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Abstract

The paper proposes a model of rhetoric based on the theoretical and methodological framework of constructivist positions on knowledge and discourse. The main claim is that the ideological meaning, and specifically of political discourse, can be analyzed from a dual perspective, 'socio-cognitive' and 'rhetorical-constructivist'. Such an analysis shows that the construction of meaning is inseparable from the deliberate choice made by the agent in communicative practices. The paper claims that rhetoric should return to its origins as a tool for citizens, and that it could become an important instrument for explaining the conflicts of current social and political discourse.

Key words

rhetorical-constructivist approach, socio-cognitive approach, Spanish rhetoric

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Constructivist rhetoric within the tradition of rhetorical studies in Spain

1. Adopting a perspective. A few words about the history of the decline of rhetoric in Europe, and its relationship to the curtailment of the rhetorical mechanism

Rhetoric – “which enables us to work on and nurture the gift of speech,” according to Quintilian (*Institutio Oratoria* II: 16. 16) – provides us with a complex theory for the construction of the various types of public discourse with persuasive intent: an essential tool in democratic societies. All its mechanisms are traditionally based on five canons, which are *inventio* (the discovery and development of ideas), *dispositio* (their organization), *elocutio* (the linguistic presentation of ideas), *memoria* (which saves from forgetfulness everything that has previously been constructed) and *actio* or *pronuntiatio* (the final canon, involving the choice of an appropriate tone of voice and gesture for the speech).

However, rhetoric as an essential tool in democratic societies was already an anachronism when Quintilian wrote his treatise in 95 CE. It could not have the political significance that Quintilian wished to confer on it, because the Roman Empire had made it impossible to engage publicly in any political discourse that would allow any criticism of the Emperor’s actions. The Republic was dead, and with it had died democracy and its most precious tool: public discourse for the purpose of persuasion, rhetorical discourse with the social and political objectives that it had had in its origins. Nevertheless, rhetoric had become a cornerstone of the education of citizens in Quintilian’s lifetime (during the Imperial era). That period, which we know today as the Second Sophistic, was, as Murphy (1988: 247) reminds us, a time of oratorical excess, although it is clear that, in the construction of the specific rhetorical discourse of the era (which lacked any polemical socio-political ideas), what was of interest were issues of a less controversial sort. It was at this point that questions of style, elegant expression and pleasant elocution came to the fore.

From that point onwards, Europe would never lose its tendency to turn rhetoric

into a mere treatise on style, albeit one of great importance to education. With the triumph of Christianity, critics of pagan traditions became particularly concerned with the use of rhetoric in education, although this use had an influential advocate in Augustine of Hippo. Augustine allowed the rhetorical tradition and biblical hermeneutics to become one, and he gave his seal of approval to written civilization (instead of oral civilization). The art of speaking well became the art of writing well (Kibédi Varga 2000: 8); and, in the late Middle Ages, rhetoric became an art of writing letters well.

With the end of the discourse of political ideas (ideas to be defended in the democratic agora or senate) and with the imposition of the civilization of writing, the only meaningful discourse was the epideictic one (the judicial and deliberative forms disappeared or became dormant); and the rhetorical mechanism was mainly reduced to a single rhetorical canon, *elocutio*, a series of discursive devices aimed at making words and ideas stylistically appropriate, writing correctly, and adorning a speech by means of tropes and figures. Rhetoric became an inventory of tropes and figures of speech based on the idea of *sermo ornatus*. This concept remained in place until the twentieth century.

Even in this reduced form, rhetoric was in a state of permanent decay (with slight upturns) until its final decline in the nineteenth century; in school texts of the period (it was taught in schools until the early twentieth century), it continued to be understood exclusively in terms of “the art of speaking with propriety, elegance and conviction,” as we see, for example, in the words of *Lecciones de Retórica y Poética* [Lessons in Rhetoric and Poetics] by Herrera Dávila y Alvear, published in Seville in 1827.¹

2. The restoration of the entire rhetorical mechanism. The new rhetoric of the twentieth century. The Spanish contribution

Rhetoric was revitalized from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, and the entire rhetorical mechanism was recovered, as rhetorical discourse (now called the discourse of social communication) recovered its original meaning: as a means for making decisions on important issues in the democracies of the new media civilization. Oral discourse once again played a prominent role in persuading the masses, adopting the forms of propaganda, advertising and informative discourse. Its entire constructive mechanics (from the discovery of ideas to deciding upon the appropriate gesture and voice to present them) once again became a focus of interest for the new communication sciences and for discourse analysts. Spain was not immune to this new phenomenon, and, to a greater or lesser extent,

1. http://www.europeana.eu/portal/record/9200110/BibliographicResource_1000126587531.html

nor was anywhere else in our globalized world, which is strongly influenced by the new media network (we only need to consider the importance of the Internet in the uprisings of the Arab Spring). When discussing Spain, we must mention two pioneering names in the rehabilitation of rhetoric in the context of the new world that took shape over the last century: the literary theoreticians Antonio García Berrio and Tomás Albaladejo Mayordomo.

As the twentieth century progressed, the rediscovery of rhetoric began with the erudite exhumation of the old rhetoric; but in the century of linguistics, it was soon recognized as a powerful foundation that could be reformulated in a new general rhetoric, which would become an effective mechanism for the production and analysis of the discourse of contemporary media communication. It was seen in this light in some philological circles: those of the new linguistics and new literary theory. Similarly, and a few decades later, the world witnessed the so-called *Nietzschean renaissance*, which marked the revival of rhetorical epistemology by the poststructuralists, deconstructivists and philosophers of what was known as *weak thought*, as a critique of rationalist logocentrism.

The philologists, linguists and discourse analysts did not approach the rhetorical mechanism in a unitary manner. There were initially simple reformulations based on linguistics (a discipline of the twentieth century), and the traditional inventory of tropes and figures of speech. These approaches, with new nomenclatures (those of the prevailing structuralism), continued to reduce the entire mechanism to the third rhetorical canon and continued to view *elocutio* as *sermo ornatus*. This was true of the μ Group with its misleadingly-named *General Rhetoric* (1970), because it only offered a new inventory of tropes and figures (μ Group, 1987). The proposals for a new general rhetoric were much more interesting; and if they had been implemented, they would have helped to forge a general science of discourse for the modern world.

However, confidence in the theory, which had increased sharply in the early stages of structuralism, soon vanished (Compagnon 2015). Its strongest advocate in Spain, Antonio García Berrio, ended up succumbing to a type of disappointment and loss of faith when faced with a task of such magnitude (García Berrio 1984: 7-59). However, this was where the return to the entire rhetorical mechanism for the purpose of carrying out discourse analysis was most stoutly defended.

García Berrio then thought of a new general rhetoric as a theoretical framework that would bring about a rigorous assessment of all the resources of expressive language as it is enacted. He believed it to be one of the great challenges faced by linguists and literary theorists in the late twentieth century. His subsequent encounter in the early 1980s with text theory encouraged his cherished idea of a general rhetoric; in it, he saw a model for the construction and analysis of texts

that was reminiscent of the powerful mechanism of the ancient discipline. When that encounter took place, he was supported by his student Tomás Albaladejo. The degree of formalization attained by this text theory in its attempt to provide a model for textual production was very high, as can be seen in the studies by van Dijk (1972) or Petöfi and García Berrio (1978). The two Spanish theorists, and especially Tomás Albaladejo (1989), were for a while engaged in the search for parallels and complementarities between the mechanism of the old rhetoric and the new theory of the text. I will not deal here with Professor Albaladejo's current approaches to cultural rhetoric, as Professor Albaladejo touches on this matter in his own article within this monographical issue of *Res Rhetorica*.

The recovery of the vast rhetorical mechanism, coupled with criticism of the traditional concept of *sermo ornatus*, undoubtedly led to the third rhetorical canon, *elocutio*, no longer being the only rhetorical canon considered in treatises on the rhetorical tradition (as it had been for centuries), and it became a subject of only secondary interest among scholars of the mechanism of the production and analysis of rhetorical discourse. Consideration was given to areas that had hitherto been neglected, and which were characteristic of the other rhetorical canons, such as *inventio* considered within the argumentation theory, with significant developments emerging from treatises by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1958) and Toulmin (1958), up to the pragma-dialectical approach of van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1990).

3. The necessary recovery of the importance of *elocutio*: tropology as a construction of human understanding of the world

For the above-mentioned group of scholars who sought to produce a general theory of discourse (this was a time of great strength in linguistics and linguistic poetics), *elocutio* became a secondary issue when all the rhetorical canons were recovered. However, we have mentioned another area in which rhetoric continued to be understood in terms of an inventory of tropes and figures (stylistic rhetoric), even though the new structural, generative, hermeneutic and ideological principles were used for its study. In Spain, this other area is apparent in books written in the late twentieth century such as *Figuras retóricas* [Rhetorical figures] by José Antonio Mayoral (1994), and *Nueva introducción a la teoría de la literatura* [New introduction to the theory of literature] by Miguel Angel Garrido Gallardo (2000).

The situation was therefore embodied in these two areas: one that still considered rhetoric in terms of an inventory of tropes and rhetorical figures, to be studied with the new nomenclature provided by the twentieth century, which was why it did not engage in an in-depth critique of the traditional concept of *sermo ornatus*

or change its thinking on rhetoric as a treatise on style; and another area, which in its interest in recovering the entire mechanism of the construction of rhetorical discourse, reduced the third rhetorical canon to a pure linguistic covering of the work done in the inventive and operative canons. And it also continued to consider *elocutio* as a stylistics of the resources of linguistic expressiveness. Neither of the two areas performed a critical and in-depth study of the third rhetorical canon.

In a paper that I published in *Rétor*, the journal of the Argentine Association of Rhetoric (Pujante 2011: 186-214), I considered what I believe to be the next step in the evolution of the contemporary recovery of rhetorical thought: the resumption of the prevalence of the third rhetorical canon, but not as a return to the stylistic tradition, but instead based on a profoundly ontological perspective, recuperating once again the *rhetorical reason* that had been adopted by the Sophists, taken up by the humanistic tradition of the fourteenth century, and which had then impregnated the thought of Vico in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In that article, I wondered whether in the Sophist thought of Antiquity *elocutio* had already been considered a complex canon. Before the point of historical reductionism referred to above (that is to say, before rhetoric became a treatise on good writing and *elocutio* became the only relevant canon in the rhetorical mechanism), how did the old writers of treatises deal with the meaning of this third rhetorical canon? According to Quintilian – when he referred to *elocutio* in relation to the previous two canons (*inventio* and *dispositio*) – all of the latter (the invention and arrangement) is akin to a sword enclosed in its sheath; and elocution is to turn the potential of the sword, or in this case that of the discourse, into an action. Cicero, his master, says “*lumen actio*”: for all these things (the rhetorical canons mentioned above), “their light [is] action” (Cicero, *De optimo genere*, 5). No wonder that, in the old rhetorical treatises, *elocutio* is covered to a much greater extent than the other rhetorical canons. But the reasons for its predominance in the old rhetoric treatises and the reasons for its predominance in the later tradition (when rhetoric had lost its primary *raison d’être*) are very different; and it is necessary to consider what that difference is, in order to avoid the subsequent pitfalls that historical rhetoric has suffered from in terms of the meaning of tropologization and discursive figuration.

It is true that *elocutio* became the basis of treatises on rhetoric from the Second Sophistic onwards, but that operational hegemony is not due to the rhetorical reasons that could have made it so predominant, namely that everything is discourse, that reality is constructed within discourse and that reality is reflected in the actuative-linguistic realization. Once the basic political reason for rhetoric had been lost, the problem of the discursive-interpretive construction of reality was neutralized or minimized. Rhetoric was reduced to a discursive-cultural exercise

of culturally assumed principles; and its elocutive function lost its ability to discover and express the world, and instead became a mere expressive aestheticism of the generally prevailing political, religious and cultural ideology, and one which was not open to debate.

When rhetoric is understood in terms of pure *elocutio*, which is in turn seen as a treatise on style and an inventory of tropes and figures of speech, it becomes easy to equate Poetics to Rhetoric; and this drift of Rhetoric towards Poetics is due to the conception of poetry as *sermo ornatus*: a discourse that is especially decorated with figures, and which is only differentiated in quantitative terms from common language. As mentioned above, the recovery of the constructive mechanics of rhetorical discourse from the second half of the twentieth century onwards constituted a fierce critique of the secular curtailment of the rhetorical canons. However, we have also pointed out that, in the reformulation of the new rhetoric, the canon of *elocutio* appears to be damaged, and when any rhetorical discourse is constructed, it occupies a place equal to or lower than the other rhetorical-discursive canons. This is a strange and contradictory situation in studies of linguistic poetics, because although there is a great deal of interest in conferring autonomy on poetic language (an idea which originates in Russian formalism), few efforts have been made to restore epistemological-rhetorical complexity to the canon of *elocutio*.

The *Rétor* article which I referred to above, and whose ideas I am attempting to summarize here, also stated that the epistemological reason for the contemporary omission of *elocutio* lies in Chomsky's vision – of Cartesian and Aristotelian origin – of the construction of discourse, a vision that has predominated in approaches to theories of the text. It is a line of thought which is based on rational argument that aspires to objectivity, which is based on a reference to the real. Reality is understood as being something that is independent of us, and as something that is objectively accessible to us. Our privileged access to that objective reality makes our arguments universally valid. This habit began with modern rationalism and became deep-rooted thanks to the scientific revolutions of recent centuries. It is the habit of considering the model of construction of our thought about the world to be the real and exclusive structure of the universe (Barfield 2015: 99).

However, this Cartesian view collides with the hermeneutic-rhetorical tradition – a tradition that is criticized and rejected as soon as it is applied outside the purely literary sphere. It is not a problem if language is creative – as long as it does not come into conflict with objective reality. When we say that the discourse constructs reality and the subject is involved² in this process, then the sparks of the age-old confrontation between philosophers and Sophists fly once again. It seems

2. The understanding of the subject according to ancient rhetorical theory, not besmirched by philosophism (an epistemological contrast created by the struggle between Sophists and philosophers), is today supported by new reflections on the *cognitive subject*, following the ideas of Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1997).

that the society in which we live does not find it conflictive for a poet to say: “the poem was finished: and to my amazement it was there that I discovered the only reality that had taken place.” However, would we accept a politician saying: “I have discovered reality in my speech?”

Today, restoring *elocutio* to its hegemonic position necessarily involves considering that the content and the persuasiveness of content are administered in the construction of discourse, through all its levels of formalization. The indissoluble union between form and content, which was so strongly advocated by the formalism of the early twentieth century (Pujante 2003: 191), has been sustained with great determination by literary theorists, but it appears not to permeate rhetorical studies.

The most prominent rhetoricians of antiquity were aware of the inevitable link between discursive construction and the interpretation of reality. Shortly before the meaning of rhetoric began to be neutralized in the post-Cicero era, Cicero himself, in his mature work known as the *Tusculan disputations*, says that the “perfect philosophy” can be found in the conjunction of the profound knowledge and ornate expression of the most important subjects: “*Hanc enim perfectam philosophiam semper indicavi, quae de maximis quaestionibus copiose posset ornateque dicere*” (Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes* I 4, 7). The “perfect philosophy” combines knowledge of the subject with the way of expressing it. There is no “perfect philosophy,” a perfect exposition of knowledge, if no consideration is given to the formal way in which knowledge is expressed.

This line of thinking influenced the humanists of the fourteenth century and subsequently Giambattista Vico, who said, in his *New Science*, that [primitive] man in his ignorance makes himself the rule of the universe; and that this man has made of himself an entire world; and as such tropes, which many believed to be ingenious inventions, were in fact "necessary modes of explanation for all the first nations" (Vico [1744] 1956: §405 and §409, 52 and 55). The human mind can thus only know what it has made, and the social and cultural reality in which we participate is an artifice of men, with feelings and experiences that are signified discursively by means of four basic tropes: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony. According to this line of thought, discursive tropologization is seen as a basic way of conferring meaning on the world's events, something that is far removed from the concept of *sermo ornatus*, for which the trope or figure was a simple ornamental addition in speeches – an optional addition that embellished what was being conceptually presented.

4. Constructivist rhetoric. A necessary step

It could be said that the evolution of rhetoric since the second half of the twentieth century has slowly but directly led to an encounter with the approaches of radical constructivism, which permeated the scientific world even before contemporary humanism, with the crisis of the classical paradigm involving scientists such as Werner Heisenberg and philosophers of science such as Thomas Kuhn (1970). As Capra (1991: 19-20) tells us, it was Heisenberg who planted the seed that would mature more than a decade later into a systematic investigation of the limitations of the Cartesian world view.

As far as rhetoric is concerned, by centering interest once again on the elocutive aspect (with *elocutio* understood now as a process of linguistic cognition, which makes our experiences conscious and constructs their meaning), we finally make rhetoric more similar to disciplines with constructivist principles; which in turn have a strong foundation in original rhetorical thought (that of *homo rhetoricus*), as they are based on an inevitable subjectivism. The Heisenberg uncertainty principle measures the extent to which the scientist influences the properties of the objects being observed by means of the process of measurement (Capra 1991: 19). This clearly echoes Protagoras' famous phrase that "Man is the measure of all things," conveyed by so many authors in the ancient world.

What we present as a rhetorical proposal within the new conceptual framework that emphasizes the limitations of the Cartesian view, deals with the opening of meanings, the constant redefinition of data according to the times and places of the discursive production, but above all, it believes that we become aware of the experience obtained in daily living through tropologization and figuration, which are the linguistic mechanisms that enable us to make our experience conscious.

This proposal is at the heart of the research project³ we are currently undertaking, and many of our students are working in this area. We propose a rhetoric that is not only understood as a formal theory of the discourses generated by societies, but we take it a step further and study all the resources of discursive expression as constructions that interpret and seek to understand the various situations and social actions that these discourses respond to. A constructivist rhetoric will always provide analytical information concerning the efforts made by discourses to shed light on new social realities. It thereby becomes a useful mechanism for social reflection on the discourses that construct the definition and interpretation of the world in which we live, since the world is understood and managed through the different genres of social discourse.

3. "Retórica constructivista: discursos de la identidad – identidades individuales, identidades urbanas y alternativas eco-sociales," headed by David Pujante (2014-16; reference code FFI2013-40934).

As mentioned above, this approach is based on the theoretical and methodological framework of constructivist positions on knowledge and discourse. This paradigm was revitalized in the twentieth century, but it is not new – although it had been neglected for centuries of logical-rationalist power – as it comes from ancient rhetoric, through the revitalization of Latin (Italian) humanism, and its major advocate in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was Giambattista Vico. In the twentieth century, it left its mark on the work of Freud, Piaget, Croce and literary theorists such as Frye, and philosophers of history including White.

4.1. Reality as discourse. “Truth, like art, is in the eye of the beholder”

At the base of constructivist thought is the understanding of *reality* as a human construction. We can agree with the theoretical physicist of Romanian origin based in France, Basarab Nicolescu (2013), who makes a distinction between the *real* and *reality*, for whom reality is the subjectivized *real*: constructions, interpretations, mediations of the *real*, i.e., constructions by man for man (considered in general and not generic terms).⁴ We can make the same distinction using the terminology of Barfield (2015), who distinguishes between the *unrepresented* and the *system of collective representations*, which depend on the percipient. This is a distinction that has been made in modern philosophy since Kant. In any event, whether it is called *subjectivized reality* or *collective representations*, the object of study of constructivist rhetoric is always this social reality, which is labile in nature, that is to say, oscillating, changing, something that can be reformulated, and which humans make in order to live in it – hence the need for it to be comfortable. It is always the result of a spatial-temporal consensus, in a dialogue, which should be friendly, through human life times and even beyond a single lifetime.

Social discourse nourishes the constructs of *subjectivized reality*. I am going to offer a simple example (similar to Aristotelian logic tests) that will enable us to observe and consider how, on a daily basis, and without thinking about it, we experience a number of levels of construction of the reality that surrounds us, and on each occasion accept them as a definitive version of that reality.

In Clint Eastwood’s film *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, a young writer from New York, John Kelso (John Cusack) is sent to the southern town of Savannah to write an opinion piece on the renowned Christmas party given by a wealthy and picturesque local character named Jim Williams (Kevin Spacey). Jim becomes involved in a murky murder case, and young Kelso starts to investigate what happened.

The film is based on the novel by John Berendt, but for our purposes, it is

4. Cf. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_jFE4w6mfaQ

sufficient for us to consider the plot of the film, during which we witness three different constructions of *reality*.

1. The murder that is at the heart of the intrigue is committed by Jim Williams himself, when, after the party that Kelso was commissioned to report on, he kills a young man who had occasionally worked for him and with whom he had had an affair. According to Williams' testimony in court, he killed him in self-defense when the young man broke into his house, damaged some very valuable items (including an antique clock) and threatened him with a revolver which went off, although the shot missed him. This is the first construction of reality which we see, based on the discourse of Jim Williams.

2. Later in the film, in a moment of confessional intimacy, the murderer Jim Williams (whose feelings for the young Kelso perhaps amount to more than mere admiration for his writing), tells him that young man never shot at him, because the pistol's safety catch was on, and that was when he took the opportunity to kill him. We are thus faced with a new discourse by Jim Williams, which reconstructs reality.

3. Jim Williams is acquitted of his crime (in the novel this acquittal happens after several years and various trials), and he has a final conversation with the young journalist before being struck down by a heart attack (the cause is unknown, although the novel mentions pneumonia) that sends him to his grave. This last conversation between the young journalist and the wealthy Jim is an inspired moment in the film, and is the focus of our reflection. John Kelso asks him (in order to find out the real, definitive, objective, absolute discourse) what really happened on the night of the crime, and Jim Williams replies: "Truth, like art, is in the eye of the beholder."

These final words are the key to rhetorical thought. To thinking and acting rhetorically. This is because the discourse that we construct is the discourse of our own gaze. Returning to Nicolescu (2013), reality is like a mirror of the self; it is where all the faces of that self are reflected (or, to put it in Kantian terms, where they are categorized). Without discourse, the world is chaos. According to Grassi:

Nature as a reality not yet recognized and ordered by man appears in its sinister elementarity. What happens when there is no human outline to convey it and order it? [...] What happens when we do not have a human outline to help us master nature? (Grassi, 1968: 9 and 12)

Grassi also shows us that the perspective of painters is something acquired by learning, and he shows how American painters paint the Andes as if they were the Apennines, because it is the perspective that they have learned from the Italian masters.

4.2. Rhetorical epistemology

As well as on democracy (without which it has no social function and ceases to be a socially useful theory of discourses), rhetoric is based on an epistemological approach consisting in an interpretation of the world through discourses (the transition from rhetoric to hermeneutics did not take place for nothing, as clearly pointed out by Gadamer; see Pujante 2007: 413-428). Taken together, democracy and rhetorical epistemology allow for the creation of a consensus on understandings of the world and on the resultant behaviors and social obligations, the laws we must abide by, and the limits to which the citizens who have agreed upon those understandings of the world (with ethics and public-spiritedness) must be subject. These understandings apply to a specific time and space, since, as soon as the majority's view of society changes, it is necessary to agree upon a new understanding both of the world and of the relations between men in this world. This idea is at the heart of the current debate on the need to change and update the Spanish Constitution.

This basic element of rhetoric, which I am referring to as an epistemological principle, is also a sign of our times. Over the last century, we have witnessed a fundamental change in how we view the world. This is apparent in the emergence of new ways of approaching science, and can also be seen in new social approaches that advocate profound changes. Attention is being paid to the construction of new social and sexual identities (with families with single parents or with gay and lesbian parents,⁵ thereby overcoming the gender binomial),⁶ and to the arguments for new ecosystems and new urban spaces (cities that are more human and more intelligent, and not simply smart cities full of technology). At the same time, attempts are being made to deactivate the cultural misunderstandings or bad practices inherited from the past, and important problems that remain unresolved and have recently become even more acute (such as the confrontation between East and West in the Islamic world). The flowering of a new vision of reality has significant social consequences, and takes place through cultural transformations that involve conflicting discourses. However, from our working perspective, we are interested above all in underlining the existence of an increasingly widespread awareness that these new socio-cultural horizons are our own construct, the product of a desire for a social change for the better, which requires a praxis of understanding between the various existing cultural frameworks. The construction of appropriate discourses is critical in this area, and an understanding of discourse

5. Elton John's campaign to boycott Dolce & Gabbana is well-known. <http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/gente-y-tv/elton-john-pide-boicotear-dolce-gabbana-por-criticar-las-familias-gais-4020069> (Last access: 15.06.2015).

6. Today, the problem of the binary categorization of gender and sex is common knowledge, and has been depicted in internationally successful films like Grant LaHood's *Intersexion*. <http://www.intersexionfilm.com/about-2/> (Last access 20.06.2015).

as a construct is even more so, because it is at the heart of the intercultural and interspectival agreement.

This sign of our times is manifested in the history of our recent culture (as a path to freedom, comprehension and understanding between peoples, cultures and societies) once we have become able to engage in the criticism of the Aristotelianism that has been the predominant current in science and the humanities in recent centuries (by which I mean, once we have discovered the limits of the rationalism that established its *theology* in the midst of enlightened Europe, disregarding everything that was left outside its spotlight as a contemptible shadow and establishing absolute truths for which to fight, die and kill).

Rationality's struggle to prevail and impose discourses of absolute truth is not unique to European modernity. It is also the source of the battle fought in Antiquity between the philosophers and the Sophists, a confrontation that would end with the triumph of the former, the destruction of the latter, and the configuration of Western culture based on assumptions of absolute truths, of powerful discourses whose flawed genealogy would (many centuries later) be highlighted by Friedrich Nietzsche in order to create a breach in contemporary thought, which has arrived at what is supposedly the end of philosophy (today as part of a new vitalizing reaction, cautiously limiting its area of action) and a *pensiero debole* (Vattimo and Rovatti 1988) involving a renewed interest, on an ontological level, in rhetoric.

I must agree with López Eire (whose death at the height of his intellectual production is a source of regret to all scholars of rhetoric in Spain) and Santiago Guervós that:

communication creates culture because culture relates to the ideal values shared by the members of a given group, the rules they abide by, and thus mediates the community's behaviour. (López Eire and Santiago de Guervós 2000: 11)

Rhetoric appeared with the same focus in classical Greece. Plato himself, in his dialogue *Gorgias*, acknowledges that the approaches of Sophists and philosophers are in fact the result of two ways of life (one contemplative, the other active) and the Sophists' approach is active, dedicated to action as a citizen: speaking in the assembly, cultivating rhetoric and engaging in public affairs (*Gorgias, or On Rhetoric*, 499e/501c). Where Plato appears to take issue is with acceptance of the idea that the truth appears in precisely this area as something relative, established in time and space, an approach with which he does not agree:

The cities wish to firmly maintain that none of this [just, unjust, pious or otherwise] is by nature or possesses its own reality; on the contrary, the opinion of the community is held to be real insofar as it seems to be so and for as long as it appears to be so. (Plato, *Theaetetus, or On Science*, 171d/173a)

But this apparently radical distance between Plato and the Sophists has a clear point of contact: reality is a fallacy of the senses. If we remove the negative aspect (the term "fallacy"), we can rephrase this statement: reality is a construction of the senses. When Platonic thought was recovered in the Renaissance, man as an ideal modeller of reality became important. Aristotelian thought, as filtered through the Middle Ages, which considered that the senses imprinted the traces of reality on the mind – an objective, attainable reality, which could be grasped by the human senses – no longer applied. Humanism believes that man shapes reality. The state of human consciousness, the human mind is the basis. There is a clear example of this Renaissance mindset in a text by Juan Luis Vives (1992: 162-163)⁷ – which was discussed by Menéndez y Pelayo and his student Bonilla y San Martín, and, through them, reached Américo Castro – and the text reads: “when we say that something is or is not, that it is this or that, that it is like this or not, we assess it from the judgement of our own spirit, not from the things themselves.” Castro (1972: 87) was interested in looking at the “concern that inspired the changing face of reality and the importance of one’s own judgement” in the Spanish literature of the time, and in Cervantes in particular.

Where do we stand, after the centuries of prevailing and domineering rationalism that precede us and which have permeated us? In the often neglected sphere of pre-Aristotelian rhetoric which was subsequently revived by Humanism, we can say that, even the stronghold that is most challenging in terms of colonization, of modern science, which emerged from the triumph of reason, has recently seen the arrival of rhetorical thought. Let us say that *homo rhetoricus* has inoculated *homo seriusus* with reasonable doubt. While the latter advocates a *beyond* that is independent of man, the immutable reference, absolute truth, *homo rhetoricus* does not submit to any single construct of the world, and his reality is what he sincerely accepts as reality. “What *truth* is in the representative semantic dimension, *sincerity* is in the expressive semantic dimension,” as Martínez Bonati (1983: 150) says. Rhetoricians consider truth to be a discursive configuration of its sincere expressiveness. Fish says:

If the highest truth for any man is what he believes that truth to be (*Theaetetus*, 152a), the ability that produces this belief and therefore establishes what is true in a given time and at a certain place is a skill that is essential for the construction and maintenance of a civilized society. In the absence of a revealed truth, rhetoric is that skill, and when the Sophists taught it, they taught “the only thing that mattered: how to deal with one's own affairs and the affairs of state.” (Fish 1992: 270-271)

7. http://books.google.es/books?id=hAZfy3nUn8gC&pg=PA162&lpg=PA162&dq=luis+vives%2Billae+enim+non+sunt+nobis+sui+mensura+sed+mens+nostra&source=bl&ots=iWB8fq67u&sig=ARmfgvRujqeMbk8R8Sw212nhxVo&hl=es&sa=X&ei=FM2zU_mJDoXW0QWdh4B4&ved=0CCAQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=luis%20vives%20Billae%20enim%20non%20sunt%20nobis%20sui%20mensura%20sed%20mens%20nostra&f=false (Last access: 05.05.2015)

We can return to Jim Williams' response: "Truth, like art, is in the eye of the beholder." Each gaze (way of seeing, perspective) on any social problem that we consider at some point, made into discourse and after a comparison of the discourses, will in a democracy lead to the choice of the discourse that is most likely to be suitable for applying to social behavior. *Verisimilitude* belongs to literary creation, but also to the interpretation of a social cause by means of a discourse that seeks to clarify it. Aristotle was obsessed with differentiating between history and literary creation, resorting to the language of truth and verisimilitude. But not even history can resist the interpretive discourse. On this point, we refer to the important insights of Hayden White (1973, 1978).

The rhetorical genres certainly seek to achieve consensus regarding the past, present and future: Who decides (knows) what happened? (for this we have the judicial genre). Who proposes (knows) what will happen? (for this we have the deliberative genre). And who (knows) is aware of what happens? (for a present in which decision-making valence resides in the citizen, there appears to be no genre). However, although Aristotle was not interested in a rhetorical discourse in the present continuous, as he reserved that for philosophy, in its search for permanent truths, we must also consider our own understandings of living in a present that is continuative, and not just anecdotal or momentary: where are we?, how are we? how are we with ourselves and with the other members of the community or neighboring communities? These are questions about our situation in the world that affect judgements about the past and ideas for the future.

If I have used the story of Jim Williams and I have emphasized his response to Kelso, it is because I want to stress that the mechanism for the construction of a rhetorical discourse involves constructing an understanding of the part of the world with which it is concerned. According to a well-known poetic adage by Campoamor, an old and forgotten nineteenth-century Spanish poet who was very famous in his own time but is never mentioned today, "*In this treacherous world / nothing is the truth or a lie / everything depends on the colour / of the crystal through which one sees it.*" Unfortunately, Campoamor's poem is always used to devalue this law, the law of Campoamor, the law of rhetoric.

According to the definition in *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, which was perpetuated by subsequent writers, "invention is the discovery (excogitatio) of real or plausible things that make the cause probable" (*Rhetorica ad Herennium* I 2). *Excogitatio*, which is the word used by the author, can be translated not only as *an encounter through reflection* but also as *imagination*, as *invention* and as *the faculty of imagination* (Pujante 2003: 79). We have a series of events and a series of black holes between those events. We are obliged and need to fill in the gaps and arrange everything in a consistent design, giving verisimilitude to the understanding of

the part of reality which concerns us, and which we are interpreting discursively. There will naturally not be one single interpretive discourse, but instead as many as there are perspectives and standpoints on the issue: “Truth, like art, is in the eye of the beholder.” Remember the words of Jim Williams? When we construct the discursive *narratio*, we set out the facts in the way we believe they have occurred or how we assume they will occur. It is our gaze at the past, the future or, from the present, on some events in question. For example, how we see the action (in the past tense) of a man accused of murder, how we foresee (in the future) the development of a war against the Turks, and our *view* of (attitude towards) a hero or a god whom we praise or for whom we say a funeral oration. That is a result of being true to the genres that are accepted in the rhetorical tradition.

If the virtues of *narratio* are clarity, brevity and verisimilitude, the weight of narrative coherence falls on verisimilitude. Verisimilitude is the thermometer of truth. The most plausible aspect of any rhetorical approach must be our choice: a discourse that explains a part of the world and is useful, fair or simply understanding of the part of the world that is the focus of our discursive reflection.

We construct our world based on our experience (rational and emotional) and on our set of beliefs (political or religious ideology), with the activity of the *logos*, which is the ability to choose and recognize (Grassi 1968: 20).

4.3. Rhetorical epistemology in modern constructivism

The proposal for a constructivist rhetoric does not therefore run counter to the times in which we live. Other colleagues, such as Esperanza Morales-López, agree that the study of ideological meaning, and specifically political discourse, must be analyzed from a dual perspective – *socio-cognitive* and *rhetorical-constructivist* – in order to show that the construction of meaning is inseparable from the deliberate choice made by the agent in communicative practices, inseparable from human action and the context in which those practices take place, and inseparable from the cognitive constructions of the social actors. In a recent study, Esperanza Morales-López writes that:

my vision of discourse is a socio-cognitive and constructivist notion. In the prologue to the book by Bateson (1972) mentioned above, Mark Engel (vii) summarizes what he believes is Bateson’s main idea as follows: “The central idea of this book is that we create the world that we perceive, not because there is no reality outside our heads... but because we select and edit the reality we see to conform to our beliefs about what sort of world we live in.” Reality based on this position exists, but individuals rearrange it to fit it to their perception of the world; it is a world view that is neither constructed individually nor separated from corporeality and the emotions. (Morales-López 2014: 252)

There is a whole series of approaches (some of which have already been mentioned in this text) – philosophical (Grassi 1993 and 2000), biological (Maturana and Varela 2003), neuroscientific (Damasio 2010), psychological (Hillman 1979) – which have been conducting their investigations based on the constructivist approach for some decades now. These studies fall within what is now known as the complexity approach.

I am very interested in the radical constructivist position of the Chilean biologists Maturana and Varela (2003), who are little known in the discursive tradition, but who have an enormous influence on systemic or complexity studies (see Capra 1998 and 2000). Maturana and Varela (2003) establish a close relationship between language, knowledge, emotions and social relationships. In one of Maturana's final references, the author explains this relationship in the following terms:

Language is a manner of coexistence in coordinations of doings, not a property or faculty of the brain or of what we call the "mind." Language occurs as a flow of recursive interactions between organisms operating as totalities; language is not a symbolic system of communication about entities of the world; language is not constituted by the doings that are coordinated; language occurs in the continuously changing present of the flow of living in recursive coordinations of doings... and emotions in the flow of [human beings'] coexistence as they language together... We do not construct the worlds that we live, we just live them. (Maturana 2006: 91)

Communication is therefore a process that is interconnected with human action and mental activity, a mind that is something separated neither from corporeality nor from one of its attributes: the emotions.

The importance of emotionality and emotional learning for understanding the world is also apparent in recent neurological studies (such as those by Damasio 1994 and 2010). According to Maturana and Varela ([1990] 2003), cognition is an integral part of the interaction between a subject (simultaneously rational and emotional) and its surroundings. This interaction causes structural changes in this individual's network, which is thus organizationally closed and *autopoietic* (non-linear) (Capra 1998: 279).

We could even say, seeking the origins of this thought in the beginnings of contemporaneity, that in *Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne*, Nietzsche (1873) considers that the emotional reactions stimulated by the encounter with things are the origin of our knowledge and the way we build our conceptual understanding of the world. Vattimo recently reminded us of this in the preface to Couceiro-Bueno's (2012: 10) book *La carne hecha metáfora*.

Emotionality is the basis for metaphor. Thanks to Lakoff and Johnson ([1980] 2001), we now know that concepts are metaphorical, and the result of our emotional life experiences: hierarchies, predominance of place (up/down), sensations, etc. The metaphor is the center of rhetorical discourse, as opposed to the concept,

which represents the centrality of rational discourse. This centuries-old strict division and hierarchical arrangement in favor of rational discourse has fallen apart. Indeed, it has been reversed: we no longer consider the path from myth to logos, but instead from logos to myth. The emphasis on the image has returned.

Indeed, one field of modern psychology – depth psychology, represented amongst others by Hillman (1979) – rejects the Freudian therapeutic interpretation of dreams for trying to adapt its own, oneiric-metaphorical language to the language of the daytime. To put it in Nietzschean terms, for wanting to talk about the Dionysian using Apollonian language, or to put it in Aristotelian-rationalist terms, for wanting to conceptualize metaphors.

Everywhere we hear voices that tell us that they want to recover the complex language of emotionality linked to that of rationality, and with the awareness that the discourse that is born (constructed by us) of such a complex experience of accessing knowledge (through reason, emotionality, intuition, imagination), is our fundamental tool for understanding our life, and our relationship with the world, both external and internal.

A constructivist rhetoric is interested in the construction of social reality, and considers discourse to be a socio-semiotic process. This means that the construction of symbolic meaning establishes a dialectical relationship with social reality (Halliday [1977] 2002: 23-87). Social reality creates a discourse which, in turn, decides on social reality, and configures the understanding of social reality. It is a circular process that Maturana and Varela (2003: 204) explain graphically using the image of Escher's Drawing Hands (in which two hands draw each other).

According to Halliday ([1977] 2002), the most basic form of this construction of social reality occurs in spontaneous conversation, in everyday encounters. For the same reason, persistence and change in the social system – and in culture in general – are reflected in texts, and at the same time are reproduced in those texts. This dialectical relationship has led to the diversification of the texts themselves, as an expression and creation of new social meanings (as well as ideological meanings, one might add) in specific contexts. Basically, the principles governing all these approaches existed in ancient Sophistry.

The recovery of rhetoric with the New Rhetoric has meant that since the 1970s there have been very important theoretical areas thinking critical terms about the logicist rationalism of Aristotelian origin – a rationalism about which Ortega y Gasset (1976: 41) said at a very early stage: “Today we find this attitude too petulant.” This critical thinking has sustained rhetorical demands, even when their interests did not coincide. Specifically, these were the discursive ethics of Apel and Habermas, to whom we owe the consensus theory of truth, and the constructivism of Lorenz, Lorenzen and Kamlah (Nicolás and Frapolli 2012: 611-624)

with their dialogic theory of truth – both theories were consolidated in the 1970s. In this area, we should also give pride of place to the hermeneutical approaches (Gadamer), closely linked to phenomenology (Heidegger, Ricoeur), post-structuralism (Foucault) and pragmatism (Rorty). This area also includes the aforementioned American anthropological tradition (Goffman) and the pragmatic-linguistic tradition (Austin, Peirce). Within literary theory, the same tradition also contains contributions by the deconstructivists who considered rhetoric in some of their works (for example, de Man and Fish). This entire robust landscape of critical thought, also known in some of its manifestations as *weak thought* (Vattimo and Rovatti 1988), was neglected or unknown in Spain for a couple of decades – at least in the philological sphere – due to the cultural power of the linguistic-Cartesian approaches.

If knowledge of personal and social reality involves discursive construction, we must recognize the power of discourse in change. Everything we know, we know through linguistic formulations. These formulations are, at the outset, social acquisitions, but they may be reformulated and are indeed reformulated in the creative process of daily dialogism, with ourselves and with other members of society, since we are all part of the historical evolution of events. The truth (both individual and social, since we are individuals in a society) is the result of effective connectivity between the *object*, the *expression* on the object and the *conditions* in which we introduce the expression on the object. We must not forget the situation of speech (speaker, listener, writer, reader) in which the participants apply procedures to validate what is being said. This is something similar to the *consensus* of Peirce or the *dictum* of Wittgenstein: I must determine the conditions under which I say that something is true.

What I have been referring to throughout this chapter as *constructivist rhetoric* represents (as I now say again at the end) an ontological step in the understanding of rhetoric, which falls within the sphere of modern constructivism. This approach therefore understands rhetoric not only as a means of constructing social discourses, but also as a conscious theoretical and practical instrument for dealing with our inevitable and necessary discursive definitions and interpretations of the world in which we live. By returning to its origins as a tool for citizens, rhetoric thus becomes an important instrument for explaining/analyzing the variants and conflicts of the social and political discourses that are defining our twenty-first century, in the complex context of language, knowledge, the emotions and social relations.

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