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AL 805

Final Paper

### My History of Rhetoric

My history of rhetoric is concerned with visual and material rhetoric and the issues of beauty and the body. My history of rhetoric starts with the Greeks and goes until the 20<sup>th</sup> century—it spends some extra time in the classical period and the Enlightenment. In order to understand my history of rhetoric, first you have to understand my definition of rhetoric. After 14+ weeks of reading what others have to say about the topic, I believe that it all boils down to this: rhetoric is persuasion. Key people in the standard rhetorical canon agree with me:

- Aristotle: rhetoric is “the faculty of discovering in any particular case all of the available means of persuasion”.
- Cicero: rhetoric is “speech designed to persuade”.
- George Campbell: “[Rhetoric] is that art or talent by which discourse is adapted to its end. The four ends of discourse are to enlighten the understanding, please the imagination, move the passion, and influence the will”.
- Kenneth Burke: “Wherever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric, and wherever there is rhetoric, there is meaning”.

Most of this support comes from the classical period and the Enlightenment and my paper reflect this.

Throughout this semester I have come to realize that in addition to being concerned with persuasion, rhetoric is a complex notion. Two things about rhetoric that were new to me this semester and central to my understanding (and history) of rhetoric are that **rhetoric reflects culture** and **rhetoric is intimately tied to power**. Carol Lipson explains that a “rhetorical system simultaneously reflects and reinforces the cultural systems, while also ritually enacting its major values” (95). While Lipson is specifically discussing the ancient Egyptians, I believe that this statement can be applied to nearly any culture. For example, writing about the ancient Greeks and Romans, Poulakos and Poulakos explain that while much of Roman culture was influenced by the Greeks, the Roman culture was still unique; this difference in culture created a difference in rhetoric (156). Susan Jarratt explains that the language that we use both carries and structures our worldviews. In the context of ancient rhetoric (as one example), she states that Plato and Aristotle “grounded a tradition which...suppressed the positions the sophists advocated—the primacy of human knowledge, possibilities for non-rational and emotional responses to the whole range of discourse types, a fundamental understanding of knowledge and values as historically contingent, a recognition of all discourse as ‘rhetorical,’ an integral relationship between theory, practice and the political sphere” (xviii-xix). Through their culture and worldviews, the rhetoric that these two men promoted shaped the future of rhetorical studies. This power is one example of how rhetoric is connected to power.

As Jarratt shows, “Othering” has been a major part of the Western rhetorical tradition from beginning of the canon. Martin Bernal offers an explanation for how this othering has happened in the field of archeology: according to the positivist notion of the “argument of silence,” “if something has not been found, it cannot have existed in significant quantities” and goes on to explain that the trap is that “In nearly all archaeology—as in the natural sciences—it is virtually impossible to *prove* absence” (9). Another way that rhetoric has been tied to power is through the shift from oral to print culture. After the shift, writing has been privileged over other forms of communication and literacy has become a form of control. Walter Mignolo explains that, “one could surmise that the idea of the book may have entered into the system of representation of graphic semiotic interaction at the point when writing gained its autonomy from orality and the book replaced the person as a receptacle and source of knowledge” (81). This notion of the move from orality to print and therefore from the body to the book is central to my history of rhetoric.

At the intersection of culture and power, I find the human body, both physically and metaphorically. Therefore, my history of rhetoric is focused around how the body is represented, (specifically, how the body is disciplined), in the practice of being persuasive. This history of the body in rhetoric starts with the ancient Greeks and Romans. A timeline of my history of rhetoric would look something like this<sup>1</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> **Names in bold are authors who talk about the body explicitly**  
*Names in italics are authors who talk about the body implicitly*

- **Plato**
    - Believed that the body and the soul are separate. Souls need bodies in order to run around on the earth, but bodies are certainly less important.
  - *Cicero*
    - Wrote that substance and style shouldn't be separated; action is the language of the body; delivery is "corporeal eloquence".
  - *Quintillian*
    - Discussed *chironomia* and the art of gesture
  - **Augustine**
    - The body is not as important as the soul. The soul is part of God and therefore is more important. The body needs to be limited and disciplined. Rhetoric is concerned with the body, but the Word is concerned with God (obviously the Word is privileged over rhetoric in this binary).
  - **Mignolo** (Renaissance):
    - Wrote about how colonization actually destroyed knowledge of native peoples. If we are able to go back and look at how native peoples communicated we would see a beautiful system that we can learn from. Many of these rhetorics come from oral cultures that value the body.
  - *Ramus* (1594):
    - Believed that presentation is important in effective rhetoric.
  - **Austin** (1806):
    - Created a detailed handbook on how the body should be used in order to be rhetorically effective. What we are seeing here is not the mind/body binary that has been so popular until now—now we see the body as a way to enhance the work of the mind.
  - *Blair* (1819):
    - Writes about belles lettres and states that the aesthetics of rhetoric are more important than substance. "Taste" is very important to him: this is something that can be acquired and with it one can move up the social ladder.
  - **Whatley** (1841):
    - Echoes the belles lettres idea that aesthetics are paramount to rhetoric. He discusses body movements (gestures, fidgeting, etc.) but says that "natural" speech can't be taught.
  - *Campbell* (1844):
    - Concerned with the "sublime" and stylistic writing. Discusses the Cartesian split.
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Clearly, most of the scholars that I am interested in come from the ancient Greeks and Romans and the Enlightenment and the bulk of my paper reflects this.

While much of ancient Greek rhetoric dealt with the body either overtly or implicitly, for this paper I am going to concentrate on Plato. Plato is a key person to look at when examining the history of the body in rhetoric for many reasons: chronologically, he came before many of the other ancient rhetorical scholars and thus had influence on them and he provides one of the first extant texts about (what would later be called) the Cartesian split of the mind from the body.

Plato was often critical of epideictic rhetoric, claiming that it was often too concerned with beauty and would therefore corrupt its listeners. Poulakos and Poulakos explain that, "Plato saw in epideictic rhetoric an instrument that could help him reveal universal principles hidden under the surface of appearances. When properly used, he seemed to reason, epideictic discourse can supplement dialect, whose reliance on the strict rules of logic can appeal only to those few disciples of philosophy endowed with a rigorous mind" (72). One text where Plato examines epideictic rhetoric is the *Phaedrus*. Poulakos and Poulakos explain that, "According to Plato, sophistic speeches...attempt to educate through a dispersed display of clever arguments and a diffused array of beautiful words, a disunited spectacle of random eloquence. But dressing up meaningless thoughts with splendid words is hardly an art" (76).

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato has his mentor, Socrates, in dialogue with Phaedrus, who wants to know more about rhetoric. Socrates discusses many things with Phaedrus including the soul, madness, divine inspiration, and art. In Socrates' second speech, he goes into detail about the soul. In the majority of the work, Socrates talks more about the soul than he does the body. According to Plato (through the words of Socrates), souls are immortal and don't need bodies unless they are on earth. According to Socrates "The soul through all her being is immortal" and goes on to explain that a body cannot be moved without a soul, while a soul can exist without a body. Socrates goes into great detail about the nature of the perfect soul, comparing it to "winged horses and a charioteer" in order to show how it can be immortal. Imperfect souls, according to Socrates, fall from the heavens and inhabit bodies:

the imperfect soul, losing her wings and drooping in her flight at last settles on the solid ground—there, finding a home, she receives an earthly frame which appears to be self-moved, but is really moved by her power; and this composition of soul and body is called a living and mortal creature. For immortal no such union can be reasonably believed to be; although fancy, not having seen nor surely known the nature of God, may imagine an immortal creature having both a body and also a soul which are united throughout all time.

The amount of truth that a soul has seen determines the type of person it will be born to. According to Socrates, souls with the most truth will become a “philosopher, or artist, or some musical and loving nature” while those with the least are condemned to be a “sophist or demagogue” or at the very worst, “a tyrant”.



Clearly there is a privileging of the soul over the body, since the type of life a person will lead is determined by the actions of the soul independent of the body. Sarah Broadie, in her article “Soul and Body in Plato and Descartes,” explains that, “Plato believes that the soul thinks best when dissociated from the body. He has two reasons: one is the observation that we cannot engage in the kind of thinking that for him is thinking par excellence when we are physically active and attending to goings on in our bodies and in our physical environment; and the other is his theory that the soul has latent within it a supremely pure and beautiful kind of knowledge which it could only have come by before birth into a body” (302-3). Clearly, Plato was concerned with keeping the body separate from the mind and therefore exerting control over the physical human body.

Plato had a great influence on rhetorical scholars that came after him. Plotinus took many of his ideas and shaped them into Neoplatonism, which was heavily concerned with the distinction between the physical and ideal world. The ideal was concerned with Forms, and Plato believed that Truth existed, although it was often beyond human understanding. The dichotomy of the physical and

ideal world fed into the notion of good and evil and later the body and the soul. Neoplatonists took Plato's idea of the soul belonging to the heavens and the body to the earth and extended it to mean that the soul was good and the body was rooted in evil. For Augustine, writing in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D., human beings were both bodies and souls, and were responsible for their own suffering. Gerald Lucas explains that, "Generally speaking, Augustine's *Confessions* seems to be a reworking of Plato's metaphysics in relation to a Christian cosmology. Augustine speaks of the dichotomy between the body and the soul, the falseness of rhetoric, memory, sublimity, and desire. In addressing oratory, Augustine recalls Plato's *Gorgias* and its subject matter inspired by rhetoric: Truth and the human condition." Simply put, rhetoric became Christianized through Augustine.

For Augustine, rhetoric was associated with the body, while the Word was associated with God. Augustine sees the body as something that can lead to sin, which he discusses at length in the *Confessions*, specifically in books VII and X. According to Sipe, Augustine believed that "...human beings must struggle to overcome the body in order to nurture the soul" (11). Augustine himself states that 'the perishable body weighs down the soul, and its earthly habitation oppresses a mind teeming with thoughts' (Augustine 1998, 138).

In book VII, Augustine explains that, "because God is perfect and thus absolute, whereas the body, in a constant process of change and decay, can never be described as perfect. Thus, the soul must struggle against the corrupting influence of the body" (Sipe 12). In book 10, Augustine discusses how



he "... is still separated from a truly Godly life due to the concupiscence of the flesh. He examines the ways in which physical touching, tasting, smelling, hearing, and seeing can lure one to ignore the spiritual and to focus on the bodily (Augustine 1998, 223-235)" (Sipe 13). While Augustine is mainly concerned with man's relationship with God, he does discuss rhetoric in the *Confessions*. However, according to Augustine, the only purpose of good rhetoric is to share the word of God.

Augustine's work helped preserve ancient rhetoric by Christianizing it. Augustine takes some of Plato's ideas about the body and, through the Neoplatonists, adapts them further until the body is something that is diametrically opposed to God. Sipe explains that "Augustine's struggle to understand God as an incorporeal being in his *Confessions* will perhaps help us to better understand what he means by a spiritual body as opposed to a material body; Augustine uses the term body, but he does not seem to imply that any sort of purified corporeal body will actually rise up" (14-15). Issues of the body and rhetoric came back in full force in the Enlightenment.

The body in rhetoric is talked about both explicitly and implicitly by Enlightenment authors. At this time, rhetoric was broadly concerned with elocution and standardization. The Enlightenment is often characterized by the advances made in science, and perhaps because of this language scholars tried to quantify their area of expertise. Peter Ramus and Hugh Blair both agree that the body, beauty, and presentation are important in order to be rhetorically

successful while Gilbert Austin and Richard Whately discuss the minute detailed importance of gestures and physical movement in successfully oratory.

In 1806, Gilbert Austin published a detailed handbook on how the body should be used to be rhetorically effective. Austin's *Chironomia* is perhaps the best evidence of the importance of the body for rhetorical scholars during this time period—even though it was a tremendous failure. The use of hand gestures in speech goes back to the ancient orators (Quintillian, Cicero). Austin was heavily influenced by their work and wrote an entire book about it. In the preface to this work, Austin states that

...it is a fact, that we do not possess from the ancients, nor yet from the labours of our own countrymen, any sufficiently detailed and precise precepts for the fifth division of the art of rhetoric, namely rhetorical delivery, called by the ancients *actio* and *pronuntiatio*. (ix)

Austin's book is divided into two parts: the first part explains the history of delivery from ancient times to his own, while the second part of the book is a handbook on how to use gestures effectively. It is perhaps ironic that in a time where scholars were heavily concerned with making language more standardized and scientific, Austin's work was dismissed as too prescriptive. Despite this need to compartmentalize and standardize language, rhetorical scholars were calling for oratory to be "natural". Austin was wary of this and used his work as a guidebook for students to avoid showing "the untutored



*Chironomia*  
Plate 2, Figure  
18

extravagance and uncouth motions of the vulgar" (138). In order to teach this, Austin divides the space around the body into spheres and discusses movement based on coordinates (see Plate 2 Image 18). According to Austin, "The human figure being supposed to be so placed within this sphere, that the centre of the breast shall coincide with its centre, and that the diameter of the horizontal circle perpendicular to a radius drawn to the projecting point, shall pass through the shoulders, the positions and motions of the arms are referred to and determined by these circles and their intersections" (308).



*Chironomia*, Plate 8 Figures 75, 76, 78

For Austin, the body was an integral part of

speaking well—not something to be

ashamed of or hide behind. This can be seen in his definition of gesture as the “action and position of all parts of the body” (133). However, at the same time, Austin’s work represents an almost severe need to keep the body disciplined. As Plilippa M. Spoel and Plillipa M. Spoel explain, “*Chironomia*...abstractly represents a particular, localized technology of bodily discipline” (8). They go on to explain that Austin’s goal in this text was to show the human body as a “‘mechanism,’ a kind of apparatus whose unity must be divided into parts and positions, gestures and movements, in order to make it knowable to an analytic, supervisory reader” (19). They go on to explain that “... at the same time as these drawings reinforce the subjugating effects of the disciplinary technologies represented in the *Chironomia*, as mechanisms of power they are ambiguous and multiple, disrupting a purely coercive relationship between supervisor and

performer, viewer and viewed, and exceeding, within their own discourse, the boundaries of socially sanctioned bodily conduct” (19). Austin’s drawings remove the person from the body part. As a result, “*Chironomia* privileges a theoretical approach to gesture which assumes that actions of the feet can be properly known and controlled only by detaching them from the rest of the body in the same way that Austin’s diagrams of chemical apparatus provide separate drawings of their different parts to help the reader understand how to construct his mechanisms” (Spoel 20). Austin’s work is representative of a shift from the body as being something evil (or, at best, something that stands in the way of the truth); however, there is still a separation of the body and the mind.

About 35 years after Austin published the *Chironomia*, Richard Whately wrote the *Elements of Rhetoric*. This text is divided into four parts, addressing issues associated with rhetoric such as persuasion, style, and delivery. In the section on delivery (Part IV) Whately discusses elocution, natural speech, and the difference between reading and speaking. In keeping with many of the rhetorical scholars who talk implicitly about the aesthetics of rhetoric, he explains that *how* something is said is just as important as what is being said (381). He states that good elocution is similar to good rhetorical style and goes on to explain how this can best be accomplished in various circumstances. In the final chapter of part IV, Whately discusses ways that his instructions can go horribly wrong. He echoes much of the popular thought at the time that natural speech was the best and gives advice about how to do this well. According to Whately,

“action...seems to be natural to man, when speaking earnestly” (448) and goes on to focus on hand gestures, voice, and keeping still versus fidgeting. He is perhaps referencing the work of Austin when he condemns “studied gesticulations” that “has lead to the general disuse of action altogether” (448). Whately explains the various ways that gestures and action during speech can go wrong, stating that “no care should, in any case, be taken to use graceful or appropriate action; which, if not perfectly unstudied, will always be...intolerable” (450). Whately believed that you can’t lay down rules for using action that will not come across as unnatural when performed during speech; however, the best speech springs from emotion and action.

An emotion, struggling for utterance, produces a tendency to a bodily gesture, to express that emotion more quickly than words can be framed; the words follow, as soon as they can be spoken. And this being always the case with a real, earnest, unstudied speaker, this mode of placing the action foremost gives...the appearance of earnest emotion actually present in the mind (451-452)

Whately seems to be in a place somewhere between Austin (seeing the body as necessary) and Augustine (seeing the body as something that gets in the way). Even in the middle of this dichotomy, it is clear that the body must remain disciplined.

This is by no means a comprehensive history of rhetoric. For me, though, these four men represent the high points of the history of the body in rhetoric. As I explained at the start of this paper when I introduced my timeline, there are many other scholars who have talked about either the body or, more commonly, issues tangentially related to the body such as aesthetics, performance, and belles lettres. Some of these works represent moments in the history of rhetoric where the body has attempted to break through the control that rhetoric has had on it.

One of these moments that I think deserves more discussion is best captured by the work of Walter D. Mignolo. In his book *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*, Mignolo explores an alternative history of rhetoric during the Renaissance. When discussing colonization, Mignolo touches on issues of non-textual writing and the semiotics of communication. He discusses the importance of alphabetic writing and literacy in Western culture and it seems to me that we have (or had in the past?) a very limited view of what writing can be. He states that, "Writing... seems to be universal of all cultures; the book, however, is not," (121) and explains that "changing the materiality of writing practices engenders alternative conceptions of reading activities" (132). In chapter 2, Mignolo explores other forms of communication used by the Amerindians such as quipu. The idea that Acosta (in *Historia natural y moral de las Indias*) couldn't not call this type of record keeping "writing" seems to reveal a problem with privileging (textual) "writing" over other

forms of semiotic communication. (And I can't help but wonder about the extent to which this still exists in rhetorical studies).

Mignolo examines other forms of communication for native people, many of which center around the body. The importance of the body in oral cultures stands out to me as an important departure from the traditional rhetorical canon, which seems to be focused on disciplining or even destroying the body. Mignolo explains that in the fifteenth century, wisdom was held for the Amerindians by the elders and "is deposited into the body" rather than a book. Another place where Mignolo touches on the body (and other non-textual makings of text) is in the section about "The History of Writing and the Writing of History," where he explains that Giambattista Vico "believed that semiotic processes from the beginning of human existence involved sound, body movement, ideas, and graphic signs by which some kind of coordinated behavior among living nervous systems was attempted. Vico's concept of *lingua* is a complex matrix composed of ideas, different kinds of visible signs, and sounds" (148). Mignolo states that the Spaniards saw the lack of alphabetic literacy as proof that other cultures were subordinate and states that, "This illustrates the difficulties of understanding differences and using differences to construct power positions" (112). For me, this raises questions about how alphabetic text/literacy is privileged in rhetorical studies today and how this privileging may have evolved throughout the (remaining) history of rhetoric.

Overall, it seems to me that the rhetorical canon is composed of men who have worked hard to keep the body (and exclusively the male body—women are not even mentioned) under control of some sort. As I continue in my academic career I am excited to learn more about feminist rhetoric and places and spaces where the body/mind dichotomy disappears.



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