

RHETORIC IN CLASSICAL SHAPE AND MODERN ADAPTION:
THE *HISTORISCHES WÖRTERBUCH DER RHETORIK*

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The *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik* can well be characterized by a quotation from the famous French *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers*: “The work that we begin and also intend to finish,” says in the introduction to the first volume (1751), “has a twofold aim: as an Encyclopedia its purpose –as far as possible– is to show the order and coherence of human knowledge; as a Methodical Dictionary of Sciences, Arts and Crafts it shall include their general principles and beyond that inform about the most important facts that determine their composition and content” (Mensching 1989, 12).¹ Concerning the *Wörterbuch* our aim is, of course, more modest; we merely want to uncover the relevant knowledge from all fields of rhetoric today. We began our work about eighteen years ago and we would like to finish it around 2010, provided that our funds, our readers’ interest, and the stamina of editorial staff and authors will allow it.

Our *Wörterbuch* is both an Encyclopedia and a Methodical Dictionary of Rhetoric. It is encyclopedic in the sense that it is meant to supply users with information about rhetorical theory and the application of rhetoric in the arts such as literature, painting or music, and in disciplines like philosophy, theology, pedagogy, psychology, sociology, linguistics, and law. The methodical character of the dictionary becomes apparent in its claim to treat all subjects with reference to rhetorical theory. However, this theory is not conceived as an invariant tool of the analytical mind; that was the methodical idea of the French encyclopedists of the Enlightenment. Today analytical thinking in the humanities –this is, the insight of hermeneutical reflection of method in the 19th and 20th century– must also be historical, and therefore rhetorical theory is conceived as historical. Rhetoric is the heritage of a long tradition dating back to Greek and Roman antiquity; it has been widely adopted and modified in the evolution of European culture. Yet rhetorical theory is no analytical tool ready at hand. It has to be reconstructed as an instrument for studying effective speech in all cultural forms.² But why not pass this business on to the writers of rhetorical handbooks? What is the special aim when compiling a historical dictionary of rhetoric?

¹ Translated by F.-H. Robling.

² On the historical reconstruction of rhetorical concepts see Robling 1995, 18 ff.

The complex research situation in rhetoric today, I suppose, calls for a lexicon of this kind. This situation is the consequence of the special historical development that our discipline has undergone. In the history of European culture from antiquity to the middle of the 18th century, rhetoric had an enormous impact on education and art. But since the 17th century, it has gradually lost its credibility. Rationalism demanded exact thought in the fields of knowledge and in social and political action and discredited the rhetorical principle of plausibility. Aesthetic theory established the ideal of the genius and understood creativity as the result of originality and not of following the precepts to write and speak well. "It will be accepted by everyone," stated Kant, the most famous critic of rhetoric in Germany, "that the genius is to be completely opposed to the spirit of imitation" (Weischedel 1957, 407).

Imitation was demanded by rhetoric, because this discipline claimed to teach the rules of persuasion. Everyone who wanted to be successful in public speaking and the arts had to follow these rules. In the second part of the 18th century, a paradoxical situation arose: rhetoric as a theory was looked upon with contempt and lost almost all influence on education, while as practical eloquence it gained new importance during the revolutions at the end of the century. The development of democratic and parliamentary politics and of mass communication in the 19th century promoted all forms of public speaking and writing. The attitude towards rhetoric changed again in the 20th century. The beginning, as far as I can see, was rather spectacular: it was linked with research to avoid the tricks of enemy propaganda during the Second World War in the United States. The question was now one of how persuasion could exercise its influence on people, and it was answered by psychological and rhetorical theories. A real break-through for rhetorical research came in the sixties, when scholars in several countries rediscovered the impact of rhetorical theory and practice on many areas of culture.³ Argumentation was traced back to its rhetorical roots, which meant that it was no longer simply a logical discipline, a discovery of the American "New Rhetoric" and the French "Nouvelle rhétorique". Jurisprudence was understood as the result of topical invention and not only of deduction from legal principles. Baroque literature and Mannerist works were analysed according to the rules of rhetorical composition and style so that they were no longer considered as strange and intricate art but understood as instances of a well-calculated artistic form. Even the Bible and its plain diction showed the influence of elaborated Hellenistic speech, as philologists discovered. But rhetoric received renewed attention not only in the humanities. A new demand also arose in the sixties for rhetorical training in the social and economic sphere because people discovered rhetoric as a means to improve the labour process. Many books containing practical rhetorical advice were published. The result of all these developments was that the large amount of new knowledge created a new demand for information about this old discipline that had been neglected for so long.

³ For the cultural concept of rhetorical research see Robling 2000, 43-53.

Given this situation, Walter Jens and Gert Ueding, professors in the Rhetoric Department at Tübingen University in Germany, began planning a lexicon in 1985. The aim was to include all relevant key words from the theory of speech and the impact of these concepts on culture.⁴ After intense work for several years and many consultations with specialists, the planning team presented a collection of more than 5,000 lemmata covering all relevant aspects of rhetoric. But this number of key words was far too large, and a new series of discussions led to the list's being condensed to about 1,300 items, because many lemmata could be included within larger concepts. This list has served as the basis for the *Wörterbuch* since 1987, when we started publishing the first articles. Today the editorial staff consists of the editor-in-chief, Gert Ueding, four sub-editors, and three assistants. The *Wörterbuch* is published in German; an English version is planned. Six volumes have already been published, and three more are planned, in addition to a separate index volume. The digitisation of the entries to be published on CD Rom has begun. The list of lemmata is revised for every new volume in order to incorporate new rhetorical phenomena. More than 400 authors have already contributed to the lexicon; they are specialists from various disciplines and come not only from Germany but also from other countries in Europe and America. So the *Wörterbuch* is intended as an enterprise of interdisciplinary nature and international collaboration.

Now, what kind of keywords will the user find in the lexicon? First of all, of course, there are all the notions that form part of the theory of speech and that concern the means of persuasion in argumentation and in arousing emotions. In addition to these, the so-called duties of the orator from *inventio* to *actio* are treated, together with entries on the genres of speech, and the ideals of the orator. Rhetoric's relationship to literature has been decisive from the beginning. Therefore, the important terms of composition and style are given, as for example the rhetorical figures. The article "Dichtung" ('Poetry') offers a survey of the impact of rhetoric on literature. Some articles treat notions of new, modern approaches to literature, especially from a rhetorical point of view, as for example "Ambiguität" ('Ambiguity') and "Dekonstruktion" ('Deconstruction'). As with poetry, the influence of rhetoric on historiography is shown in a detailed article. Painting and music are dealt with in the articles on "Baroque" and "Humanism". All these keywords refer to European culture. Moreover, we intend to provide surveys concerning the role played by rhetoric in other civilisations, as for example in the American, Arabian, Chinese, Indian and Jewish cultures and in tribal societies. The scientific disciplines mentioned above that are related to rhetoric are treated in a similar way under their respective key words. So the entries of the lexicon try to cover the classical fields of rhetoric and its cultural impact. They try to define specific rhetorical features, as for example the article "Philosophie" demonstrates. In contrast to the article in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, which provides the relevant definitions of the notion in history, our text concentrates on the attitude of philosophy towards rhetoric (Ueding 2003, col. 968-1074; Ritter & Gründer 1989, col. 572-879). And one

⁴ For the first outline of the project see Ueding 1986, 115-119; Kalivoda & Robling 1989, 129-142.

will find not only classical concepts in the rhetorical lexicon, but modern ones as well. One example is the entry “Rhetorische Anthropologie”, which describes a new discipline in the fields of cultural anthropology and ethnology, which have discovered rhetoric for their research (Robling 2004). Another example, in this case taken from contemporary advertising, is the article “AIDA-Formel” (‘AIDA-formula’). AIDA is the abbreviation for “attention-interest-desire-action”, which can serve as a short definition for rhetoric and its functions. The article shows that this formula is not simply the result of good observation but goes back to central insights of rhetorical theory in antiquity (Riedel 1992, col. 285-295).

The article “AIDA-Formel” may serve as an example because nearly all entries in the *Wörterbuch* are –if possible and convenient– built according to the same pattern: after a definition, there follows the historical development of the concept. This is normally given from antiquity to modern times, so that the reader has a historical panorama of the notion from the direct or indirect roots to its contemporary connotations. Ancient rhetoric, as conceived by the Greek and Roman schools from the times of Hellenism, functions as a model to identify rhetorical phenomena. The description and analysis of the changes in this model show how it developed over time. Historical analysis of the rhetorical tradition in this sense is critical work, because the scholar is supplied with information about the usage of terms he does not find in general handbooks of rhetorical terminology. These mostly focus on a merely systematic treatment of the matter. The meaning of terms for rhetorical figures is the best example. Some of these do not cause problems of usage, but many of them have changed their meaning through history. One example is the term “Admiratio”, which in antiquity denoted an expression of surprise and admiration, but whose meaning was narrowed in the 18th and 19th century to “admiration” itself (Erhart 1992, col. 109-118). Another example is the word “Affictio”, which has a rather diffuse terminological usage. The linguistic phenomenon, that is, playing with words and the technique of argumentation in order to commit someone to a statement he did not make, is clearly to be identified in the rhetorical handbooks, but its denomination varies. Sometimes “Affictio” means the same as “Annominatio” or “Paronomasia”; at others, it resembles “Prolepsis” or “Prokatalepsis” (Valenti 1992, col. 253-258). The problem of defining “Affictio” is due to the fact that this concept is both a figure of speech and a figure of thought, which always causes great difficulties. The rhetorical system does not have the strong coherence of a philosophical or logical system; it is always open to modifications in accordance with the practical demands of persuasion (Robling 1998, 154-155). Rhetoric is the science and the art of effective speech; therefore, Greek and Roman rhetoricians described it as a *téchne* or *ars* that comprises both knowledge and the skill to achieve something (Robling 1992, 1009-1030, 1455-1485). Today this aspect of rhetoric is frequently forgotten, especially when linguistics attempts to re-conceive rhetorical terms in a stricter and less contradictory way. Historical reconstruction of the development of terms helps us to discover what the tradition found in the texts really meant and supplies a more correct usage of notions today.

Encyclopedic information and a methodical claim with regard to the historical adequacy of terms: that is the purpose of the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*. At the same time, many key words from various disciplines show the impact of classical tradition on modern communication. The result is that the insights from history, especially those of antiquity concerning rhetoric, are often much broader than contemporary views, which are somehow fixed on psychological facts or manipulative tricks when the question of effective speech arises. In this lexicon, rhetoric appears as a theory of culture itself. It preserves the human approach to things, an aspect that is still evident in that privileged English denomination for the classical disciplines: the humanities.

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