Considering issues of Rhetoric and Violence

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sometimes the repetition of words will produce an impression;
at other times;
Cicero, De Oratore

Do I begin with rhetorical violence, a rhetoric of violence, violent rhetoric of violence, rhetoric or violence?

What about: Violence or Rhetoric
Rhetoric emerges as a craft in the Athenian city state in 500 BC as a way of mar physical violence, substituting politics and law for war also: careful staging of what violence is deemed necessary, but this isn’t called rhe Rhetoric emerges as a discipline from law-court practices and teaches techniq save your skin also: techniques for skinning others alive, but this isn’t called rhetoric all the Rhetoric emerges as a practice from people worrying about writing and how abuse the absent audience, offering strategies for engagement with differenc make parallel the oral and the written also: critiques of strategies for manipulation, coercion, deception – cut out the cr bit and this is what rhetoric has often been called ever since.

Recent commentaries have followed the link between sophistic rhetoric an physical culture of the gymnasias, both as areas for exercise, competitiio controlled violence of the agonistic, known in many western Euro-American cu as the ‘debate’.

But sophistic rhetoric derives from people who didn’t belong in Athens anc therefore became mediators. The sophists were strangers to the city, wi citizenship rights although they were not slaves. They made their way th argument, persuasive words, the ability to articulate the other aspects of the which they were in a good position to notice. Ever since, the words clustering a ‘sophist’ have implied a less than committed attitude, people who can mani words in whatever direction they want with no regard to social responsibility, rel belief or political mandate. There are increasing numbers of people commit the sophists’ commitment to a questioning of the unquestionable, so sometim sophists seem to bc the only people with responsibility, belief or mandate.
Plato not only compared rhetoric to 'sleight of hand' but also to philosophy. In *Phaedrus*, rhetoric is allied to power, dependent entirely on manipulative talk, to money, where it becomes a medium of exchange, to love, at which point it is mediated by the eroticism of feathering materialised in writing, medicine and gardening.

The point of the connotative fields of the topics of love being: they need satisfactorily unless within an environment, a context, an ecology of interrelations. They can all be violent, but they can all also be engaged moral practices. ‘Moral’ here of course does not mean a set of standards that we must follow, but engaged, situated, interactive work that recognizes the difference as well as similarity.

In one way rhetoric manages violence by substituting contestatory if not overt language for violent actions, but in another it addresses a root of violence, that of the difference, by offering strategies for valuing things we don’t understand, for giving meaning to becoming part of our lives.

In another way, rhetoric instigates violence: impels people into the cycle of actions that once started becomes self-justifying. This too has its own rhetoric.

The history of rhetoric from Aristotle onward, has been the history of reconfigurations and political structures. Aristotle developed the field of rhetoric firmly in the service of mediation, away from the intimate eroticism Plato describes.

Rhetoric became central to political power because of its ability to side-step offer alternatives.

Rhetoric became central to political power because of its ability to manipulate systems of power.

Rhetoric became central to political power because of its ability to instigate groups of people to fight each other.

It became the dominant tool of the law courts, as systems of legal justice physical violence as ways of dealing with displaced anger and fear.

It became the dominant tool of the law courts as systems of legal justice physical violence as ways of appropriating and guarding property.

It became the dominant tool of the law courts as systems of legal justice did not disavow the punitive often lethal spectacle as a device for forcing people to do the things they might otherwise not.

Rhetoric is particularly a history of responses to changing modes of democratic civic life, and to changing questions in philosophy.

Rhetoric is the script for self-consciousness.

It deals with probably-the-best, also the plausible, also the true, and the ways these may be cast.

Whenever philosophy has proposed an answer (to anything) rhetoric has contributed to the context for the grounds that make it possible (or not).
to do what you want without physical force it is better all round. The new po
order simply replaces the older in an immediate way that leaves people o
the cycle of brutality that physical force initiates, and makes for a longer-l
system. The more radical the new order the less likely that this changeover w
feasible.

But rhetoric is often seen as simply one stage along a scale from violence
example, force, then coercion, then obedience, then assent, then engagemen
Cicero is clear on justice and law as replacements for violence and individual rev
He is also clear, in *The Orator*, about the way justice works primarily by ge
people to ‘identify’, to recognize ‘as one of their own’ the person who claims ji
(either prosecuted or prosecutor). Hence justice is for those who belong, it h
inclusive sweep.

Machievelli echoes this nearly 1500 years later, in different political circumsta
but similar rhetorical techniques. In the renaissance in Italy, most leaders, pri
of city states had an orator or counsellor, often attributed with magical pr
(think of Merlin), to help them control the feudal structure of militant baro
lords within their area. *The Prince* shows how the leader can take on this
explicitly alongside force and violence (to cover the bases so to speak), to pers
people to his political order.

The strategies that Cicero and Machievelli suggest are echoed (self-consciously
Hitler/Goebbels in *Mein Kampf*, which looks at the strategies appropriate to
self-referential sweep in the early twentieth century, especially in the use of n
such as newspapers, radio, and mass demonstration, all of which were
nationally focused in the 1930s. Nazism was dealing with a much larger gro
people than Machievelli or Cicero had imagined. It developed slightly diff
-techniques to construct and maintain the ethos of the leader, and that of the
individual at each level of social management.

The duality of rhetoric/violence is in each of these cases to do with a specific
of rhetoric, a coercive rhetoric that recognizes that in all likelihood the peo
be convinced will not take easily to that convincing because they are not inv
in power-making mechanisms. Its central strategy, what makes the inclusive s
work, is to give back to the audience the structure it most wants (not needs)
Each of the rhetorics is dependent on the construction of a system.

The bigger the system the more difficult to maintain its self-justi
tautologies (self-evident rights).

The more people involved, the more difficult to crack.

‘The Bigger the Lie’...

People don’t do violence to others unless they think it’s justified.

All justification of violence is based on self-evident proof and reaso
Therefore people doing violence think it’s self-evidently necessar
These systems are often self-justifyingly violent to other systems or group
individuals.

They violently rupture other sets of grounds.

They are successful to the extent that they can maintain their tautology

Violence may rupture their sy
As communication systems of various kinds made it possible to mediate a m-
tuned ideology/hegemony, that desire could more precisely be defined, an
financial and commodity markets, more precisely delivered.

This was and still is the phenomenally successful strategy of the chur-
had control over effective media from an early period in its history; most
based religions replicate the strategy in politically and socially specific re-

The rhetoric of violence is absorbed into controlling power, defining the k
upon which we make decisions through the plausible/truth switch (one man
is another’s truth: judicial or forensic persuasion). At the same time then
Patrizzi, Erasmuses, Marxes, and Foucaults of political rhetoric reminind
other kinds of persuasion, other stances.

The rhetoric of exchange which involves direct trades in position from
defined positions, is to do with

an agreement not to challenge but to work in the Venn diagram of
the plausible/probable (deliberative or demonstrative persuasion)
although slippage toward the plausible is likely.

And a rhetoric of change, that difficult set of negotiations around the

difference,

is mainly to do with

working in the probably-the-best,

it’s strategically unstable yet produces long-term results.

I see little evidence for a rhetoric of change in political rhetoric, except in
in certain carefully defined contexts such as Nira Yuval-Davis’ ‘trait
politics’, or First Nations’ politicians ‘the braided way’. Yet I suspect it’s
new phenomenon, but one that has been going on for centuries in local sit
where people cannot turn away from each other. In an increasingly
society we have lost a lot of these skills.

With the rhetoric of violence, the group in power assumes it has the righ
t power. Negotiating over difference is not an understandable concept, it
occur. Therefore the rhetoric is to absorb or destroy, as with the arroganc
to the genocide of aboriginal peoples all over the world.

But look at Cynthia Cockburn’s work on the conflicts in Bosnia or
Ireland, where she analyses, against the backdrop of the violent destru
way that women from the different ethnic groups continue to talk and

The relation of rhetoric to politics has not often attempted to engage with
of change. It is, for example, difficult to be a democratic leader in peacetime
calling on law and order, the protection of property, and in the capitalis
today, the ‘family’.
These were Cicero’s common grounds with his audiences, they were Mac
they were Hitler’s, they are...
But this is to speak of the relation of a formally defined rhetoric to vi
physical force.
It can be used as a technique within a larger rhetorical structure.

When historians discuss military campaign strategies they are elaborating rhetoric of that violence.

In the recent war in Kosovo/Serbia two quite different rhetorics were at stake: Serbia was 'at war', with men in tanks, in person, driving out of one into another, out of one village into another. NATO was 'stopping war', bombing targets that made war possible, putting no soldiers in.

One is a 'hands on' war, and one is 'hands off'.

A 'hands off' war feels like war within the torn country, but not in other places.

We are not engaged.

Our family members are not threatened.

The 'hands off' rhetoric points to the problematic presence of N. in someone else's country.

Violence occurred in the first place, despite the potential for agreement at Rambouillet, because Milosevic had a history of atrocity (in Bosnia). He, like Hussein, had lost the right to normal consideration, forfeited his right to negotiation, to formal rhetoric itself.

So we are left with a rhetoric of violence.

You could argue that the rhetoric of NATO is not a violent rhetoric but a rhetoric of violence.

NATO did.

Rhetorical Violence

Violence is often staged,

as in public executions and punishments that are part of the mediatic ideological systems.

Staged violence often assumes a rhetoric of exchange.

Much domestic violence mirrors back to the perpetrator or abused, images intend to constitute or agree with their self-perceptions. The rhetoric of abuse often called collusive, is about the easy transition from violence as 'truth' or 'n is right', to violence as defining one's access to truth/right.

Violence can be learned not as force but as a rhetorical technique in its own right.

'Systematic abuse' is just that: not only abuse of 'the system' but abuse constructs a 'system'.

And again, violence is not necessarily physical.

If someone is systematically denied access to particular information, say a their health, this too is a violence.

If ideology constitutes the representations of a subject to ensure the inadequacy of that representation, hence the anxiety, desire, emptiness of that person, too is violent.
more powerful keeps obscure/renders obscure, by say not informing sc
their rights, then this too is violence.
Seen this way, the plausible/truth switch to which those avoiding phy: inevitably turn, is another violence.

Violent Rhetoric
And again, rhetoric is not necessarily non-violent, as the previous demonstrate.
If a group of people in casual conversation say ‘That fucking car ran my fucking hosepipe...’, it’s different in rhetorical force to someone sr their face and spitting ‘Fuck off’ in yours.
Handbooks of rhetoric are full of devices to wound, maim and hurt.
Tapinosis: base words used to diminish the dignity of person or th
Litotes: disguised threat or boast. Pseudomenos: to put som position where all they say is taken amiss. Diasyrmus: the o argument is made to look depraved or ridiculous. Mysteri: scornful mock. Bdelygma: expressing hate or ambivalence.
What is interesting and boring about technical rhetoric is that it gives only at risk.
Most examples need the specificities of context to make rhetorical sense way of putting this is that if you recognize the way the device works, it n you have something in common with the person who provided the exa

Rhetoric and Violence
And rhetoric is not only verbal.
It is to do with any communication system like clothing or food,
with any medium like film, song, writing,
with any interaction between at least two people.
While a discussion about rhetoric and violence would throw forward contextual particularities, it could also be analogous from medium to medi to person.
Take for example an academic discipline.
It will usually begin from consensually agreed grounds for discussi quickly, without enough and consistent attention, become systemat Cultural studies is largely stuck in the discourse studies methodolc which it was initially formulated.
Rhetoric is necessary to ensure that disciplines seem coherent, that disciplines, systematic structures.
So what is disciplinary violence?
when one discipline exercises a rhetoric of power over another?
or disciplinary violation?
when one discipline is being violated?
or when that structure is asked to admit to its self-enclosed stance?
and act on it?

enclosure is faced by difference, and necessary change?
Is this a rhetoric of change?
or a rhetoric of force,
of violence?

Not all rhetoric is force. No rhetoric inherently forces, it’s dependent on situational environment, ecology.

Rhetoric/Violence (this is getting out of hands)
Desire is when you do something because you are constituted as someone who wants and you pursue the commodity that is supposed to fill the gap. Is this the result of violence? Is it violent in itself? Is it a displacement of violence?Eroticism is incessant, and becomes beleaguered in an ideological context as is most moral activity trying to articulate difference. Is this too violent? Is this too violent? Desire promises the stations of the ethical. Because desire is the beating heart of ideology without it there is no possibility of immediate political effective. There is no violence without rhetoric. Is there any rhetoric without violence? Representative systems need to build in learning time for those who are not making subjectivities but have to embody them. Is learning politics violence or work and if you do the dishes even when you don’t want to is it violent or not?

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