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Rhetorical Critic's Role and Mission in Communication

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Abstract

The Classical Greco-Roman rhetoric is considered to be the humanist basis of the Western cultures. This study aims to highlight the importance of the rhetorical tradition in the study of human communication. Rhetorical criticism of the communication sciences is one of the main approaches to qualitative textual analysis. In a meta-theoretic approach our work tries to establish the specific rhetorical criticism as a qualitative, interpretative and subjective discourse research method in our contemporary communicative society. We argue that the teacher who teaches his students rhetorical criticism provides a range of methodological and educational clues such as: understanding other people, clarification of the values, aesthetic appeal, community consensus and changing of the society. After all, the rhetorical critic's role is to internalize and propose a humanist alternative opposed to the dominant objective paradigm. Rhetorical critic's mission is to come up with his own discursive voice which is meant to communicate about the contemporary social and political challenges. In the spirit of the methodological pluralism we consider that in the field of communication, the practitioners of quantitative and qualitative methods should enjoy recognition and mutual respect.

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1. Introduction

Our Western society has been many times called as communicational society. The Ancient Greek rhetoric (especially the sophists, Plato and Aristotle) and the Roman one (Cicero and Quintilian) had offered the cultural background of today's European Union. Values such as: democracy, equality, freedom of expression, argumentation

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and persuasion of ideas were provided by the rhetoric discourse. The Western tradition proposes a model based on the competition and the agreement of the majority as opposed to the Eastern tradition based on the lack of competition and non-violence (Baiaş, 2013, 38). We consider that this cultural background should be part of our students' education. We should be open to any alternative perspectives that might appear to other cultural traditions, outside of Europe. A first step in this direction is the familiarity with cultural difference.

Our study is mostly related to the communication sciences. As teachers of rhetoric and communication we face in our teaching and scientific work with a number of problems. Some of these problems are related to the theoretical aspects while others are related to methodological ones. What should be the legitimate modality for us as teachers and students, of a college under the name of "Faculty of Communication Sciences" (from Romania, Timisoara) to enter in the field of scientific research, if we want to take advantage of the above cultural difference?

The question of our study is the following: "What are the critic's role and mission in the field of communication?" Our question refers to the researcher who has already assumed and internalized the methodological and epistemological exigencies of the rhetoric criticism. Our main aim is to justify the work of the rhetorical critic in the field of communication sciences. The rhetorical criticism is a quasi-American trend. Therefore another significant aspect of our study is the familiarization of the European researchers in the field of communication, and in the other related fields with the specific of the rhetorical criticism as theory and method in order to use it in teaching and research activities. In this respect the present study is of interest both for the teachers and the researchers.

To answer to our question the best method of investigation is a meta-theoretical approach. The present approach may be included in the area of the communication philosophy. We propose a "pyramidal approach" that begins with the most general themes towards the specific ones, namely to the self of the researcher. Our study will present subjects related to: Western research traditions, scientific and interpretative characteristics of the theories, main qualitative and quantitative research methods from the field of the communication sciences, of the specific rhetorical criticism and of the rhetorical critic's academic activity.

Thus, the main paradigms in our field of interest can be found in the theory of communication. In this area we want to highlight the main research traditions (i.e. socio-psychological tradition, cybernetic tradition, rhetorical tradition, semiotic tradition, socio-cultural tradition, critical tradition and phenomenological tradition). Our approach places a great emphasis on the rhetorical tradition. We will not present only the classical Greco-Roman rhetoricians, but we intend to bring to light another approach. Although less known in the European space since the 20th century, the rhetorical researchers in the United States proposed a new epistemological current in the study of human communication: rhetorical criticism.

To better understand the relevance of the rhetorical criticism in the communication sciences we have to analyze both the specific of the theories and the qualitative and qualitative methods. Based on these characteristics we can partly sketch a portrait of the rhetorical criticism. To complete the picture we add specific features or descriptive epistemological presuppositions of the rhetorical criticism, which give originality in the field of rhetoric in general and in particular in the field of qualitative methods.

To answer the question "What is the rhetorical critic's role in the academic life?" we explore the specific of the qualitative research method called rhetorical criticism. We argue that the communication and rhetorical teacher who teaches his students rhetorical criticism provides a number of methodological and educational landmarks opposed to those provided by the statistical quantitative methods. After all, we consider that the rhetorical critic's role is to internalize and propose a humanist alternative as resistance to the dominant objective quantitative paradigm.

To answer the question "What is the rhetorical critic's mission in the social life?" we appeal to current epistemological presuppositions. We argue that the rhetorical critic's mission is the valuing of the subjectivity and his active involvement in society. The rhetorical critic's mission is to come up with his own discursive voice, communicational built on the contemporary cultural, social and political challenges.

2. The research traditions in the field of the communication theories

The history of a domain is closely related to the theories appeared in it. What is the history of the communication field and of the communication approach? Such a history of the domain can be found in the 3rd edition of the excellent book entitled *A First Look at the Communication Theory* written by Professor Emory Griffin (1997) from

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