



POST-TRUTH, RHETORIC AND THE AESTHETICISING OF CONTEMPORARY POLITICS:

THE POWER OF RHETORIC

University of Cumbria, Lancaster Campus

5th September – 6th September 2019

Trump's Presidency; Brexit; the rise of the authoritarian right in Europe and South America; deniers of climate change, vaccine benefits and progressive science; critics of 'political correctness': contemporary conservative and populist social, political and public discourses that rebut criticisms from 'institutional interests', the 'liberal intelligentsia' and 'scientific elites' in propagating truth or fact. Whilst critiques of the status and power of truth and knowledge have always accompanied the enlightenment and modern commitment to scientific truth from both left and right, the deployment of 'post-truth' and 'fake news' as a dominant discourse and the resilience of slogan and claim or evidence and analysis has reached a crescendo in the early 21st Century.

The rise of 'post-truth' discourse has highlighted new, intense and persuasive forms of rhetoric at work within spheres of politics and practice. Rhetoric has been seen historically as the poor relative to the pursuit of truth and knowledge since Plato's critique of the sophists, yet the ways in which messages have been conveyed have always been as critical as the messages themselves, evidenced in critical studies of ideology and discourse. Certainly, rhetorical power appears a key variable in the contemporary populist politics and worthy of critical examination in its own terms. More than simply being dismissed as aberrant or deficient forms of intellectual discourse, the persuasiveness of these forms of discourse are increasingly challenging us to re-think the ways in which we understand, conceptualise and critique the rhetorics they work within. In

particular, this directs critical focus towards questions of style, representation and aesthetics, where culture and rhetoric meet in persuasive forms.

Whilst analyses of rhetoric are currently drawn to the broader issues of post-truth and the persuasiveness of rhetorical power in politics, they are equally important in everyday policy, process and practice. It is rhetoric that instantiates and reinforces orthodoxy, that provides the communicative culture by which decision-making and procedural agencies occur and practices are formed, performed and understood. These meso and micro concerns, and their aesthetics, are as important in understanding the power of rhetoric as they grand narratives.

This two-day seminar seeks to explore how the rise of different persuasive modalities relate to the traditional relationships between rhetoric, philosophy, politics, culture and aesthetics. It aims to bring together contributors from across different areas to discuss these relationships, and explore ways in which critique can be reframed, or reimagined, in response to post-truth rhetorics. We therefore invite papers from both within and across disciplinary divides in the humanities and social sciences, whether conceptual or theoretical studies or case analysis and studies. We are also interested in practitioner participation as well as academics. We are happy to consider panel suggestions, alternate forms of intellectual presentation and papers (both polished and in progress), which should be aimed at 20 minutes maximum presentation.

Topics may include:

- Reassessments of the place of rhetoric within philosophical and political discourse in the light of post-truth and populist movements (e.g. Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe)
- The differences and continuities between philosophical, rhetorical and aesthetic accounts of political identities
- The effects of new media on traditional models of critique and critical discourse
- Accounts of new persuasive forms within specific political and media contexts (e.g. political leaders using Twitter; new media forms of protest; etc.)
- The affective turn in cultural studies and its response to 'post-truth' (e.g. Brian Massumi, Karen Barad)
- Reassessing and re-theorising 'propaganda' in the contemporary age (e.g. Jason Stanley)
- The politics of aesthetics and the aesthetics of politics (e.g. Jacques Ranciere, Boris Groys)

- Rhetoric and Pedagogies – Educational Rhetorics
- Rhetorics in practice – art, work, professions and their spaces

The event is hosted by HASCE at the University of Cumbria (<https://www.cumbria.ac.uk/research/enterprise/hasce/>) and the Cultural Difference and Social Solidarity Network (CDSS).

Cultural Difference and Social Solidarity Network (CDSS) is an international organisation focused broadly on fostering collaboration and debate around the broad issues of difference and solidarity in human societies. The network organizes regular conferences, as well as periodic seminars and collaborative projects (see www.differenceandsolidarity.org). It has a particular interest in supporting international research collaboration and younger researchers entering the international stage. The network works towards the development of trans-disciplinary and trans-national understandings of and interventions in questions of solidarity and difference. This event is the first collaboration between the CDSS Network and HASCE.

Prospective participants should complete the proforma and provide a 300-word abstract by visiting the CDSS website and clicking on the link for the seminar - www.differenceandsolidarity.org.

Any queries should be addressed by email to Tom Grimwood: tom.grimwood@cumbria.ac.uk - with the heading CDSS Rhetoric, by Friday Wednesday 26th June 2019. Acceptances and otherwise will be notified by Wednesday 3rd July 2019. Please note we can also operate a rolling programme of considering and accepting paper proposals as they are submitted to facilitate those who need to apply for funding.

The seminar fees, which include seminar packs, administrative costs, daily refreshments and lunches is:

Presenters: – 75

Postgraduates: – 40

Practitioners: - 40

We have a number of fee waivers and fee reductions that are available on application. We can also advise on a range of accommodation options in Lancaster, including student halls.

Seminar Organisers:

Tom Grimwood: Senior Research Fellow and Academic Lead, HASCE, University of Cumbria, UK

Paul Reynolds: Reader in Sociology and Social Philosophy, Edge Hill University, UK (and Co-Director, CDSS)