

The Crisis of Rhetoric: Renewing Political Speech and Speechwriting

Workshop 2: Concepts

Tuesday 12 December 2017; University of Birmingham

Notes for Speakers

Goals of the Workshop: The aim of the workshop is to enrich our understanding of political speech and rhetoric by sharing perspectives from different disciplines and developing a conversation between them. There is no need to prepare a very specific paper but you may want to draw on examples from work you have done. We are hopeful that the day can develop into a reflective and easy-going exchange between all speakers and participants with the sessions building on and responding to each other.

Timing: The schedule allots 75 minutes for each session, and some of you are sharing slots. We suggest that you prepare to speak for 15-20 minutes so that there is plenty of time for questions, responses and discussion.

Content:

Conceiving Speech: Of particular interest for this workshop is the way in which our different disciplines *conceive* of the very thing we are studying. What does each of us ‘see’ when we focus on political speech? Do we all see the same thing? Do we see different aspects of the same thing? Do we each see something very different? What do we not see? With that in mind you might want to talk about the specific ‘history’ of how your field thinks about political speech and the debates within it or about how you think about it in your research. Does it make a difference if we are thinking of a particular speech as an example of speech in general, of politics, of classical civilization? And in particular, does your field think of rhetoric as ‘rhetoric’ or as something else (‘discourse’, ‘speech’, ‘deliberation’ etc.)? Do rhetorical terms (such as ethos or pathos) matter in your field or do you have better ways of thinking about these?

Speech in Context: The first area of questioning links directly to what we might think of as transdisciplinary concepts – such as power, identity, representation and so on. Do we have a common understanding of these in relation to political speech? Are there differences we need to understand? How do we think about and analyse political speech as social action of some kind?

Analysis: Thirdly, and also of great interest, is the methodological or analytical ‘toolkit’ our different disciplines bring to the study of political speech. Which parts of this toolkit are transferable? How do they complement each other? What questions do they help us to ask and answer? Are there terms, themes, methods in your field that the rest of us have to know about?

We invite speakers to reflect on these questions in a general way while also affording specific insight into how to study and assess ‘the crisis’ of political speech. If there are examples from your work then we’d certainly like to hear about them and discuss them with you. You could (re-)read the executive summary from Workshop 1 to get a sense of what practitioners think about political speech, but we are especially interested in the view from your specific discipline.