

Cultures of Conviction

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Abstract:

Edited by Christian Meyer and Felix Girke, *The Rhetorical Emergence of Culture* is the fourth volume in the interdisciplinary series *Studies in Rhetoric and Culture*, which has fostered the dialogue between rhetoric and anthropology since 2009. Arranged into three sections on intersubjectivity, emergence, and agency, fifteen articles examine the cultural foundations of rhetoric and the rhetorical foundations of culture. Contributors hail mainly from anthropology and rhetoric, but also from communication studies, cognitive studies, linguistics, and philology. Hence the topics range from the ancient ideal of the orator and early modern Jesuit rhetoric in Goa to Internet forums for Russian migrants to the United States and the connections between architecture and public speech in New Guinea. Whilst some of the contributions are kept very general and others are in the main designed for specialists, the volume represents an important building block in bridging anthropological and rhetorical research. What is more, the thesis of the interconnection of rhetoric and culture is relevant for fundamental research in cultural studies.

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Rhetoric has convinced many researchers in fields in and beyond cultural studies and criticism of its valence. New historicist appropriations of rhetoric (Hayden White, Alan Liu), on-going work in rhetorical narratology (James Phelan, Dan Shen), and the 'rhetoric of inquiry' of scientific texts (Herbert Simons) are only a few of the examples, not to mention rhetorical criticism itself. However, the precise relation between rhetoric and culture and the assets of rhetorical criticism when it comes to the analysis of cultural structures and practices have hardly been made sufficiently clear so far. One of the major contributions to the rhetorical turn of the 1980s and 1990s came from the Writing Culture debate in ethnography, and hence it is no surprise that another catalyst for the larger debate has been set by the anthropological rhetoric/culture project.

The *Rhetorical Emergence of Culture* is the fourth volume in the series *Studies in Rhetoric and Culture*, and the editors, Felix Girke and Christian Meyer, ground this book in the basic assumption of the rhetoric/culture project that "just as rhetoric is founded in culture, culture is founded in rhetoric" (p. 1). In their introduction, they outline what distinguishes their approach to the idea that culture emerges dialogically (in a Bakhtinian sense) from human interaction: rhetoric conceives of this emergence as one of conflicting wills that clash within power relations. This rhetorical outlook thus also offers a mediating way out of the age-old dilemma of stressing either supra-individual structures or individual agency. The idea is that "neither does the orator fully master their discourse, nor does the discourse entirely master the orator [...] so are culture rhetorically emergent and rhetoric culturally emergent" (p. 5). While some of their ideas will have to stand the test of further scholarly scrutiny, such as the term 'resonance' that is meant to capture the elusive affective and bodily aspects of persuasive discourse, Girke and Meyer convincingly argue for the use of rhetoric in the analysis and interpretation of culture.

Of the fifteen articles in the volume, which are arranged in three sections, intersubjectivity, emergence, and agency, many make good on the editors' ambitious promise. In his article on "Co-Opting Inter-subjectivity: Dialogic Rhetoric of the Self", Linguist John W. Du Bois shows the implications of rhetoric as a public phenomenon for the realm of the individual and hence of what is usually thought of as isolated and private; rhetoric does thus extend both outwards

from and inwards to the subject. Using empirical cases, Du Bois shows how voices are rhetorically engaged in productive conflict, not only in multi-party but also in one-party conversations: talking to oneself is just as rhetorical as talking to someone else.

That rhetoric is not restricted to speech acts but can also convincingly deal with the effects of cultural objects, especially in rituals, is argued by Felix Girke and Alula Pankhurst. In their chapter on "Evoking Peace and Arguing Harmony: An Example of Transcultural Rhetoric in Southern Ethiopia", Girke and Pankhurst interpret rites such as the blunting and burying of spears in a South Omo peace ceremony as rhetorical acts: the latter makes sense only if the spears are – by way of a metonymic personification – represented as the perpetrators of the war, onto which the blame for the bloodshed can be put. Girke and Pankhurst's most relevant conclusion for rhetorical studies at large follows from their observation that the ritual establishes peace first, before guilt in the war is determined: the setup of the rhetorical situation, "not as one group talking to another, but as people talking together", creates the necessary sense of consonance (p. 245). The production of conviction is thus vividly shown to be not only a matter of argument and the intrapersonal acceptance of truth, but of performing speech acts and producing rhetorical objects.

Other papers give critical and constructive impulses to further theoretical areas of rhetorical research. James Thomas Zebroski, in his analysis of the social formation of gay authorship in the United States after the Stonewall riots, critiques the view that rhetoric has remained the same throughout its history of two and a half millennia, and outlines an understanding of authorship as a collective rhetorical process that happens in four distinct (and generalisable) stages of proto-community, myth-making first generation, revolt of the second generation, and third generation consolidation (pp. 271-73). Todd Oakley captures the attention of the reader by focusing on an under-researched aspect of rhetoric, namely attention itself. His analysis of the US census' 2000 promotional campaign, based on blending theory, arrives at seven elements, "alerting, orienting, sharing, selecting, sustaining, controlling, and harmonizing", that represent the "phenomenological grounding of rhetoric culture theory" (p. 301).

One should not remain silent on the fact that a few of the articles fall short of the promise of the volume, having been written either for very expert audiences or engaging in theoretical speculations the value of which is hard to grasp. In his otherwise insightful article on "Tenor in Culture", Ivo Strecker dubs the productive and receptive "realms" of a metaphor "tenor and resonance", respectively. As he defines it: "neither of the terms of a metaphor would be called tenor [as I. A. Richards had done, GG], but rather the metaphor's 'sound,' its totality, its intentional thrust and the resonance it produces" (141; my emphasis). Thus, the productive realm of a metaphor, the tenor, seems to include the receptive realm, the resonance, which makes seeing the logic of this new concept of the tenor unnecessarily difficult. There are a few passages in one or the other article which simply lack conceptual coherence. One example, from "Discourse beyond Language" by Donal Carbaugh and David Boromisza-Habashi: "humans, in some communicative movements, do not stand in opposition to a non-human natural world, but in fact belong to it as one among other members" (p. 103). If the (certainly doubtful) opposition between a non-human natural world and a human world that is (presumably) not

natural is to be overcome, as the authors suggest, then humans should certainly not be counted as part of the non-human natural world, as the sentence says, the "it" referring to "a non-human natural world".

These occasional weaknesses cannot obscure the overall positive picture of the volume. The fresh insights of many articles and the overall conception that aims at transdisciplinary exchange make this volume an important step towards an analysis of the interrelations of rhetoric and culture. Kenneth Burke's insight from *A Rhetoric of Motives*, quoted several times in the book, may serve as a summary of why rhetoric matters for the study of culture: "Only those voices from without are effective which can speak in the language of a voice within" (1950, p. 39). That the voice within is at the same time an effect of the voices without would be one of the basic insights of a rhetoric of culture.