

A Response to Professor Campbell's Lecture on Rhetorical and Communication Studies

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It is my great honor to respond to Professor Campbell's lecture given at Dokkyo University during her six-month stay as a visiting scholar in the annual year of 2005. During her stay at Dokkyo, Professor Campbell gave a lecture on rhetoric, in which she attempted to link together the study of literature with the study of communication as indispensable inquiries. In front of faculty members of the Department of English, Professor Campbell eloquently demonstrated the importance of rhetorical studies for today's communication inquiries. She set out to establish the link between communication studies (in both humanistic and social scientific traditions) and stressed the vital role of rhetoric within this relationship. Professor Campbell's theory of rhetorical studies offers us one of *poroi* of the communication studies, and called to us to think through the fundamental assumptions about the role of rhetoric within the field of inquiry. Her speech delineated the dialectics between modern and postmodern theories of rhetoric and offered important insights into how we ought to imagine rhetorical study in today's postmodern world. Taking Professor Campbell's lecture as an occasion, in fact, a call for such discussion, I would like to initiate it in the form of a response to her lecture. In the following, I will reconstruct her lecture in terms of postmodern theory of rhetoric and, in so doing, I wish to show how a theorist of rhetoric might reach similar conclusions of interpretive meaning of rhetoric and humanities by thinking

through different *poroi* on his/her way.

Postmodern Rhetoric as Social Theory

1. Postmodern Theory and the Constitutive Rhetoric

Professor Campbell justifies her definition of rhetorical studies by appealing to the authority of both classical and contemporary theorists of rhetoric such as Isocrates, Cicero, and Kenneth Burke. Having found her citations to those theorists important for today's communication studies, I partly agree that rhetorical studies center around "public discourse" that emerges out of practice to discover such social knowledge as *endoxa*. In particular, speaking of Isocrates with social theory including Burke becomes crucial to understanding today's postmodern world. To this end, I would like to construe Professor Campbell's discourse, with an emphasis on the social theory and Isocrates as the founder of humanist tradition.

Professor Campbell's turning to Kenneth Burke, in juxtaposition with Isocrates and Cicero in the humanist tradition, as a theorist of constitutive rhetoric in order to extend contemporary social theory becomes now significant for understanding rhetorical studies in postmodernization of our social condition (McKerrow, "Critical Rhetoric"; "Critical Rhetoric in a Postmodern World"). The significance of rhetorical studies no longer relies on the study of mere public speaking to educate individual students to be good speakers, but a constitution of society and community in which people dwell. As Professor Campbell points out, "rhetoric is the study of the ways that truths are socially constructed through language ..." Representation is a constitutive part of an event; not after the event, but already part of the interpretation of the event. Hence, "reality" does not exist *outside* the process of representation but in the very process of how a signifier, and which signifier, articulates the event in signifying practices. Constitution of meaning is a part of the object; the meaning of an event resides not outside, but inside of the event. Arguably, the meanings of the (social) space wherein certain values are artificially represented emerge out

of a rhetorical construct by a certain disposition of discursive configuration; in turn, the subject in society is constituted in a cultural praxis through a performative understanding of the configuration (McKerrow, "Possibility of the Subject").

Constitutive rhetoric that makes people's voluntary subjectivization to society and culture critiques the discourse of power (Charland, "The Constitutive Rhetoric"). This power relationship does not repress the subject and oppress the people by domination, but works as the hegemonic praxis that people are hailed and come into being as the subject through and by a performance of lenient gesture in a concrete instance of a textual representation that constitutes the individual as such. As Professor Campbell puts it: "Such scholarship [of an imagined community that arouses nationalism imagined in and by praxis as in President Hugo Chávez's renamed Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela] is closely related to rhetorical studies of constitutive rhetoric, the kind of speech that creates and sustains community." That rhetorical praxis creates the existence of society in a moment of its impact is truly a subject to critique in the contemporary theory of rhetoric and communication.

Constitutive rhetoric becomes important in communication theory mainly because it is a social theory in a democratic world where our notion of power needs to be revised and where consequently ideological rhetoric plays an important role. After the modernist rhetoric, often seen as a psychological inquiry of effect studies on audience's attitudinal change, has lost a great deal of currency, Douglas Ehninger states that, as a system of rhetoric, contemporary rhetoric is based upon social theory (Ehninger, "On Systems of Rhetoric"), and rhetoric produces a plethora of discourse to constitute its subject. In the social theory, Michael McGee states that the idea of the "ideograph" (McGee, "Ideograph"), developed in part from his previous essay on "the people" as a materiality of discourse (McGee, "In Search of the 'People'"), is a concept used to argue *against* the rational understanding of the subject and its communication — such as in the works of Chaim Perelman whose understanding of rhetor as the individual

subject who is a rational agent of action aiming at behavioral effects on an audience. In his rejection of discourse as rational argument, McGee turns to the idea that ideological representation is immersed in a domain of culturally and historically material conditions. The materiality of discourse is important because we must understand discourse not simply textually but also as culturally specific and structurally reproduced among the people and by their practices (McGee, “A Materialist’s Conception of Rhetoric”).

What needs to be addressed is power that affects the configuration of cultural and historical conditions. As Michael Foucault states, power is not repressive, but rather the subject’s capacity to do, or can-do-ness, that in turn the subject is hailed into subjectivization in the materiality of discourse (*The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*: 92–93). The speaker, as well as its audience as subject, is constituted by material conditions in which, according to Professor Campbell, he/she is “to be human, to swim in language, and to use and be used by it.” This material condition in which postmodern theorists of rhetoric are interested concerns how rhetoric operates as socially and culturally recognized power relations that constitute the speaker itself and its subject produced (Greene, “Another Materialist Rhetoric”).

2. Humanities, Rhetorical Hermeneutics, and Praxis

Historically speaking, the humanist tradition — following the Renaissance, contemporary theories such as Martin Heidegger and Ernesto Grassi,¹⁾ via Vico’s Italian humanism — is derived from Cicero, who inherited much from Isocrates. In critical studies, the tradition has now merged with the contemporary theory of rhetoric. For example, Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction is a close textual analysis of theoretical praxis by such theorists as Saussure, and Michel Foucault’s interest in Isocrates is seen in *The Use of Pleasure*, and theorists of classical rhetoric in turn became interested in such contemporary theories.²⁾

The historical connection between pedagogy, humanism, and liberal

arts resides in the rhetorical tradition that was a part of trivium. Professor Campbell observes: "The essence of those ideas [Greco-Roman classical works and Renaissance] was the liberal arts, a system of education grounded in the quadrivium, the four-part curriculum of mathematics, geometry, music, and astronomy, and the trivium, the three-part curriculum composed of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, with rhetoric as the capstone, as the means by which to demonstrate competence, mastery of knowledge." During the Renaissance, rhetoric as a part of trivium was indeed taught as a training of public speaking; yet unlike the language training, the purpose of its rhetorical education is not for speaking in public *per se*.

In the humanist tradition, public speaking is not primarily training to be a good speaker but cultivation of a liberal mind that demonstrates acquisition of ethos that substantiates a speaker's power to persuade an audience by means of his/her social identity. Professor Campbell understands its importance: "Only when students could articulate what they knew were they considered fully educated. Speech was an index of character; producing cogent public discourse was an index of an ordered, disciplined mind." Training in public speaking as part of a rhetorical curriculum to discipline ethical minds is, hence, important not because rhetoric makes students master speaking well in public, but because a speaker's ethos becomes a means of political intervention that potentially changes cultural and social praxes. Virtue that a rhetor embodies becomes important to demonstrate the power of his/her discourse: "rhetoric is equally about our virtues, about our ability to create powerful dramatic works, literary and political, all of which tell lies that transport us far beyond our humdrum daily lives." True, rhetoric for Isocrates works as virtue; yet the virtue is not morality to adjudicate moral conduct according to the existing code but ethics as a judgment of each case that constitutes the standard to be. It is important to know that ethos is not a morality that constitutes a code of cultural norms to discern whether an action is virtuous or not. It is a judgment in itself to constitute the code that can be re-inscribed by each judgment. Judgment always requires interpretation that articulates praxis and fragments of

knowledge.

The postmodern condition wherein we currently live witnesses a radical change of rhetorical theory departing from the social science to critical study of any public discourse (McGee, "Fragmentation"). Unlike social science of rhetorical studies that was prevalent in 80's U.S., it is a fundamental method of textual interrogation for critical studies to interpret public texts to elucidate the formation of discourse as an emerging social and cultural condition wherein subjects live their own lives.³⁾ We are living every moment to interpret a cultural space of mediation that representation constructs a particular disposition out of textual meaning. Rhetorical hermeneutics, a method of the humanities as the theory of interpretation of (literally) texts, elucidates a moment of praxis that theory performatively becomes substantiated as if it were a mirror of the truth that abstracts its existing form.⁴⁾

For this purpose of interpretation, critics attempt to find theories of praxis that rhetorical study has traditionally interrogated as its object of inquiry. As Professor Campbell correctly points out: "Rhetoricians study public discourse of all types: literary, political, scientific, philosophical, and commercial, in order to discover *the knowledge that emerges out of practice*." Praxis is a theory-in-action that constitutes the subject of discourse (Charland, "Horizon and Telos"). The realm of praxis is a space of politics where philosophical knowledge is required to know what action is (Arendt, *The Human Condition*: 22-28; "Philosophy and Politics"). Any theoretical inquiries are praxes of rhetorical discourse, praxes that are subjects of critique for "Project on the Rhetoric of Inquiry."⁵⁾ Theorists produce knowledge that emerges out of their praxis of inquiry wherein rhetorical discourse is a technology to produce truthfulness of knowledge. In a nutshell, theory is the highest form of praxis (Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science*: 90). For this reason, theorization is a political praxis of theorist that constitutes a theoretical discourse of knowledge and truth.

3. *Phronesis*, Pedagogy as Philosophy and Politics

The significance of Greek rhetorical theorist, Isocrates emerges in this context (theory is a praxis, and praxis is a theory), as the theorist extended his notion of praxis even to pedagogy, and made it into the "highest form of praxis." Pedagogy is a form of praxis that rhetoric and criticism plays the center of humanist inquiry and educational method (Clark, "The Critical Servant"). Isocrates' pedagogy in itself is a praxis and his public discourses are a theorization of rhetoric in action (McGee, "The Moral Problem").

For Isocrates, pedagogy is not merely a teaching of speaking skills, but an education of citizens to grow their sense of belonging to Athens and as Hellenes. Teaching speaking skills is merely a means to this goal, while pedagogy is a whole business of philosophy to love knowing. Particularly, Isocrates regards *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, a kind of knowledge to foster a certainty of judgment within a domain of social, cultural and political contingency important for his rhetorical pedagogy. Teaching is a conduct to cultivate students to be citizens, and it is a rhetorical intervention of "social surgery" (McGee, "Fragmentation") toward the citizenship that ideologically attempts to reconfigure the subject. Rhetorical intervention is a means for constituting, not a policy, but a polity to govern the citizen and condition political decision making about policies. Isocrates did not advocate any concrete policy to offer to the Athenian audience, but presented his interpretation of cultural texts of such Greek myths as "Helen" within his political arguments for pan-Hellenism. This rhetorical interpretation, "rhetorical hermeneutics" of textual praxis, is a political action that had much impact on the cultural praxis of the Greek society.

In the tradition of postmodern critique derived from Isocrates whose rhetoric is also heretical in the Greek studies, I am chiefly concerned with Professor Campbell's interpretation of Isocrates and considerations of Plato and *endoxa*. Isocrates' ideological activity in his pedagogy was indeed a strong critique of Plato whose philosophy was not practical at all in the political realm of praxis. It is true that Isocrates was a rival of Plato, and

many of the Isocrates' public discourses were arguments against Plato as well as the sophists, especially a rejection of Plato's understanding of philosophy. To pursue philosophy by presupposing the *aletheia*, or truth as unhidden-ness, and its truth seeking, is not a main part of Isocrates' praxis of political speech.

Indeed, for Isocrates, philosophy enables deliberation about political consequences by means of *phronesis*. To deliberate about the consequences of a judgment is an action enabled by *phronesis*, because "we regard as sage those who most skillfully debate their problems in their own mind" (Isocrates, "Antidosis": 256). Hence, Isocrates taught *phronesis*, in contrast to *episteme*, that kind of knowledge Plato values to induce the certain truth independent from human experience, "since it is not in the nature of man to attain a science by the possession of which we can know positively what we should do or what we should say, in the next resort I hold that man to be wise who is able by his powers of conjecture to arrive generally at the best course, and I hold that man to be a philosopher who occupies himself with the studies from which he will most quickly gain that kind of insight" (Isocrates, "Antidosis": 271). Judgment, enabled by *phronesis*, promotes certainty about its following action on the basis of *doxa* that people are culturally immersed and taken for granted, and thus hails its subjects (Takis Poulakos, "Question of *Doxa*"). Rhetorical effects of judgment are achieved by *doxa*, culturally taken for granted-ness that values certain representations.

It is also worth pointing out that Professor Campbell chooses presidential discourse such as presidential public address to the nation *merely as an example of* the public discourse. Public address is not about rhetoric itself; for instance, it should be also understood as a part of action for (inter)national political and social relations. Any theorists of president's public address that constitutes U.S. society can tell, analyze, and evaluate how to speak and argue political issues. Having observed the U.S. president arguing and producing discourse, theorists must be able to apply the theory abstracted from a political theory to a class of public speaking, as a field of the

presidential discourse. Hence, the field of rhetoric covers not merely public speaking but also any sorts of public discourse, which includes such mass media, films, TV programs, ads, as well as literal discourses circulated among the public as a culturally recognizable tradition. Present studies of communication, in particular presidential discourse, are not limited to such rhetorically narrated public addresses as U.S. presidential speech, but to any praxis of public discourse such as Internet that mediates a society of politics.

Toward a Postmodern Theory of Rhetoric

In her discussion of praxis as rhetorical subject, Professor Campbell's insightful justification of rhetorical studies as one of ethico-political discourses meets postmodern theory of communication studies. I agree with Professor Campbell's conclusion: "I study rhetoric in order to understand what it means to be human, to swim in language, and to use and be used by it. I share with Isocrates and Cicero the view that it has enabled us humans to create all that makes our life good, but I share with Plato the belief that it has the capacity to foster and to rationalize the greatest of human evils." It is true, as Isocrates suggests, that "the power to speak well is taken as the surest index of a sound understanding, and discourse which is true and lawful and just is the outward image of a good and faithful soul" (Isocrates, "Antidosis": 255). Isocrates continues, "if there is need to speak in brief summary of this power [of rhetoric], we shall find that none of the things which are done with intelligence take place without the help of speech, but that in all our actions as well as in all our thoughts speech is our guide, and is most employed by those who have the most wisdom" (Isocrates, "Antidosis": 257). Professor Campbell's justification of rhetoric by means of social theory, history of humanities, and praxis of public discourse is a great step toward a rhetorical understanding of our present postmodern world, and such theorists of humanities as Isocrates and Cicero, along with contemporary theorists like Burke and McGee, will show us the right way

to inquiries of discourse and language as postmodern representational politics.

Notes

- 1) For the reference of a relationship among philosophy, humanist tradition and rhetoric, see, for example, Ernesto Grassi. *Rhetoric as Philosophy: The Humanist Tradition*, trans. John Michael Krois and Azizeh Azodi (Carbondale; Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2001).
- 2) There are some classical theorists such as John Poulakos ("Rhetoric, the Sophists, and the Possible") and Takis Poulakos whose interests directed toward such contemporary theorists as Heidegger and Nietzsche from the Greco-Roman perspective.
- 3) Turning point was 1990 when McGee published an article on the postmodern rhetoric that proclaimed a revival of the humanist tradition in the postmodern condition.
- 4) For the reference of rhetorical hermeneutics, see *Rhetorical Hermeneutics: Invention and Interpretation in the Age of Science*. ed. by Alan G. Gross and William M. Keith. (Albany: State U of New York P, 1997); Steven Mailloux. "Rhetorical Hermeneutics." *Critical Inquiry* 11 (1985): 620-641; "Rhetorical Hermeneutics Revisited." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 11 (1991): 233-248.
- 5) For the reference of Project on the Rhetoric of Inquiry (POROI), see, for example, *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences: Language and Argument in Scholarship and Public Affairs*. ed. by John S. Nelson, Allan Megill, and Donald N. McCloskey. (Madison: The U of Wisconsin P, 1987); *The Rhetorical Turn: Invention and Persuasion in the Conduct of Inquiry*. ed. by Herbert W. Simons. (Chicago; London: The U of Chicago P, 1990).

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