

International Conference

**RHETORIC AND THE FORMS OF EUROPEAN CULTURE:
FROM TRADITION TO CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES**

Kaunas, 6-7 May 2016



Sanzio Raffaello. The School of Athens (1509)*

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Conference abstract

Today one of the privileged domains for research and bringing up-to-date rhetoric is cultural studies, which consider it not only as a social and linguistic phenomenon, but also as a cultural tool for the exercise of freedom in democracy. An epistemic rupture, which occurred in Europe on the threshold of the 18th and 19th centuries, resulted in the gradual abandonment of the rhetoric background that had prevailed until then. The analysis of recent developments shows, in many ways, a continuous tendency to minimize or obscure the consequences of such an abandonment. These consequences are related to the means at our disposal – especially the discursive ones – to orient ourselves and to make decisions in a hazy, uncertain, precarious world, while mobilizing resources of practical reason. Indeed, as the philosopher Chaim Perelman said, it is above all the "contempt for rhetoric" and "forgetting the theory of argumentation, [which] led to the negation of practical reason"; led, in one way or another, to the war and contempt for people. Let's admit, rhetoric can not be the prerogative of self-proclaimed 'experts' or the preserve of language specialists. Rhetoric, as Aristotle already assured, is a skill shared by all people; common to all citizens. A skill that is important precisely to learn to attend to in order to master it. Everyone should be able to build *in conscience* on the ancient technè of discourse in order to defend oneself and to accuse; to engage in or refuse the engagement; and not to remain without a voice other than that of violence. Without a concrete mastery of cultural tools of rhetoric, speech is doomed to being practiced haphazardly, without any method and, above all, *without conscience*. This is what we need to investigate as part of this conference.

Particular attention will be paid to the following issues:

- Hasn't the doom of rhetoric contributed to making it even more difficult the resumption of universal forms of European culture?
- Is the practice of rhetoric a way to guard against fatal diversions of the facade consensus and the

* <http://www.wga.hu/support/viewer/z.html>

hollow verb?

- In what sense can rhetoric give access to European cultural sources capable to provide the contemporary public discourse with culturally richer intertexts?
- Can the concept of the *sublime*, formulated in antiquity, help us to overcome the pathetic dimension and declarative grandiloquence of contemporary public discourse?
- Is rhetoric, as taught at universities, engaged in the cultural tradition from which it sprang? Does the way we understand it meet the needs of a truly humanist citizen education?
- How to transmit the tools of rhetoric today? And why? To what extent does the apprenticeship of uncertainty and vulnerability constitute an issue of rhetoric and also a prime challenge for democracy?

We invite researchers in the areas of rhetoric, cultural studies, philosophy, literature, linguistics, political science to send their proposals (approx. 200-300 words) by **February 26, 2016** to the following address: j.petrulionyte@hmf.vdu.lt.

Participants will be given 20 minutes for their presentations. Conference languages: English, French, Lithuanian.

The conference will take place on May 6 and 7 (Friday and Saturday), 2016 at Vytautas Magnus University (Small Hall) in Kaunas.

On behalf of the organizing committee:

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