

## PREFACE



THIS BOOK IS THE RESULT of years of work done by scholars involved in the International Rhetoric Culture Project (see [www.rhetoricculture.org](http://www.rhetoricculture.org)), and in order to show the scope of cooperation and the wide range of activities that preceded the publication of results, we outline here the history of the project in some detail.

According to our private myth, it all began one winter day of 1981 in the Haddon Library at Cambridge University. Some rare rays of the sun were playing on the books on the shelves and made Ivo forget what he had come for. Then, suddenly, the title of Stephen's green book caught his eyes: *The Said and the Unsaid* (1978). What a fitting title, he thought, for it evoked all the problems that he was then encountering in his study of symbolism, later to be published as *The Social Practice of Symbolization* (1988). There and then he began to read and found that in his preface Stephen had outlined a vision of research that was very much in tune with his own, a "rhetorical and hermeneutical vision of language that returns language to its proper context of everyday uses and understandings" (Tyler 1978: XII).

Here is not the place to recall the details of how we met and began to discuss our mutual interest in a rhetorical theory of culture. It must suffice to say that we eventually arranged a workshop on "Rhetoric Culture Theory" at the 1998 Biennial Conference of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) in Frankfurt/Main.

Afterward we found it premature to publish any results and thought it better to involve more of the leading scholars working on the intersection of rhetoric, anthropology, philosophy, literary studies, and the like. Perhaps nothing would have come of our plans if the German Research Society (DFG) had not agreed to finance Christian Meyer and a small team of junior students of Mainz University to assist with the library research that still needed to be done in order to draft an application for funding further conferences. In addition, several senior students and staff joined our team, notably Anna-Maria Brand-

stetter and Felix Girke of Mainz, and Anke Reichenbach of Leipzig University. This was an exciting time when we had constant contact with each other, when our email correspondence was growing daily, and when one distinguished scholar after another joined our project.

In March 2001 we sent out an application to the Volkswagen Foundation for support of a conference on “General Rhetoric Culture Theory” and one on “Rhetoric and Linguistics.” A few months later we were told that funds had been granted to hold the two conferences as requested, scheduled for February and July 2002 respectively, and to be held at the Institute of Anthropology and African Studies at Mainz University.

After the conferences we entrusted the publication of results to Berghahn Books, which agreed to start a new series entitled *Studies in Rhetoric and Culture*; and together with Marion Berghahn—who herself holds a Ph.D. in social anthropology—and her staff, we drafted a first introduction to the series.

But although we had announced that we would now begin to publish, we soon began to doubt whether this was wise, for we still needed further contributions to general theory and had nothing or little on special subjects such as economics, politics, social relations, and religion. Wouldn't it be better to use our energies first to conduct further conferences that would address these themes and would allow us once and for all to lay the foundation for the series that Marion had so generously offered to publish?

So, from Spring 2003 onward for a whole year we worked on yet another application, supported in Mainz by Anne, Christian, and Felix as well as colleagues from other universities: Donald Brenneis (Santa Cruz), Ralph Cintron (Chicago), Stephen Gudeman (Minneapolis), and Jean Lydall (Addis Ababa). Others occasionally gave us advice, especially Jon Abbink (Amsterdam), Vincenzo Cannada Bartoli (Rome), and Susanne Schröter (Frankfurt/M). The Volkswagen Foundation took quite a while to decide, but eventually funds were granted for two further conferences, one on “Rhetoric in Social Relations and Religion” (February 2005) and one on “Rhetoric in Politics and Economics” (July 2005), and it was at this point that the “Rhetoric Culture Project” really came into its own.

It would be tempting to tell more about the history of the project here and relate, for example, how we discovered Jean Nienkamp's new book *Internal Rhetorics* and celebrated it with a workshop held in her honor at Mainz, July 2003; or how Philippe-Joseph Salazar invited members of the Rhetoric Culture Group to explain their project and reveal their ambitions at his conference “About an African Athens” in June 2004 at Cape Town University; or how we began to realize the relevance of chiasmus for Rhetoric Culture theory, discovered Boris Wiseman and Anthony Paul, and subsequently asked them to attend one of our conferences; but here there is room for only one more episode:

Sometime after we had completed the “Rhetoric Culture Conferences,” Gerard Hauser invited several of us to the “12<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference of the Rhetoric Society of America” scheduled for 26–29 May 2006 in Memphis. He wrote that he and Ralph Cintron had discussed the need to continue the dialogue between anthropology and rhetoric, and that they had floated a proposal to David Zarefsky, President-Elect of the Rhetoric Society of America, to include a session devoted to the work of anthropologists that bore on rhetoric and would highlight the presence of anthropologists, draw a good audience, and promote debate.

Mentioned in the program as one of the highlights and entitled “Rhetoric Culture: A Dialogue Between Anthropology and Rhetoric,” the panel was included in the conference and drew indeed a good audience and promoted a lot of fruitful talk. Most importantly, the conference brought out once again how much rhetoric can gain from anthropology and vice versa. In his introduction to the program, Zarefsky had written that the conference chose “Sizing up Rhetoric” as its central theme because it was time “to take stock of rhetoric’s current position in the academy and in our culture.” Scholars should also reflect, he continued, “on what rhetoric’s ‘size’ is and ought to be—how large should be the scope and range of projects we undertake,” and finally he encouraged everyone to “think bigger” about their research and teaching aspirations.

At the first plenary session, Steven Mailloux (Irvine) enlarged on this in a talk entitled “One Size Doesn’t Fit All: The Contingent Universality of Rhetoric.” He stressed the point that the transdisciplinary perspective of rhetoric both explains and challenges traditional disciplinary boundaries (thanks to Steve for sending us the manuscript!). This was, of course, very much in accord with the Rhetoric Culture project, which by definition is based on a wide concept of rhetoric and makes the case that the relationship between anthropology and rhetoric is one of mutual interdependence.

After the conference, we decided to ask a scholar of the Rhetorical Society of America to join us as third editor of the Berghahn Books series *Studies in Rhetoric and Culture*. The choice was not difficult, for Robert Hariman had been helping us already a great deal with contacts, conversation, and editorial advice. So we asked Bob, who without any ado accepted the invitation.

The conferences held at the Johannes Gutenberg-University of Mainz have been recorded on video, and the resulting films are available from Berghahn Books and Documentary Educational Resources in a series entitled *Conference in Film*, which “captures,” as our flyer says, “the rhetorical element of scholarly discourse and enables viewers to witness the drama—or shall we say comedy—of academic culture.”

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