

The Obsolete Art of Disney Rhetoric

In his essay on Rhetoric, Aristotle seems to base a certain assumption on human natural inclination towards truth. Much of his later argument provides an analysis of rhetoric as a mean to bring forward a truth based on the above mentioned assumption. The word "persuasion" is often adopted in this context; how is for instance the orator going to persuade his or her listeners about a certain truth, this given the orator's aids (various types of evidences but also his character) and his aims (whether political, forensic or ceremonial)? A very early recommendation, almost rendered by Aristotle as implicit and obvious, is the orator's adherence to facts and the repression of any irrational feelings that could easily affect the listener, such as pity or anger. The use of syllogism as a way to provide a complete truth, seems also a logical argumentation to provide the orator with an unquestionable truth: "if this one is so then this second one is so because it cannot be otherwise".

Further in his books on "The Art of Rhetoric", Aristotle moves on describing the various types of cases to be considered when addressing both the audience and the subject of the oration. For the latter he goes as far as providing definitions and distinctions for each of the possible elements which may comprise the subject of the oration. In these definitions and distinctions Aristotle is quite categorical, leaving no space for ambiguous exceptions. The reader thus finds him or herself soon furnished with a broad spectrum of prejudices which he or she may apply when preparing an oration. Firstly, he or she has to give an impression of goodness, then he or she, depending on the age, may use a certain set of examples which is more or less appropriate to a young or old orator. Moreover, the Aristotle instructed reader can now adopt all sorts of tricks to, for instance, heighten the honour of a not so honourable person, yet Aristotle himself dedicates ample parts of his books to morally instruct the reader on good and evil.

"The Art of Rhetoric" can be in this sense seen as a Book of Magic, instructables that can be potentially adopted for black magic, or is Aristotle right in saying that anyhow the good and right will at last prevail over the bad and wrong? Is this really a natural human inclination? At present, we may be able to view Aristotle's User Manual on Rhetoric as a Le Corbusier's Manual for young architects, a very logical instruction on how to intervene on for instance a urban landscape or even worst, a Vladimir Propp's like manual for Disney's screen writers aiming to persuade a particular group of young audience, like for example the new wealthy class of oversized Chinese kids as targeted in recent years with animation productions such as Disney's Mulan, Dreamworks' Kung Fu Panda and Pixars' Up. Under such comparisons, and knowing the devastating

outcomes of such modernist and technology driven approaches, in which way are we to view such logical instructions?

Platonically speaking, Aristotle did diligently his scientific work of breaking up the 101 parts constituting a chariot and describe each and every function; the reader is now able to detect and judge an oration yet is he or she able to give a proper oration after such a reading? In other words, would he or she, like a computer program be able to execute his or her art of rhetoric ("if this is one so and that one is so then do so else do nothing")? The context in which "The Art of Rhetoric" was written has drastically changed. Despite any human natural inclination towards truth, as Aristotle states, many questionable truths are today artificially sustained and further truths are scavenged within, this without the possibility of unplugging the institutional and media driven machines that artificially feed them. How are we then to go about in providing instructions to the new offspring of orators? Is the art of persuasion really the skill to look for or are we rather to provide them with insights to detonate the already socially pervasive persuasion by means of, for instance, authenticity (e.g. Studio Ghibli's animation production prior being bought by Disney)? Given that a potential orator may be already furnished from the start with means of persuasion (talk shows are in the background of our childhood), how are we to think the art of rhetoric in today's context?

As Aristotle seems to imply, the orator needs to clearly execute a list of procedures, yet, as these procedures have now largely expanded onto a massive library, a freezer of goods that no human brain can store, modern orators may either resort to the old method of only keeping that which can be humanly memorized and orally transmitted or they might as well accept to extend their orations with a technical auxiliary. Such an extension though may at last bring forward the danger of substituting the actual orator. What about then asking the advice of the oracle?

Three days prior this oration, the professor asked a student warming up his pasta in the kitchen, to prepare this oration based on Aristotle's books on rhetoric. The student, who by then was preparing for a seminar on Nietzsche, promptly switched his mind-set to face the upcoming task of a public oration. He was not so much worry with the actual text but rather with the task per se. That night the student went to bed with this question in mind: "What should I prepare and how will I address my young audience knowing that my professor is also there and knowing my rather hazardous way of making statements?" The student did not know that the answers to his questions were all laying in the Aristotelian readings ahead of him. He just went to bed with such

problems in the back of his head (at present he has other problems to think of but those requires far more time to solve).

In the upcomingness of the event, his mind, the oracle he regularly pays homage to, provided him with a revelation; among his usual dreams there was one with the very professor, they were together in a small gym and she was asking him to enact the Aristotle's text at which words the student seats on the ground and starts rolling the wheel of a small skateboard. For each turn a catastrophe was happening somewhere in the planet at which the professor told him to be less pathetic and the student started to idiotically stroll around with the skateboard chained on his neck.

The above mentioned narration may not be, according to Aristotle, most suited for a prime man like the one talking. It might also be of no need for the audience to get further into answering the issues above mentioned, namely concerned with the actuality of rhetoric in a media governed scenario. As a matter of fact, the above described dream had probably more to do with Nietzsche than Aristotle, and can easily be explained by telling the audience that the student was in a small dance room doing Chinese gymnastic prior the occurrence in the kitchen.

Yet here one could raise a new question concerning the decision making, the structure and the style an orator is to adopt, in particular when he or she is not aiming to persuade the audience upon a decision but rather stimulate the audience to reflect, as we can believe it is the role of a humanist. Given then the myriad of possibilities that a contemporary orator has to prepare, style and structure his oration, can we also think of a multi-styled and multi-structural output which in itself is not highly conclusive and do not provide any drastic final assumptions but rather allows the audience itself to be active interpreters of the matter?