

Considering issues of Rhetoric and Violence

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

Do I begin with rhetorical violence, a rhetoric of violence, violent rhetoric
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 managing
physical violence, substituting politics and law for war

also: careful staging of what violence is deemed necessary, but this isn't called rhetoric
Rhetoric emerges as a discipline from law-court practices and teaches techniques to
save your skin

also: techniques for skinning others alive, but this isn't called rhetoric all the time
Rhetoric emerges as a practice from people worrying about writing and how to
abuse the absent audience, offering strategies for engagement with differences
make parallel the oral and the written

also: critiques of strategies for manipulation, coercion, deception – cut out the crux
bit and this is what rhetoric has often been called ever since.

Recent commentaries have followed the link between sophistic rhetoric and
physical culture of the gymnasias, both as areas for exercise, competition and
controlled violence of the agonistic, known in many western Euro-American cultures
as the 'debate'.

But sophistic rhetoric derives from people who didn't belong in Athens and
therefore became mediators. The sophists were strangers to the city, without
citizenship rights although they were not slaves. They made their way through
argument, persuasive words, the ability to articulate the other aspects of the world
which they were in a good position to notice. Ever since, the words clustering around
'sophist' have implied a less than committed attitude, people who can manipulate
words in whatever direction they want with no regard to social responsibility, religious
belief or political mandate. There are increasing numbers of people committing
the sophists' commitment to a questioning of the unquestionable, so sometimes
sophists seem to be 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 techniques: 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 are not satisfactory unless within an environment, a context, an ecology of interaction. 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 and negotiates difference as well as similarity.

In one way rhetoric manages violence by substituting contestatory if not violent words for violent actions, but in another it addresses a root of violence, the negotiation of difference, by offering strategies for valuing things we don't understand as they become part of our lives.

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

The history of rhetoric from Aristotle onward, has been the history of re-organizing political structures. Aristotle developed the field of rhetoric firmly into a field of mediation, away from the intimate eroticism Plato describes.

Rhetoric became central to political power because of its ability to side-step and 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 replaced 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 replaced physical violence as ways of appropriating and guarding property.

It became the dominant tool of the law courts as systems of legal justice developed notions of the punitive often lethal spectacle as a device for forcing people to act in particular ways.

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 provided 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-la
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 engagemer
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 ju
(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 po
(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 peop
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 reason.

Therefore people doing violence think it's self-evidently necessary.

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 muted ideology/hegemony, that desire could more precisely be defined, and financial and commodity markets, more precisely delivered.

This was and still is the phenomenally successful strategy of the church: 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 law upon which we make decisions through the plausible/truth switch (one man is another's truth: judicial or forensic persuasion). At the same time the Patristic, Erasmian, Marxist, and Foucaultian of political rhetoric remind of other kinds of persuasion, other stances.

The rhetoric of exchange which involves direct trades in position from pre-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 certain carefully defined contexts such as Nira Yuval-Davis' 'trajectories of politics', or First Nations' politicians 'the braided way'. Yet I suspect it's a new phenomenon, but one that has been going on for centuries in local situations where people cannot turn away from each other. In an increasingly global society we have lost a lot of these skills.

With the rhetoric of violence, the group in power assumes it has the right to power. Negotiating over difference is not an understandable concept, it never occurs. Therefore the rhetoric is to absorb or destroy, as with the arrogance of the genocide of aboriginal peoples all over the world.

But look at Cynthia Cockburn's work on the conflicts in Bosnia or Northern Ireland, where she analyses, against the backdrop of the violent destruction, the 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 the rhetoric 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 capitalist world today, the 'family'.

These were Cicero's common grounds with his audiences, they were Macaulay's, they were Hitler's, they are...

But this is to speak of the relation of a formally defined rhetoric to violence, not to 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 work. Serbia was 'at war', with men in tanks, in person, driving out of one country 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 NATO in someone else's country.

Violence occurred in the first place, despite the potential for agreement in 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 'no 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 about 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, this too is violent.

more powerful keeps obscure/renders obscure, by say not informing so their rights, then this too is violence.

Seen this way, the plausible/truth switch to which those avoiding physical 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 some position where all they say is taken amiss. Diasyrmus: the o argument is made to look depraved or ridiculous. Mycteri: scornful mock. Bdelygmia: 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 mediu 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 situa
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
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
beleaguering 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
ideology without it there is no possibility of immediate political effective
There is no violence without rhetoric. Is there any rhetoric without violence
Representatives 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

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