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ATINER's Conference Paper Series MED2013-0554

The Contemporary Communicator:
A 21st Century Rhetorician

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Printed in Athens, Greece by the Athens Institute for Education and Research.

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ISSN **2241-2891** 24/09/2013

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ATINER CONFERENCE PAPER SERIES No: MED2013-0554

This paper should be cited as follows:

Magagnini, M. (2013) "The Contemporary Communicator: A 21st Century *Rhetorician*" Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: MED2013-0554.

The Contemporary Communicator: A 21st Century Rhetorician

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Abstract

The study of online communication processes is challenged by the presence of elements of classical rhetoric science. These elements are persuasion strategies (ethos, pathos and logos), and the abundant use of rhetorical operations and figures by communications agents. Our research states that there is a convergence between classical rhetoric and social networks communication. Both realities share and mutually feed each other with resources in order to achieve more persuasive and creative communication. Therefore, the network user may be designated as the new XXI century *rhetorician*. In order to support this statement, the paper will review main authors and publications that have already established links between the Greek agora --original rhetorical environment-- and the Internet. The review will also cover implications of classical Rhetoric science in the hypertext, in network configuration or in cyber-journalism. The paper will tackle explanatory features of Internet communications, taking into account the intersection of the Greek agora and the type of discourse coming out from the Net, (Computer Mediated Communication). Discourse features are shared by oral and written discourses. such as persuasive characteristics of conversational language usage, in interpersonal communications. In conclusion, Internet communications becomes a mediated communication through technological devices, leading to a critical review of present study models. The paper will try to show the link between Rhetoric and our actual communicational environment.

Key words: Social networks, rhetoric, communication, Internet, user, persuasion

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Introduction, Objectives and Methodology

Certainly there are elements of classical Rhetoric on Internet, becoming a new challenge in the study of online communication processes. We refer by these to the use of persuasion strategies (*ethos*, *pathos*, *logos*) as well as to the abundant use of rhetorical figures and operations by players of current communication. Our research stands up for the convergence of classical rhetoric and online communication, which become two realities mutually sharing resources for a more persuasive and creative communication. Therefore, we may refer to the social network user as the new rhetor of the twenty first century.

In order to reach these goals the authors have performed document review and critical reflection of articles and authors who had established similarities between the Greek agora --original rhetorical space-- and Internet; and of authors who had spotted implications of ancient Rhetoric on hypertext, a social network configuration or on cyber journalism. These two scenarios are linked by the particular nature of discourse which originates in social network or *Computer Mediated Communication*. Thus, we approach social network communication features, interconnecting Rhetoric and our communication present, one mediated by social network boom as new paradigm.

Presence of Rhetoric in Internet Communication

Internet may be considered as a new rhetorical space. Several authors have underlined the similarities between the Greek agora --original rhetorical space- and Internet (Navarro, 2003; Gamonal, 2004).

Let us remember that classic agora was the public place which was the nerve centre to public life, to politics, trade and culture of the Greek polis. The *bouleuterion* was a central spot specifically reserved for celebrating assemblies and discussing topics of public interest. Theater-shaped, it allowed the speaker to be heard by all attendants. "Internet is the most similar space to agora right now, except for the fact that Internet is not a physical space" (Gamonal, 2004: 12). Indeed, both spaces share some essential characteristics: a) open public space where different social classes attend, and interact through words; b) their social character and c) some access restrictions: even though both spaces developed within a democratic environment, agora activity was restricted to women and slaves. Internet, today as well, displays digital divide which affects most of the present world geography.

George P. Landow (1992: 120-121) already considered the role and implications of classical Rhetoric on hypertext, and analysed the five elements of Rhetoric in their construction and pragmatic aspects. Tomás Albaladejo goes further in building bridges between this old discipline and Internet. According to Albaladejo (2005a) a website construction responds to a rhetorical productive process, regarding the semiotic organisation of the significant object being constructed; and so, *inventio* helps getting content and its preparation;

dispositio helps structure; elocutio expresses it making use of all rhetorical tools, and actio or pronuntiatio helps communication.

Jerónimo Alayón (2009), following gets deeper on rhetorical operations structuring hypertext discourse. This scholar conducts a very comprehensive and correct analysis; therefore, we sum up the relation of rhetorical operations, and will complete it with other scholars' opinions, as well as with ours.

Table 1. Transfer of rhetorical operations inventio, dispositio and elocutio to the Web, according to Alayón (2009). Source: authors' elaboration.

Eleme	nts of classical Rhet	Elements of the Web	
	Classic topica		hypermedia topica
1. Inventio	Ars, ingenium		Persuasive signs: linguistic, visual and listening
2. Dispositio	Ordo naturalis, ordo artificialis		Ordo artificialis retrieving ordo naturalis characteristic of the mind
	Exordium (captatio benevolentiae)		Intro
	Narratio (rem docere)		Site map
	Argumentatio (altercatio)		FAQ
	Peroratio		Pop up
3. Elocutio	Ornatus (figures)	repetition	Design frequent repetitions
		catacresis	Tool box, open window
		metaphor	Design allegory
		eufemism	Document erasing
		hyperbole	Zoom

When transferring the first operation structuring discourse to hypertext, we may notice that web desingers, before coming up with a site, performs a topic search operation and looks for reasoned arguments for hypermedia discourse, like a classic rhetor's search. As in the classical *topica*, the webmaster enjoys the use of hyper media *topica*. Alayón suggests using for this concept the term: *topica hiperscripti*, that is, hyper classified catalogues on the Web where webmasters are able to retrieve linguistic, visual or aural signs which discourse receivers may immediately recognize as valid persuasive signs. In addition, if these signs are clever, –the author explains– the Internet user remains with an agreeable feeling, reminding of the value *ars* and *ingenium* in the *inventio*.

Regarding the second structuring discourse operation, *dispositio*, hypertext order seems less natural, given the freedom offered to the receiver when chosing their reading itineraries. Nevertheless, we share Alayón's doubt on the natural characteristic of hypertext order, given that hyper texting may recover the natural process of our mind, as it was before the inversion performed by the printing. Returning to *dispositio*, part disposition within a rhetorical discourse followed this order: *exordium*, *narratio*, *argumentatio* and *peroratio*. Alayón (2009) analyses thoroughly this classical operation and sets up an accurate correspondence with hypermedia communication.

Looking at the hypertext within any website, the multimedia introduction or intro, with its combination of text, image and sound, acts as *captatio benevolentiae* capturing the receiver's attention. When going through intro, the receiver is able to quickly see the website (*partitio*), thus knowing how to structure their own discourse. In contrast to classical rhetorical discourse, what we usually denote as menu is visible on the top or at the left margin, as a navigation map; it not however read in the order suggested by the author in the hypertext (Alayón, 2009).

FAQ (*Frequently Asked Questions*) are a powerful argumentation device, which, according to Alayón, remind of *altercatio*. The webmaster or new rhetor sets up reasoning in the shape of counter arguments, gradually deconstructing them, to reconstruct a pro-standpoint (2009).

Finally, peroratio shows in very few websites. Some websites display a device or pop up, a window open when leaving the site, as in a last minute resort by the webmaster to persuade the hyper media receiver. 'These pop ups do not account for the axis thematis; they hit the receiver's emotional topography usually with some kind of present, in a very similar modality to the ending of certain classical discourses, the peroratio laudationis' (Alayón, 2009).

Elocutio is easily recognizable by the frequent use of rhetorical figures within the hypertext. According to the web configuration, scholars such as Jean Clément (1995) and Espen Aarseth (1997) already spotted certain remains of the main tropes in every discourse based on hyperlinks. In this context, the synecdoque (the part for the whole) means that a particular fragment, node or hypertext scene, is taken by the entire hyper document. In contrast to the printed text, it becomes a dynamic figure: with each note, the user tends to imagine the whole, but every new node in the horizon forces the user to reshape the total view of the discovered hyper document. Asyndeton (leaving out conjunctions between words or sentences) appears in hyper texts when each note is perceived on screen without obvious junction, or performed, by now, with other nodes in the structure. Finally, metaphor allows for each node to appear according to their configuration paths; that is, their coherence is built on a greater coherence. This non-linear discourse also displays a clear rhetorical figure, hyperbaton. According to Alayón, rhetorical figures in hyper text discourse correspond to the elements of advertising rhetoric. He brings out some of them in particular: repetition, reinforcing and augmenting the perception of a particular sign; catacresis or tralation, moving a sign from a context into another (such as the expression 'opening a window' or 'tool box'); metaphor, the highly complexity shown by many websites mean almost allegories. The perisology or euphemism is the harmful escape of a taboo term, as in 'deleting a document' instead of destroying a document'. There are also augmentation and diminishing hyperbolic figures in the zoom (2009).

Brenda Estúpiñez (2009) states that interface design responds to a rhetorical process performed by *inventio*, *dispositio*, *argumentatio* and *actio* operations, in order to obtain a persuasive product. *Inventio* sets the pace for element definition and knowledge, elements involved in interface development.

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In order to do so, it is necessary to plan the site features, the main tasks the user will be able to perform on it and how these tasks are supported by digital objects (buttons, links, images, texts, sound, etc.), as well as the scenarios in which these action will take place. Elocutio concentrates tasks and already defined objects in the interface. This process is supported by tools used in other fields, generating diagrams to guide designers and programmers in the application development. Examples of these tools may be mock ups, settings, storyboards, flow charts, software prototypes. These tools allow for professionals in all areas cooperating in the project to coordinate and act conjointly, sharing the same goals. Actio denotes the realization of a website, planned in detail, with elements of the above mentioned operations. In this one, electronic document contents fit media possibilities, breaking up with canons of written text. At the same time, the need to adjust to the audience brings out considering three main issues: immersion in reading, that is, to take advantage of the graphic opportunities of digital format so that the reader may take over the content; text kynesics, or opportunities which paper does not offer (readability elements); and finally, the folding of the text, or hyper text use to show information to the reader whenever required (define contents to be included in each section, adjusting to the audience).

Table 2. Diagram for user interface development, following Brenda Estúpiñez (2009). Source: authors' elaboration

	(2007). Source, authors etaboration				
	Initial situation				
Situation analysis	 Product profile 	Inventio			
Situation analysis	 User profile 				
	 Context profile 				
	Reach				
Interface definition	 Interface attributes 	Dispositio			
	Function diagram				
	Surfing route				
Conceptual	 Information systems 	Elegatio			
development	Graphic style	Elocutio			
	User screen design				
	Development				
Immlementation and	Usability				
Implementation and maintenance	Optimization	Actio			
	• Launch				
	Cyber metrics				
	Maintenance				

Along the same lines, Alejandro Tapia (2003) gathers the elements of classical rhetoric on a website design, as an orienting resource for the user interpretation of the particular site. This scholar bases his study on Janice R. Walker's work, *Reinventing Rhetoric: The Classical Canon in the Computer Age*, an essay published on 1997: She gathers an account of the issues faced by rhetorics making the shift from a classical rhetoric directed at a printed text, to

online rhetoric. Walker pointed out then, concepts such as multimedia, hypertexts and its effect on argumentation, copyright, or memory. Based on this work, Tapia brings out that knowledge and subsequent practice of classic rhetorical concepts would ease visual designers' tasks, the creation of more efficient interfaces, more accessible and usable.

One of its applications could be the introduction in flash language as exordium. Some web sites propose an animated introduction, or music, to introduce the audience into the topic or the tone of the page. This resource represents a simple example that the planning and layout of a webpage is a rhetorical action. Its study and understanding helps to set up the success of online communication. Another rhetorical resource applied to web design is the page as architectural metaphor. This metaphor helps understand the written material since it is subject to a structure known by any user. Web pages have, as architectural spaces, the characteristic of being habitable. No wonder netsurfing starts from Home, where we always start a journey. Internet also reactivates the presence of common places. Indeed, when we surf we use icons which help us in the process and which are based on associations with scenarios known to the user (new common places): scissors, house, trash bin, the clip, or the brush we use to make metaphors of operational functions in software programmes. Tapia believes that the shift of these concepts to the Web show how our digital era is a continuation of western discourse tradition. Javier Díaz Noci is also a scholar who notes the presence of Rhetoric on Internet. He articulates it to cyber journalism. In his Definición teórica de las características del ciberperiodismo: elementos de la comunicación digital' (2008) [Theoretical definition of cyber journalism features: elements of digital communication] he uses a classification criterion for journalistic cybertexts, in connection to the parts of discourse in classical rhetoric. He also reviews the scholars who relate the hyper media discourse with rhetorical or stylistic figures (65-79).

Table 3. Rhetorical classification of journalistic cybertexts. Source: Díaz Noci, 2008: 60

Criteria for rhetorical classification of journalistic cybertexts					
	Parts of discourse				
Topoi	Inventio: Multilinearity and poly				
Narrative genres	acroasis				
Interpretation genres	Dispositio: Hypertext structures				
Dialogic genres	Actio: Interactivity				
Argumentative genres	Elocutio: Multimedia resources				
	Memoria				

Along the same lines, Roberto Gamonal undertakes a suggestive analysis of the metaphoric terms on the Web starting with the great metaphor of the Web of Webs: 'million communication points scattered around the Earth, connected by an intricate web of cables, which not even the mythological Aracne would have better interwoven' (2004). In addition, Internet is an ocean

where the user surfs, software is a browser, and in the journey we may encounter pirates. Internet is a hotel, where its pages are hosted in a host (hospitality), there are rooms (chat rooms), assistants helping us to move around this space and where accommodation is paid (hosting). Internet is an eco system, with worms, viruses and anti-viruses, and, however trying to become clean, sometimes receives trash (spam). Thus, metaphors follow one another: Internet is a highway, office, democracy, culture, etc., all of them examples full of rhetorical figures which help us better understand how it works without needing specific systems knowledge on the part of the user. As in ancient times, Rhetoric, once more, becomes a social tool. García García (2005) wonders whether there is a specific Rhetoric on Internet. The scholar concludes that, the way certain general principles exist which explain the rhetorical nature in every kind of discourse, there is also Rhetoric linked to the very nature and great paradigms of Internet: data bases and knowledge management, hyper texts, text convergence, interactivity and interaction, synchrony and asynchrony in communication and universal access. Perhaps, the most interesting issue for the present research is the catalogue of innumerable doors which Internet opens to Rhetoric: the combination of all different media and expressive materials, emission times, the new role of the user, relationships between discourses occurring on the web, user networks, authenticity issues, source reliability and value, cultural globalization; these are, among others, some fields opening up for the study of Rhetoric on online social networks.

The Presence of Rhetoric on Social Networks

All these principles may apply to any social network, which just by being a web site aimed at helping a persuasive communication becomes rhetoric right away. Rhetoric and networks appear, therefore, as two converging and analogous realities. As we have already pointed out, Rhetoric on social networks is a virgin field, without scientific research work which directly supports the close union of these two realities, at least in Spain. De Salas (2009: 77), in an article about social network advertising, citing Gamonal (2004), relates the activity on social networks with the ancient Greeks activity in the agora.

In several articles published by Berlanga, she already stated the belief that the spectacular development of social networks such as Facebook, derives mainly from the presence on their discourse, of classical Rhetoric principles. These principles have been enriched with iconic language and audiovisual language, extremely important in our present culture. The author showed, therefore, the need for Rhetoric participation in every present communicative action, especially in audiovisual communication. Berlanga then defended with great success her doctoral thesis, 'Discourse in digital media: classical rhetoric principles on social networks, Facebook as a case'. She analysed in depth the discourse of social networks users, and she has recently published some parts

of this research, with experts confirming her theories on the topic (Berlanga, 2013). The union of these two scenarios receives its origin in the nature of discourse stemming from social networks. This discourse has been denoted with different denominations, according to diverse scholars. The most common denomination is Computer Mediated Communication or CMC (Baron, 2000:158). It refers to communication on Internet, electronic, virtual or surfer. The origin of this name goes back to Hiltz and Turoff (1978). Their study on human communication through computers originated the subject of virtual ethnography (Hine, 2004). It is true that technological convergence has modified codes and languages, but mainly communication itself, and practices and social interaction liked with it. The analysis of discourses generated within social networks by different profiles (in terms of age, education and gender) showed the wide use of figures and tropes in their conversations, with an average of 2.7 figures per intervention. Regarding rhetorical strategies, any social network presents a structure which favors and helps the set up of these strategies. In connection to the strategy ethos, there lies among users a certain idea of authority, since the relationship which the user established or still maintains with a certain person in real life influences the relationship with the very same person in the virtual world. This is precisely the reason why the user adds the relationship as friend. Logos, taken as rhetorical strategy, rarely appears on social networks like Facebook; it depends on other strategies. On Facebook, topics and messages in the discourse are per se, second to persuasion and may be qualified as trivial. The basic element in each micro network is that the user moves around friends-relatives. Nevertheless, in other type of networks, such as LinkedIn, a professional network, logos acquires a dominant role. Regarding pathos, the very nature of these online platforms shapes it as the dominant factor on the network. Facebook wall, for example, is neatly orientated towards empathy and affective relationship. This is why the user calls friends (with all the semantic depth of the term) to those who have just been given entry to the micro-network. In short, the social network supplies support to persuasion and communication as never before. These particularities shape the social network user as the new rhetor of our time.

Conclusions

Discourse on social networks share features from oral discourse as well as written discourse; it is interpersonal communication, summing up the eminently persuasive character of conversational use of language; in short, it is mediated communication by technological devices, displaying certain condition which force to a critical revision of the usual analysis models.

Among future lines of study, we may propose the role that the social network user plays. This user is a sender who profits from the rhetorical skill of humans, and widens it with technological advantages. Thus, we may speak of the network user as the new rhetor of the twentieth century. Theoretical studies and field work show that the three communication strategies described by

Aristotle may be found on the Web, as an extension of professional and personal relations. Net users, as classical orators, follow a similar process to that used by ancient speakers in the construction of discourses: they perform an *inventio* looking for ideas and reasoning; they later organise them somehow (*dispositio*), –however, not following a common discourse order– and express them subsequently, according to certain elocution strategies. They finally represent them under new forms of pronunciations (*actio*). Thus, these discourses will remain on the network adding up to the content treasure of the social network (*memoria*) once they have been spoken up. We therefore dare to talk about cyber rhetoric.

Research in this field is by no means definitive or finished, because of its distinctive features. The development of the object of study demands for a constant update and methodological reformulation. Let us open a door to the debate of the rhetorical component on emergent communication media

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