to structural models of information flow, also taking into account that these contributions represent a valuable interdisciplinary bridge between rhetorical studies and communication theory. Tesauro's argumentative and rhetorical framework presents a convergent conceptual structure, not a direct precursor, with the ~~5Ws~~ “5Ws” theory, as the similarity lies in their shared function of organizing discourse, rather than in any line of influence.

Tesauro uses the term narration as it was inherited from classical rhetoric about the four parts of discourse structure, exordium, narratio, argumentatio, peroratio, in terms of description of facts. This is why the scholar of media studies should probe not only the development of letters as an institutional medium in the modern age, but also the way Aristotelian categories concerning the techniques of description were renewed in the XVII century, in “the court society” described by Norbert Elias (1978). It is worth delving into Tesauro's communicative laboratory concerning both narration and description techniques (Maggi, 2008), in line with the pivotal circumstances with which reliable communication had to comply, starting from Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*. Tesauro's survey of epistolary communication is founded on the social and expressive force of metaphors in everyday life, as Umberto Eco (1986, p. 105) points out: “Tesauro knows that metaphors are not created out of a pure joy of invention, but that they impose a *labor*, to master which takes practice”. We owe to Tesauro the intellectual insight of metaphors as “the highest peak of clever tropes” (Tesauro, 1978, p. 67), as

he demonstrates not only in his main treatise, but also in his *Panegyrics* and in the *Inscriptiones* for the Venaria Reale in Turin, “the great register that certifies the constant job labour of Emanuele Tesauro as epigraphist of the Savoy court” (Barberi Squarotti, 2018, p. 183).

Tesauro’s most significant encyclopedic effort in the field of daily communication is *The Art of Letters* which appears as an underestimated example of a media handbook at a time of improvement in letter-writing and the development of printing techniques and travel on land and sea (Merola, 2012). Tesauro’s attempt to provide precise and detailed instructions on the writing and sending of letters is fostered by the categorizing fever inspiring the Baroque age, in line with the convergence of so-called “concettismo” and wit. In other words, the treatise *The Art of Letters* (1674) is a sort of practical manual that fills a gap left by *Il cannocchiale aristotelico* that does not deal with the techniques of narration. To the fore is the very modern attempt to probe the communicative power of metaphors through the lens of linguistic transformation and combinatory expressions, as Giulio Ferroni points out: “In the *Cannocchiale aristotelico* the clever method is intended to be limited to the ‘civil’ communication, but indeed it becomes a medium of universal communication: nature is clever in its continuous fluctuating from element to element, from phenomenon to phenomenon; God himself is clever in his communications with men. Of course, the main tool of wit is the metaphor: basically, all images can get into all words; and infinite passages are possible from one word to the other, from one trope to the other, from one metaphor to the other” (Ferroni, 1991, pp. 257-258).

Tesauro belongs to the influential group of writers who dedicated their intellectual effort to explaining and teaching how to cope with the “relations in public” as Erving Goffman would say, with particular regard to the communicative and conversational dimension: this is the case, for instance, of Gioviano Pontano and his dialogues *De sermone* (XV century), Pietro Bembo and his *Writings on the Vulgar Tongue* and Baldassar Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier* (XVI century), Francesco Sforza Pallavicino, *Considerazioni sopra l’arte dello stile e del dialogo* (XVII century), in which the educational tension is supported by a constant focus on the social and civil dimension (Burke, 2019, pp. 215-239). In this perspective, Tesauro’s *The Art of Letters* retrieves Aristotle’s theory of metaphor in line with the communicative Jesuit patterns of the XVII century, at a time of great European conflicts and the growth of the grand European courts such as the Savoy court (Hersant, 2001). The rise of the “Gutenberg galaxy” engendered a rapid shift in the process of visual and cognitive understanding of the world, as McLuhan (2011, pp. 28-29) underlined: “If a technology is introduced either from within or from without a culture, and if it gives new stress or ascendancy to one or another of our senses, the ratio among all of our senses is altered”.

Even after the public circulation of literary letters (such as Cicero’s) and epistolary novels (for instance Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* and Johann W. Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther*), letters were written by hand and represented the most important medium in familiar and institutional contexts, at a time ruled by the Cartesian and Galilean paradigms criticized by Giambattista Vico (Berlin, 1991, pp. 49-69). In this sense, McLuhan highlights the role played by Jesuits in the XVII century, when the relationship between secular and transcendent aspects became more and more complex: “typography as the first mechanization of a handicraft is itself the perfect instance not of a new knowledge, but of applied knowledge” (McLuhan, 2011, p. 171). Furthermore, the use of letters appears to collide with the tendency towards the regulation and fixation of language fueled by the print technology that “created national uniformity and government centralism, but also individualism and opposition to government as such” (McLuhan, 2011, p. 267). The juxtaposition of private and public communication in the XVII century required an attentive analysis of the social impact of the printed book, as Shakespeare, Rabelais and Cervantes had already experimented (Lombardinio, 2017, pp. 124-149; Lamberti, 2012, pp. 139-154). Opposed to the XVI century governmental centralism and made possible by the new forms of portability of documents, letters and books, the new forms of bureaucratic decentralism are closely related to the new possibility of content repeatability engendered by the press, along with the slow but inexorable replacement of Latin by the vulgar tongue (Del Lungo Camiciotti, 2014a & 2014b).

This is why Tesauro’s encyclopedic interest in epistolary communication emphasizes not only the role played by the men of letters in the great European courts of the XVII century, but also the need to systematize and categorize the writing techniques related to the art of description of facts, the so called narration in rhetorical terms, namely in everyday practical communication. Since McLuhan argues that Francis Bacon was the “PR voice for the *moderni*” (McLuhan, 2011, p. 208), Tesauro can be defined not only a writer and playwright, but also a well-rounded institutional communicator, so insightful as to be defined by Eco a theorist who “borders on modern speech-acts theory” (Eco, 1976, p. 105). Tesauro’s analysis of the “categories” and “circumstances” ruling the communicative process, namely the epistolary ones, may sound like a historical anticipation of the “5Ws” model of mass communication that Lasswell has turned into a highly celebrated epistemological tool, even though it is impossible to outline a direct influence of Tesauro on Lasswell. Nevertheless, the definition of the fundamental questions ruling the process of communication highlights a convergent interest in organizing the structure of discourse in line with clear, sharp aims, since Tesauro’s narrative pattern seems to provide a proto-structural methodology to communicative reasoning, in line with the normative effort to define a reliable epistemological

paradigm for narrative and informative accomplishments. In maintaining that the “5Ws” model has become one of the most important heuristic tools in journalism and informative strategies, it is important to remark that every narration or report has to comply with the tenets of clarity, completeness and precision, as Walter Lippmann observed in *Public Opinion* (1922) about the central role of stereotypes in informative strategies: “If we cannot fully understand the acts of other people, until we know what they think we know, then in order to do justice we have to appraise not only the information which has been at their disposal, but the minds through which they have filtered it. For the accepted types, the current patterns, the standard versions intercept information on its way to consciousness” (Lippmann, 1922, p. 85).

Tesauro’s underestimated analysis of communication highlights that every communicator must reply to some specific questions, thus emphasizing the role that ancient rhetoric can still play in modern times. Tesauro’s communicative prowess stems not only from his professional engagement, but also from a representative well-roundedness developed in his dramas, in line with that Jesuit theatrical allure that Walter Benjamin investigated in his treatise on *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. In his work, Benjamin emphasizes not only “the insignificance of the influence of Aristotle” (Benjamin, 2003, p. 60) in European baroque dramas, but also the cultural dynamics characterizing that age, in which the convergence of religion, establishment and communication can still be seen as a peculiar cornerstone of Baroque modernity (Osman, 2005).

2. Emanuele Tesauro as a Modern Communicator

The Oxford reference points out that Emanuele Tesauro (1592-1675), born in Turin and educated by the Jesuits, “was the most important Baroque literary theorist in Italy” (<https://www.oxfordreference.com>). He was a Jesuit philosopher, rhetorician, poet, dramatist, literary theorist and historian. At the Savoy court in Turin, he became preacher to the Duchess Cristina and carried out diplomatic missions between Lombardy and Piedmont. After leaving the order of the Jesuits, he joined the duke’s brother Thomas Francis, prince of Carignano, as court historiographer during his Flemish campaign and the Piedmontese Civil War. In Turin he became the preceptor of the princes of Carignano and tutored the King of Sardinia Victor Amadeus II. His polyhedric talent led him to write philosophical and historical treatises, sacred poems, orations, dramas, epigrams, in line with the Marinist tenets of expressive astonishment, literary opulence and classical heritage. From 1669 to 1674 Tesauro oversaw the publication of the various volumes of his *Complete Works*, including his own revised version of *Il Cannocchiale aristotelico* (1670), first published in 1654.

Next to Baltasar Gracià, he is considered the most ambitious and comprehensive interpreter of Baroque “concettismo”, inspired by an encyclopedic tension founded on the principles of Aristotelian rhetoric and poetics. Wit plays a central role in Tesauro’s aesthetics, as Umberto Eco emphasizes in his semiotic writings and in the novel *The Island of the Day Before* (1994), in which one of the main characters, Father Emanuele, is inspired by Tesauro himself. In *From the Tree to the Labyrinth* (2007), Eco probes Tesauro’s attempt to turn metaphor into a cognitive and communicative tool founded on its semiotic force as “the most clever and acute, the most weird and amazing, the most joyful and useful, the most talkative and fruitful offspring of human intellect” (Tesauro, 1978, p. 67). Nonetheless, his encyclopedic model may appear paradoxical, as Eco points out:

An encyclopedic model is paradoxically offered by Emanuele Tesauro’s *Cannocchiale aristotelico* (Aristotelian Telescope, 1665). I say ‘paradoxically’ because, in the very century in which the model of Galileo’s telescope comes into its own as the paradigmatic instrument for the development of the natural sciences, Tesauro proposes a telescope named after Aristotle as an instrument for renewal of what today we would call the human sciences, and the instrument he proposes is metaphor. In the *Cannocchiale*, however, we recognize the fundamental nucleus of Aristotelian rhetoric and the model of metaphor is proposed as a means of discovering unfamiliar relations among the elements of knowledge, though Tesauro’s interest, unlike Bacon’s, is rhetorical rather than scientific (Eco, 2014, p. 38).

Metaphor is interpreted as an indispensable communicative tool, in line with the central role played by wit in social and institutional life (Steiner, 2013), in line with “the lure of communication” and the rhetorical patterns of daily interactions (Lombardinio, 2024). Tesauro’s encyclopedic work can still be interpreted as an outstanding effort to categorize all the possible cognitive solutions provided by linguistic creativity for probing the communicative impact that metaphors may have in everyday communicative processes (Ricoeur, 1978; Castoriadis, 1975; Bateson, 1972). One of the most popular definitions of metaphor, provided by Cicero in the *Ad C. Herennium Libri IV De Ratione dicendi*, is inspired by Aristotle and reflects an epistemological approach that mingles ancient knowledge and communicative pragmatism: “Translatio est cum verbum in quandam rem transferetur ex alia re, quod propter similitudinem recte videbitur posse transferri / Metaphor occurs when a word applying to one thing is transferred to another, because the similarity seems to justify this transference” (Cicero, *Ad C. Herennium Libri*, IV, 44). The process of semantic sliding concerning the techniques of metaphorization is connected to the duty that poets, novelists, dramatists, orators, screenwriters and journalists still have to explain what is hard to express, thus coping with the juxtaposition between fiction and reality (Bloom, 1994; Frye,

1957). The constant attention paid to Greek and Roman poets providing a great number of metaphorical samples, especially Virgil, along with the profound knowledge of the rhetorical, institutional and oratorical prowess of Court and Church, make Tesauro's encyclopedic effort a kind of heuristic attempt to analyze the metaphorical complexity of everyday life (Katinis, 2024). This factor may explain why Eco and Paci (1983, p. 218) dwelled on the "Scandal of metaphor" and defined the "metaphor as a deviation from the system of norms".

Metaphors have the power to institutionalize what can be initially seen as extravagant and odd, until linguistic combinations ruled by wit and genius become the communicative norm. Jon Snyder highlights this in reference to Tesauro's Baroque mindset and rhetorical modernity: "The resultant paradox concerning the nature of the relationship between fiction and the valid statements that it may make about the real and the true has fascinated thinkers as diverse as Plato, Freud, Lukács, Benjamin and Baudrillard, whose efforts to throw light on this question have by no means exhausted the debate even today" (Snyder, 2016, p. 74). Of course, the list of great thinkers who investigated the imaginary of communicative processes might be integrated with Paul Ricoeur, Gregory Bateson, Cornelius Castoriadis and Umberto Eco. From different perspectives, they showed how complex the process of signification can be when the rigid observance of linguistic norms impinges on the "social construction" of reality that Berger and Luckmann investigated in the Sixties (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, pp. 159-182). For instance, Benjamin investigated the Baroque passion for metaphors from a religious point of view, thus highlighting the complexity of the public representation of social life: "The baroque knows no eschatology; and for that very reason it possesses no mechanism by which all earthly things are gathered in together and exalted before being consigned to their end" (Benjamin, 2003, p. 66).

Tesauro's philosophical eclectic mindset, founded on a profound Jesuit knowledge and a solid Aristotelian trust, seems to confirm and legitimate Benjamin's analysis of Baroque dramaturgy, as it deals with the communicative dimension of public representations and aesthetic narrations (Newman, 2011). Tesauro's three dramas, *Hippolytus*, *Oedipus* and *Ermenegildus* (published together in Turin in 1661 and re-elaborated over a long period), show an array of theoretical reflections and a free interpretation of Aristotelian rules, constantly in dialogue with Sophocles, Euripides and Seneca. His only tragicomedy, *Alcestis or Sincere Love*, "is the best work of his theatre" (Doglio, 2000, p. 208), highlighting a brilliant and original interpretation of Euripides's myth, in line with that Baroque interest in dark and gloomy atmospheres that the Elizabethan theatre retrieves from Seneca (Raimondi, 1995).

Communication is closely related to its emotional impact and rhetorical lacework, as some of the greatest Baroque writers demonstrate, from Baltasar Gracián to Daniello Bartoli and Robert Burton. This is an aspect accurately probed by Benedetto Croce in his *The Baroque Age in Italy* in reference to the Aristotelian convergence of Dialectics and Rhetoric in the seventeenth century: "Some scholars of rhetoric were focused on this topic, especially Emanuele Tesauro, in his *Cannocchiale aristotelico*. In addition to many relevant details, it is very important for this attempt to build an "organum" of rhetorical and poetical knowledge, for this sketch or idea or at least symbol of that discipline that would later become the Aesthetics" (Croce, 1993, p. 246).

3. The 8 Circumstances of Communication: Description and Narration

The beginning of Chapter II of *The Art of Letters* (1674), composed of six books, deals with "Concerning Historical Persuasion, or Narration (Della persuasione historica, ò sia Narratione)" to explain the informative paradigms that every report complies with, in line with the persuasive aims of speeches and especially letters. The accurate analysis of the style of epistolary writing provided in Chapter I is thus integrated with the description of "the Body of the Letter": "Now it is worthwhile to depict with its colors every Part, starting from the main which includes the *Persuasion*, that we already define the Body of the Letter!" (Tesauro, 1669, p. 52).

In the first book, Tesauro describes the topics and styles of epistolary writing, namely the demonstrative, deliberative and judicial styles, as depicted in classical rhetoric (Cicero, *Ad C. Herennium Libri*, I, 2). He delves into the "essential form of letters" (Tesauro, 1669, p. 21), through a need to define that turns his treatise into a real handbook of modern communication, pivoted on the rhetorical processes of everyday life and the communicative tenets imposed by narration and description. It is not by accident that the work opens with the definition of "What a Letter is" ("Che cosa sia Lettera Missiva"), maintaining that it is impossible to translate into English the Italian compound noun "Lettera missiva", essentially with the same meaning:

The letter is a short and written reasoning with a distant person, upon things belonging to human exchange. Therefore, a LETTER is what we would utter by word of mouth to someone, written and submitted to the Reader. Indeed, it is an amazing art, full of miracles, that we have to be grateful for to King Cadmus (Tesauro, 1669, p. 17).

The reference to the myth of Cadmus, depicted by Ovid (*Metamorphoses*, III), is a rhetorical solution founded on the emotional impact of the hyperbole inspired by the mythic invention of the alphabet (West, 2008). The very beginning of the treatise emphasizes the media dimension of Tesauro's discourse aiming to classify the style and analyze the structure of letters in the era of the first gazettes, as he underlines in reference to the authority of reliable thinkers and writers

reporting facts and telling true stories: “For this first reason we trust Letters of reports, and Novellas; this happens when they are written not by Gazetteers, but by authoritative persons, as in the case of Alexander’s letter to Aristotle, upon the wonderful things in India, since it is unlikely that a Magnanimous man would lie” (Tesauro, 1669, p. 27).

In the following chapters, Tesauro dwells on the juxtaposition of authoritative writers and gazetteers/journalists, at a time when gazettes became popular in the great European courts (Habermas, 1989, pp. 51-67). This ante litteram media analysis is inspired by Tesauro’s communicative practices complying with his religious beliefs and institutional engagement in the Savoyard kingdom, as his historiographical writings very well show, namely the *Campeggiamenti overo istorie del Piemonte* (1643). Seemingly, his *Panegirici et ragionamenti* (1659), along with his abundant epistolary writing, highlight the pragmatism of daily communication, in a way that seems to legitimize the encyclopedic effort of *The Art of Letters*, in which the need to define is supported by a constant need to explain. In this sense, the definition of narration (the description or “representation of facts” founding the structure of the message) given in chapter II plays a central role in Tesauro’s treatise, as it implies the respect of the eight circumstances (or questions) differentiating a perfect narration from an imperfect one:

The perfect narration is a Representation of some successive fact through all the Main Circumstances, as in the case of a Murder, a Party, a Battle.

In this sense, the Circumstances are Eight Interrogations. *What? Who? With whom? Through what? How? Where? When? Why?* And I add other two Circumstances, which strongly enliven the Narration: *id est, Which one? and How Much?* Here comes the Example of a Murder (Tesauro, 1669, pp. 52-53).

As we will see soon, the example shows the degree of both simplicity and complexity in a report exploiting the available information, knowledge of facts, reliability of witnesses, authority of reports and the argumentative and stylistic approach. Tesauro is profoundly convinced that every reliable report has to observe the eight “substantial circumstances” or questions that Lasswell would reduce to five: Who, says What, in Which Channel, to Whom, with What effect. Tesauro’s epistolary guidelines gain a further communicative impact if we take into account the Latin translation of the eight interrogations so familiar to Lasswell’s reader: “quis, quid, ubi, quibus, auxiliis, quo, cur, quomodo, quando”. Exploiting his knowledge of the Latin ordinarily used in church rituals and institutional celebrations, Tesauro epitomizes the paradigm of the perfect modern media theorist, as he demonstrates with the example of a murder, in a way that appears to anticipate Raymond Queneau’s *Exercises in Style* (1947):

7. The last Sunday, (6) on the Appian way, (2) Titius (3) with many brigands, (1) killed (2) Sempronius (5) traitorously, (4) with Swords and Weapons, (8) for greed of his money.

This is the simplest and more impartial Historic Narration; but it is perfect since it includes all the eight circumstances of the principal Action. Therefore, it is typical of those who report facts and Gazetteers, narrating the fact briefly and with impartiality. But you would better add the other two Circumstances, Which, & How many: the narration will be little far from brevity, and it will sound much better in this form to the ear and to the soul (Tesauro, 1669, p. 55).

Tesauro’s textual analysis is inspired by an explanatory intent that permeates the whole treatise, thus supporting a didactic endeavor aimed at turning the treatise into a real handbook. The real modernity of his explanation is in the central role played by brevity, impartiality and completeness: they seem reliable strategic keywords in a discourse inspired by a prominent communicative need. The reference to reporters and gazetteers shows outstanding foresight, especially if we consider the journalistic analysis on public opinion and propaganda techniques carried out by Bernays, Lasswell and Lippmann in the first decades of the twentieth century (Graham, 2016; Lasswell, 1927, pp. 14-46), thus confirming the theoretical support that a historically and rhetorically situated analysis can provide to the scholar of contemporary communication. Tesauro delves into the persuasive force that every narration must possess to sound reliable, as the emphasis on the two qualitative circumstances shows, “Which” and “How Many”.

Every discourse ought to possess a good style and a refined form, since beauty means persuasion and attraction. The sketch of the single parts of the epistolary communication emphasizes the role played by the circumstances on which an effective narration is founded. The example of the murder, thereafter developed in various and more complex versions in the chapter, demonstrates how communication complies with the eight questions that writers and gazetteers have to observe. The example of the murder contains the numbers of the single circumstances (or questions) that Tesauro has just explained above:

- 1) *What?* means the Action occurring; namely being killed and the killing.
- 2) *Who?* means the person injured, Sempronius, and the agent person, Titius, both Romans.
- 3) *With whom?* means the Persons the Agent was with, the brigands, and the injured person with two servants.

- 4) *With what?* means the instruments used, swords and weapons.
- 5) *How?* means how he was killed: traitorously. This is often expressed with adverbs, for example, traitorously, proudly, poorly.
- 6) *Where?* means the place of the event: the Appian Way.
- 7) *When?* means at what time he was killed: last Sunday.
- 8) *Why?* means out of greed for his money (Tesauro, 1669, pp. 53-54).

This is unlike Lasswell's explanation of "The act of communication", omitting the fact that Tesauro considers the where, when, with what compulsory in every reliable report, including the journalistic ones. In addition to the eight sketched questions, Tesauro suggests a possible integration: "It is possible to add to these Eight Substantial Circumstances the other two which decorate and enlighten the Narration":

- 1) *Which?* This is an Adjective that qualifies many Circumstances to be highlighted, as Sunday Holy Day, Titius the cruel, Sempronius the Good, wicked brigands. Avaricious greed of his Money.
- 2) *How Many?* Similarly, it is an Adjective, or Adverb, that can be applied to many Circumstances to be inflated; as many brigands. Immense greed (Tesauro, 1669, p. 54).

The distinction between substantial and qualitative circumstances enables the reader to focus on the compulsory elements of a reliable narration, along with the optional factors making the narration more vivid and complete. The list of these ten circumstances can thus be considered pragmatically innovative, as the definition of the communicative questions relies on the synthetic pattern and the perspicuity of the explanation. The list of the eight questions is functional to the educational aims of the treatise, founded on the dialectics of narration and description, as we will see in the conclusion of this paper (Maggi, 2008, p. XIV). *The Art of Letters* emphasizes the theoretical and practical contexts in which the technique of construction of reliable messages finds its communicative application, thus filling a gap left by *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*. The tenets of brevity, completeness and impartiality comply with the different typologies of letters and style, as Tesauro sharply indicates focusing on the "Rhetorical differences of styles" (Chap XII, "On the style of letters"): "Terse or figurative style; Laconic or Asiatic style; Ethic, or pathetic style; Sweet or harsh style; Serious or witty style" (Tesauro, 1669, pp. 38-40).

The rhetorical paradigms shaping the so-called "forms of talk", as Erving Goffman (1981, pp. 5-77) would say, enhance the accomplishments and needs of epistolary communication that Tesauro conceives as a popular medium to be used in "three manners":

Therefore, the Narration is but an organized collection of these eight circumstances: which can be carried out in three manners. The first is simple, in a single continuous period, narrating the stark fact, or enlivening it with some adjective of the other two types of Information, *Which & How Many*. The second manner consists in dividing the Narration into more periods, and widening every period with other more particular Circumstances, & with some little reflection. The third is reached through the mingling of the Historic narration with the Oratorical Persuasion, inspired by some rhetorical genre, demonstrative, or deliberative or judicial. The purpose is to exaggerate the circumstances of the fact and push the listener toward some goal (Tesauro, 1669, p. 54).

Of course, Tesauro's explanation is arguably influenced by Aristotelian and Roman ancient rhetoric, comparing his analysis with the first book of *Ad C. Herennium Libri IV De Ratione dicendi*, in which Aristotelian, Quintilian and Ciceronian writings are cleverly summarized. In chapter I, 4, we find a definition of narration: "Narratio est rerum gestarum aut proinde ut gestarum expositio" ("The Narration or Statement of Facts sets Forth the events that have occurred or might have occurred") (Cicero, *Ad C. Herennium Libri*, I, 4). Tesauro's didactic effort tethers rhetorical tenets to modern communication, as the definition of the ten circumstances cleverly shows. His cognitive effort resides in the definition of a theoretical framework that applies oratorical instructions to the communicative paradigms of written exchanges requiring brevity, impartiality and completeness.

It is not by accident that the first part of the five oratory sections provided by the classical rhetoric (*inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *memoria*, *pronuntiatio*) (Cicero, *Ad C. Herennium Libri*, I, 3) as analyzed by Tesauro, is the *inventio*, subdivided into six parts, *exordium*, *narratio*, *divisio*, *confirmatio*, *confutatio*, *conclusio* (Cicero, *Ad C. Herennium Libri*, I, 4). *Narratio* is the very focus of the beginning of *The Art of Letters*, in line with an epistemological effort focused on the convergence of "expression and communication", as Benedetto Croce (2005, pp. 213-215) would assume. Classical rhetoric provides the fundamental principles of reliable narration, as pointed out in Cicero, *Ad C. Herennium Libri IV De Ratione dicendi* (I, 14): "A statement of facts should have three qualities: brevity, clarity, and plausibility. Since we know that these qualities are essential, we must learn how to achieve them". The description of the three qualities, echoing both Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* and Cicero's *De oratore*, sheds light on the central role of expressive thoroughness and

persuasive prowess achieved through the observance of specific rhetorical requirements.

Thus, the theory of narration provided by classical rhetoric is developed by Tesauro pragmatically highlighting not only the “Jesuit teaching of Rhetoric” (Barthes, 1988, p. 48), but also the communicative innovations introduced by the press and printing techniques in the seventeenth century, in line with a rhetorical definition of narratio, as Roland Barthes explains in *The Ancient Rhetoric*:

The narratio (diegesis) is of course the narration of the facts involved in the case (since causa is the quaestio in that it is penetrated by the contingent), but this narration is conceived uniquely from the point of view of the proof, it is “the persuasive exposition of some fact or alleged fact”. The narration, then, is not a narrative (in the romantic sense and as detached from the term), but an argumentative protasis. Consequently, it has two inevitable characteristics: (1) its nakedness: no digression, no prosopopoeia, no direct argumentation: there is no techne appropriate to the narratio: it must only be clear. credible. brief: (2) its functionalism: it is a preparation for the argumentation; the best preparation is that in which the meaning is hidden, in which the proofs are disseminated in imperceptible seeds (semina probationum). The narratio includes two types of elements: the facts and the descriptions (Barthes, 1988, p. 105).

Barthes’s analysis of ancient rhetoric, with particular reference to the Jesuit rhetoric, highlights the evolution of Aristotelian legacy and its semantic and communicative track, since the techniques of narration never ceased to comply with specific and often unconscious rhetorical patterns. The juxtaposition between facts and descriptions is explained by Tesauro according to the differentiation between narration and description, as pointed out in *The Art of Letters* (1, II, “On the Description”): “Since the *Narration* that you heard is a Representation of some successive Action; in the same way, the *Description* is the presentation of some Permanent or Natural Subject, as an Elephant, a Lion; or an Artifact, as a Ship, a Palace” (Tesauro, 1669, p. 58). The description of the Elephant, explained by Michele Maggi in the *Introduction* to the printed edition of the *Vocabulario Italiano*, is a clear example of the lexicographic and semiotic creativity of the Italian language, in line with the taxonomic pressure and the rhetorical flair that inspires Tesauro’s encyclopedic effort. To the fore is the communicative force of every reliable narration founded on the persuasive and informative features of the language, as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, p. 132) argue: “Language is not only a means of communication; it is also an instrument for acting on minds, a means of persuasion. Now, the influence of the needs of argumentation on the malleability of notions has not received the emphasis it deserves”.

4. Conclusion

Emanuele Tesauro’s eight circumstances of epistolary communication can be interpreted as a real media categorization, inspired by the contingent communicative dynamics of daily exchanges, both formal and informal. Tesauro’s influence on the writers of his age shows the rapid diffusion of his aesthetic creed, as in the case of Andrew Marvell’s poetry as analyzed by Edward Holberton (2024, p. 17): “The political embeddedness of Marvell’s reading of *Il cannocchiale aristotelico* shows that his reception of poetic theory was closely shaped by political tensions and communities, and that he thought carefully about the changing cultural valencies of his previous style of wit as the Restoration political landscape unfolded”.

Tesauro’s epistemological beliefs deal with the rhetorical patterns of daily interactions as they can be framed within classical Aristotelian rhetoric, in a time ruled by Galilean and Cartesian scientific theories. Eco has emphasized Tesauro’s modernity concerning linguistic invention and communicative proficiency. In *The Limits of Interpretation* (1990), he sheds light on “Early Jesuit Semiotics”, highlighting that Tesauro’s “encyclopedic index” may help a better understanding of James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* (1939), inspired by the need to categorize the “witty inventions” of the Baroque age. Eco’s fascination is more than a literary insight, since it shows the central role played by the combinatory techniques in the communicative processes, including the literary ones:

The *Cannocchiale aristotelico* of Tesauro seems, in short, a manual with which to read *Finnegans Wake*. In point of fact, *Finnegans Wake* is an example of a categorial index put into practice, a sort of computer which has received the input of all available knowledge and which returns an output of new connections effected among the various elements of this knowledge. *Finnegans Wake* is the representation (even if in an artistic rather than theoretical form) of an encyclopedia in action (Eco, 1990, p. 147).

The juxtaposition between Tesauro’s treatise and Joyce’s masterpiece further evokes the baroque encyclopedic background founded on a process of metaphorization of reality through the combinatory wit of social actors, as Joyce’s re-elaboration of Vico’s theory on rhetoric and philology demonstrates (Eco, 2002, pp. 119-123). In other words, Tesauro’s *The Arts of Letters* can be read as an underrated attempt to provide the fundamental communicative instructions coping with the most significant informative patterns of the time, with specific reference to epistolary exchanges through the lens of Aristotelian legacy. The several references to the tenets of brevity, impartiality and completeness, along with the hints at the narrative techniques of the “gazetteers”, confirm the outstanding modernity of Tesauro’s analysis, in spite of his

ecclesiastic and court connections.

Just as *Il cannocchiale aristotelico* can be considered “a manual” that is useful in reading *Finnegans Wake*, *The Art of Letters* – published one year before Tesauro’s death – can be read as a modern compendium of communication, a sort of practical handbook on the techniques of description of facts and construction of reliable messages through hand-written letters. His analysis is founded on the convergence of ancient rhetoric and modern epistolary communication pivoted on eight fundamental questions, *What? Who? With whom? Through what? How? Where? When? Why?* These questions sound so evocative of Laswell’s very popular theory of the “5Ws” guidelines, assuming that Tesauro is not a direct precursor of such a methodological approach, but an authoritative theorist of daily communication in terms of rhetorical patterns and informative effectiveness. In this view, *The Art of Letters* can be read as a handbook of modern communication inspired by the attempt to adapt ancient rhetoric to current times. This is why he cannot be considered a direct but perhaps a precursor to structural models of mass information flow. It is useful to recall that in the first paragraph of *The Structure and Function of Communication in Society* (1948), Lasswell provides the popular five questions ruling “The act of communication”:

A convenient way to describe an act of communication is to answer the following questions:

Who
Says What
In Which Channel
To Whom
With What Effect?

The scientific study of the process of communication tends to concentrate upon one or another of these questions. Scholars who study the “who”, the communicator, look into the factors that initiate and guide the act of communication. We call this subdivision of the field of research *control analysis*. Specialists who focus upon the “says what” engage in *content analysis*. Those who look primarily at the radio, press, film and other channels of communication are doing *media analysis*. When the principal concern is with the persons reached by the media, we speak of *audience analysis*. If the question is the impact upon audiences, the problem is *effect analysis* (Lasswell, 1948, p. 37).

The apparent proximity that the contemporary reader can find between the epistolary model of the “8 circumstances” and the information framework of the “5Ws” can be found in the permanent historical need to make every narration comply with certain specific and compulsory questions. Tesauro utters them in both Italian (“Che? Chi? Con chi? Con che? Come? Dove? Quando? Perché?”) and Latin (“quid, quis, quo, quibus auxiliis, quomodo, ubi, quando, cur”), thus facilitating the learning of the techniques of narration, description and information of his time. Tesauro knows the theory of rhetorical circumstances and the doctrine of “progymnasmata” founded by Hermagoras of Temnos and developed by the imperial and late rhetoricians. Through his Aristotelian lens, Tesauro builds a theoretical framework that exploits the classical and medieval rhetorical techniques, along with the principles of the *ars dictandi*, with the aim of probing the communicative strategies of his time (Berardi, 2017; McLuhan, 2011, pp. 105-114; Calboli Montefusco, 1979).

The “5Ws” guidelines cannot be considered a clear compendium of the eight circumstances, but a well-known attempt to simplify the rules of information flow in line with some specific and fundamental informative requirements, as they are the result of a process of synthesis that serves the contemporary media and epistemological approach, despite the harsh criticism that his theory underwent: “Many scholars have pointed out, however, that other important questions were not being asked, a criticism that has caused a schism in media research that persists. No such division existed, however, when scholars set out to discover *with what effect* media met their audience, a question answered through psychological and sociological means” (Olson, 1989, p. 63).

The definition of the communicative model founded on some simple but necessary questions is fundamental in contemporary information research, provided that every narrative and informative product complies with the tenets of brevity, clarity and completeness. Rhetoric can still deal with the immanent dynamics of private and public communication. As Tesauro underlines at the very beginning of *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, they inform us that “The more you promise, the more you stumble upon accomplishing” (Tesauro, 1978, p. 3).

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