

The Crisis of Rhetoric: Renewing Political Speech and Speechwriting

Workshop 3: Ethos & Identification

Wednesday 14th March, 2018

University of Glasgow; Adam Smith Building room 711 (D8 on campus map)

A fundamental theme of rhetorical theory and practice, ancient and modern, is ‘ethos’. This term refers to the ‘character’ a speaker presents or performs and which classical rhetoricians considered one of the three sources of proof in rhetorical discourse: a speaker must present themselves as someone an audience can believe, trust or see as in possession of the authority to speak about particular matters. Contemporary rhetoric has broadened the application of the concept to cover the process of ‘identification’ between speaker and audience: the ways in which a rhetorician forges a sense of commonality or shared interest. Pushing this further, it can be argued that ethos involves a kind of ‘invitation’ to audiences to conceive of their own collective character or individual identity in a particular way. Consequently, the rhetorical concept of ethos overlaps with and complements research in ethics, political psychology, political theory, critical theory, political science (especially studies of political leadership and personality), media studies and political marketing, cultural sociology and performance studies.

Applied to the contested concept of a ‘crisis of rhetoric’, research into ethos might hypothesise that contemporary politics is marked by the inability of ‘traditional’ or ‘mainstream’ politicians to establish a stable and reliable ethos, and to provide performances of ethos which are recognisable or meaningful to citizens. It might also be that audiences are refusing to accept the invitation to assume the identity proposed for them in mainstream politics and that they are instead looking elsewhere for a sense of collective belonging.

With these issues in mind, key questions for this workshop include:

How should we conceptualise ethos? How do different disciplines help us to understand it?

How have political orators in different historical periods created and maintained credible public personae and used them to promote themselves and their political agendas?

How is rhetorical ethos used today to create identities and shared values with audiences?

What are the challenges to constructing political ethos today? Is the expression of ethos most hindered by social changes or by changes in the technologies of communication?

Each session starts with a short presentation by invited speakers, followed by an open discussion to which all participants are invited to contribute.

Schedule

09.00 Arrival and registration

09.15 Introduction to the workshop (Henriette van der Blom and Alan Finlayson)

09.30 Session 1: **Ethos in political rhetoric in ancient Rome**

Karl-J. Hölkeskamp (Professor of Ancient History, University of Cologne, Germany).

Henriette van der Blom (Lecturer in Ancient History, University of Birmingham)

10.45 Coffee

11.00 Session 2: **Constructions of Ethos in Contemporary British Politics**
John Gaffney (Professor of Politics & Co-Director, Aston Centre for Europe
Research Director, Politics and International Relations)

12.15 Lunch

13.00 Session 3: **Philosophies of Ethos**
Sophia Hatzisavvidou (Lecturer in Politics, University of Bath)

14.15 Closing Discussion and 'Next Steps'

15:00 End of workshop