Leslie Mock

JE: Chapter 6 (Rhetors)

ENGL 400: Active Citizenship - An Advanced Writing Seminar

The rhetor is the person or persons’ that conveys through symbolic action, their

cause to their audience in order to persuade them into action. The Rhetor also

represents symbolic action themselves and plays many roles.

1. The rhetor puts on a certain face “persona”. Their character, “ethos” is of the

utmost importance. They must have the trust and respect of their audience. They

are essentially an actor who has authority with an up standing image that plays a role

to persuade their audience into action for their cause. They have to try and be

the complete package. Being well spoken, educated, trustworthy and honorable

are just a few qualities they should covey. They use: “ethos, roles, identity, authority,

image and they are all interlocked and are used as a whole.” (Rhetor in Citizenship Life

Pg. 167). Aristotle’s states the rhetor has three dimensions: “practical wisdom - sound

reason, virtue - values of the audience culture, and goodwill -being motivated by their

audience best interest.” (pg.167). Cicero states “the audience already has a connection

with the rhetor because of their actions from the past.” Example of persona: “During

Wendy Davis’s filibuster (and the people and media recirculating the filibuster) created

a complex persona. In the first few minutes, she claimed authority as a legislator,

critiquing the decision to depart from past Senate procedure to discuss SB 5 in a

special section.” (pg. 165)

2. Strategic essentialism is when there are certain things that can work for or against the

rhetor depending on who their audience represents. These can include sex, race, social

class and the culture they are from. If the rhetor is creative, they can present themselves

in a way to overcome these differences in order to gain the trust of their audience.

Then in return the audience will give them the chance to be heard. Groups organizations

that are fighting for a voice in their cause use strategic essentialism. They fight for the

the misrepresentation of their group as a whole and gains trust so their voices can

be heard. There is a breakdown of the social power structure to follow in order gain

the authority in the eyes of the audience. These powers are: “A. reward power -

rhetor to benefit audience, B. Coercive power - punish audience, C. expert power -

knowledge, talent and skill, D. legitimate power - position in social structure, E. referent

power - audience identifies with rhetor.” (Rhetor in Civic Life pg.176). The rhetor

uses and identifies with these powers A, B, C, D and then ultimately will be granted

E. referent power.

3. In the postmodern world there could be many rhetors with in the symbolic action

being used. There is the web, social media, twitter, television and speech writers

among the many. It is like a screenplay, there are writers, editors, producers and

actors who all put in a part of themselves, using their backgrounds and many influences

they’ve grown up with. They each bring their own symbolic action to the table.

These medias can reach vast audiences from all different cultures. This in turns can

effect how the audience interprets the information and whether they can be

motivated into action. One person can perceive one thing one way and someone

else could perceive it all together differently. The rhetor may or may not get the

the reactions they are looking. Three minutes may be all is needed in their speech to make

a powerful statement and then their image is perceived. Example in the text of Wahl’s

speech: He came across well spoken, strong male figure, clean cut and educated. He

used “ethos” to represent himself to his audience and gained their respect early in his

speech without them knowing his basis background. The world is forever changing and

the role of the rhetor keeps evolving with it.