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In issue 5.1 of *Enculturation*, Krista Ratcliffe, in the subtitle of her article "The Current State of Composition Scholars/Teachers," poses the question, "Is rhetoric gone or just hiding out?" In short she answers her own question with the statement that rhetoric is "hiding out in terms like cultural studies and literacy." This made me think about other places that rhetoric might be "hiding out." I decided to skulk about and see where I could find this hidden rhetoric.

Ratcliffe defines rhetoric as "the study of how we use language and how language uses us." This is a dynamic definition that brings to mind the constructive inter-subjectivity in the writings of Schopenhauer, Husserl, Heidegger, and Sartre. I find the definition all the more appealing since I maintain that language is historically constructed (Geertz), indigenous (Masolo), and deeply indexical (Garfinkel). That is to say that language operates at the local level or within what I term private spheres.[1] Ratcliffe's definition also breathes life into Jean Baudrillard's concept of "passwords." Baudrillard wrote that words are really passwords that perform as "passers or vehicles of ideas" (xiii-xiv). I take these ideas to be not only the etymological heritage of the words, evolving out of Wittgenstein's ancient city of language (*Philosophical Investigations*), but a record of each word's migration to a specific *private sphere* as well as an element of the heritage or history of the people who occupy the sphere. Wittgenstein has shown us that by selecting a word we select a number of related ideas and meanings that have a "family resemblance" to that word. If Baudrillard and Wittgenstein can be taken at their word (pun intended), then the selection of a word, in speech or text, is a choice of a set of intrinsic ideas and relationships. A choice of a word is made at the expense or exclusion of another word with its own set of intrinsic ideas and relationships. In this sense the choice is an argument against the excluded word and its set of intrinsic ideas and relationships. This being true then a case can be made that one cannot use a word without employing rhetoric.

I do believe that rhetoric and language are inseparable. I believe that rhetoric is leveraged in the everyday activities of all users of language. I believe the ethnomethodological work of Schutz, Garfinkel, and Giddens[2] has provided a sufficient foundation for future work that will ferret out complex hidden methodologies in the everyday and corresponding enculturation into the processes that construct and validate practices of ethnophilosophy and ethnorhetoric.[3] But, Ratcliffe's point addresses the hiding places of a formal rhetoric within other disciplines of academia (outside composition). I do not want to suggest that the rhetoric embedded in everyday language (language as I have described it in this paper) is the same thing as the study of what I have termed as formal

rhetoric. However, I do want to argue for its inclusion as a valid methodology within *private spheres* for constructing and validating truth. Specifically, I contend that the language that is leverage in conversations, arguments, and statements among friends, in neighborhoods, at work or church, in city or state, or in any one of a myriad of *private spheres* has its own rules and standards and constructs a version of truth every bit as valid as that constructed within our academic disciplines (disciplines themselves being *private spheres*). Towards the end of finding formal rhetoric in the halls or texts of academia I think it is imperative to include some of the historical elements of rhetoric in order to discover these aforementioned hiding places. These elements include the study of technique and rules, argumentation (verbal and written), epideictic oratory and writing, and persuasion.

Hitting these elements (as topics) quickly, I can write unequivocally that rhetoric still saturates academia. Technique and rules provide the underpinnings for discourse in the analytic philosophy that seems to dominate so many philosophical programs throughout the country. Argumentation is the foundation of Habermas' work in *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 1*. According to Habermas, rhetoric, clad in the process of discovering "the strongest argument," literally constructs (or, some may argue, reveals) truth. Additionally Habermas puts argumentation front and center in his political and ethical theory. In sociology and many other disciplines, the influence of Habermas is extensive and significant. I do recognize the dominance of empiricist writings in the field of sociology; however, I believe that as long as a discipline maintains a camp of faithful, and perhaps a bit rebellious, theorists, then rhetoric will have a place to thrive. The teaching of epideictic oratory and persuasion has always gone hand-in-hand. In fact it's still a vibrant practice at lecterns and pulpits in every part of the country. From the Ivy League, which boasts of such speakers as the very electric Cornel West, to seminaries and religious schools within private colleges that continue to teach eloquence and reason in the pulpit, the artful speaker trained to lift some in praise and lower others in blame remains a vibrant art form. Dr. West is also an excellent example of rational, rhythmic, epideictic writing that pulsates with energy without sacrificing substance.

Concerning composition, I think it is important to note that there remains an unavoidable source of rhetoric that every student must confront. Literature itself is the single most influential source of rhetoric in Western culture. It is in the novels and short stories that students read and write about in their English classes that the finer points of rhetoric are tacitly conveyed. Writers such as Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin chronicle a rich tradition of Black Southern public speech and put on display the craft of rhetoric within distinct places and times in history. John Steinbeck, Ken Kesey, and Toni Morrison create complex characters employing adroit rhetoric to persuade not only the characters in the story but also the reader of the righteousness or hideousness of certain individual and social acts. Sinclair Lewis, John Updike, and John Irving present complex, emotional, and hallow speeches, dialogues, and inner-conversations (in a dialectic similar to what Freud termed a "private

poem") that mirror the empty promises that echo through the everyday lives of their readers, and by doing so persuasively argue against the thick malaise of modernity. It is through these writers' masterful vigilance in contrasting "is" and "ought" that they employ and teach to the unsuspecting reader, and in many cases future writers, the rules and practices of rhetoric.

Finally, Ratcliffe refers to rhetoric as having a "founding role" in her field. I believe that the Sophistic tradition, the rightful birthplace of rhetoric that so influenced the words and writings of Plato and Aristotle, has, like these two giants, played a founding role in many fields. Even the sacred discipline of science is deeply rooted in rhetoric. Writers like Henri Poincare and Thomas Kuhn (Kuhn perhaps more than any other scientific writer) have made us aware of this. Of course some like Edward O. Wilson disagree. But I find it amusing that Wilson must succumb to the tools of rhetoric in order to draft a text (*Consilience*) to disagree with writers like Poincare and Kuhn. It is as Ratcliffe has written; rhetoric is "alive and well."

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## Notes

1. Private spheres are networks, localities, or relationships where language, and ultimately truth, is constructed and validated. The concept is anthropological in nature and similar to C. Wright Mills, "local environments," Richard Wright's "a world of his own," Lyotard's "institution," Pierce's "community of minds," Schutz' "communicative common environment," Goffman's "arenas of interaction," Masolo's "indigenous," and Husserl's "fixed forms of a spatial and temporal world." The term "private sphere" is intended to play off of Habermas' use of public sphere in his work, *The Theory of Communicative Actions: Vol. 1*, by offering private sphere as the proper context for Habermas' strongest argument within communicative actions. ([Back](#))

To understand the concept of private spheres it is necessary to understand that I maintain public spheres do not exist. All places that have been defined as, or simply called, public spheres, fail the test of openness or access. There does not exist a sphere of discourse that does not exclude or silence the voices of many. For this reason I have employed the concept of *private spheres*. *Private spheres* can be understood as a network of adjacent and overlapping spheres that contain their own structures of meanings and knowledge that are taken for granted in language that "anyone like us necessarily knows" (Schutz, Garfinkel). The "anyone like us" allows those in each *private sphere* to inter-subjectively bear witness (Gadamer writes that bearing witness in this manner is likened to the Greek concept *theoria*, meaning to witness a ceremonial rite and by doing so validate it) and construct meaning. This "anyone like us" within *private spheres* also makes room for subcultures, feminist theory, (and yes even academic fields of study), and any other voices that have been previously silenced by the hegemony of universal concepts such as the public sphere.

2. Schutz, Garfinkel, and Giddens all write within, or touch upon, a school of thought call ethnomethodology. Ethnomethodologists analyze everyday activities, specifically conversations, and in an effort to uncover the processes in which individuals create a sense of the social, and, in the case of Giddens's writings, self-identity. This work is ethnocentric in a positive manner in that it attempts to validate indigenous practices or activities in the everyday. ([Back](#))

3. Ethno is derived from the Greek *ethnos*, meaning "of a people." By using ethno as a prefix to rhetoric and philosophy I intend to argue that each group of people has their own language (this includes sub-cultures and plebeian groups that use a form of a predominant language that includes unique slang, jargon, and meanings) and thus their own distinctive form of rhetoric and philosophy. By philosophy I mean a fundamental and structural approach through language of answering the question, "What is the best way to conduct my life?" I believe this Socratic approach to philosophy is indigenous and shared by all. ([Back](#))

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**Citation Format:**

Casteel, Phillip D. "Locating Rhetoric: Rhetoric: Alive and Well." *Enculturation* 5.2 (2004): [http://enculturation.gmu.edu/5\\_2/casteel.html](http://enculturation.gmu.edu/5_2/casteel.html)

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