
Z. fornisce un esame attento e sottile degli aspetti formali e retorici della declamazione, indaga e testimonia la presenza in essa di materiale letterario precedente o contemporaneo e la sua permanenza nella letteratura successiva. Il suo contributo è altresì prezioso per il confronto tra la realtà culturale contemporanea e quella tratteggiata nella declamazione, con cui egli dimostra in modo esemplare come le declamazioni possano contribuire a ricostruire il dibattito del tempo sui valori e sulle regole comportamentali.

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It has always seemed fitting that Giambattista Vico’s last rediscovery came at the end of the psychedelic era in 1969 (*Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium*, eds. Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Hayden V. White), when category mistakes could appear at the heart of cultural and political revolution. Unlike Foucault’s orderly thinkers of the Enlightenment, Vico and his tables of knowledge always appeared intriguingly disheveled and full of holes that led, if one was fortunate, to new dimensions of time and human character. But like other casualties of the psychedelic era, Vico has often seemed in danger of perishing in the epiphany, falling victim to accusations of idiosyncrasy or even incoherence. Thanks to David Marshall, however, we now know that the story of Vico’s rediscovery does not end this way. In his landmark book *Vico and the Transformation of Rhetoric in Early Modern Europe*, Marshall demonstrates that Vico is once again a pivotal figure in a modern age broadly conceived, where sober sciences newly engage the irrationalisms of emotion, language, and human history. We can now celebrate the first major, English-language monograph on Vico in over a decade at the same time that we enjoy expert guidance through a range of concerns that traverse Vico’s work; Marshall’s book serves as an excellent primer on the
interlocking fields of modern epistemology after Descartes, the prehistory of Peircean pragmatism, early modern European intellectual history across four literatures (English, German, French, and Italian), and the history of rhetoric and communication, which serves as a key to the rest.

Marshall launches the story in original fashion when he begins with Vico’s *De coniuratione principum neapolitanorum*, a history of the 1701 Neapolitan Conspiracy of Macchia that was unpublished and unacknowledged by Vico, although it was probably in circulation, as Marshall discovered through manuscript research at the Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli, within months of the event itself (p. 33 n. 3). This document turns out to be crucial because in it one sees the driving question that would give shape to Vico’s entire scholarly initiative at the University of Naples in 1699 as professor of rhetoric and continuing through the posthumously published 1744 edition of the *Scienza Nuova*, for which Vico is justifiably famous. Frustrated, Marshall speculates, by the limited utility of rhetorical historiography traditionally conceived, Vico asks in light of the Conspiracy “What would it take to reconfigure rhetorical inquiry for Neapolitan conditions?” (p. 32) given that Naples lack the conditions for immediate politics imagined by the rhetoricians of classical antiquity. And from this seemingly simple question emerges a transformative moment for Vico in the history of rhetoric. Marshall summarizes that “Vico’s oeuvre takes on a new unity and sense of purpose when it is understood as a sequence of responses to the following question: How can rhetorical inquiry give an account of politics useful for a society that does not possess institutions capable of guaranteeing public debate? My claim is that Vico overcomes classical rhetoric’s inappropriateness for modernity by jettisoning the assumption that orator and auditor are immediately present one to another in place and time” (p. 7). “To be sure,” Marshall continues, “Vico never describes his agenda in these terms,” and thus Marshall’s most daring methodological gambit where the reader is invited to judge whether any particular interpretation is helpful or unhelpful in explaining other parts of Vico’s system, in which case Marshall allows that the interpretation should be jettisoned (p. 238). And although this reader does wind up discarding some of Marshall’s more dramatic conclusions, especially those that radically subordinate traditions of sacred and practical rhetoric (objections I will return to below), most survive intact because Marshall painstakingly reconstructs the logic in the evolution of Vico’s thought to show that his works build on each other and constitute a series of answers to this question.

For Marshall the answer to this local question about Neapolitan politics can be mapped onto a modern transformation from rhetoric to communication, memorialized in Vincenzo Cuoco’s profoundly Vichian analysis of the 1799 revolution, in which *retorica* is actually replaced with the word *comunicazione* (p. 29). Communication, argues Marshall, is the institutionalization of rhetoric whereby “categories of analysis that are oriented to the here and now” are habitually subordinated (p. 4), giving us in the trajectory of Vico’s career, for instance, poetic logic in place of elocutio, “Homer” in place of pro-
nuntiatio, and “a very particular analysis of historical consciousness” in place of the temporal orientations of forensic, epideictic, and deliberative rhetoric (p. 34). Though each of these examples challenges the critical imagination, they do so in a manner appropriate to Vico, and they explain in detailed analytic terms the significance of Vico’s transformation from the rhetorical handbook Institutiones to the final 1744 edition of the New Science—a transformation, Marshall argues—that characterizes European modernity generally: “Vico reinvents rhetoric for a world that is distinctively anti-rhetorical” (p. 74). So at the same time that Vico distends rhetorical categories of the here and now, he marks the transformation of the rhetorician from a master of kairos to a reader of signs, a hermeneut, finally an anthropologist (p. 101), and he transforms the art of speaking into the art of listening understood in terms of human institutions not individual physiology (p. 112). Hence one of the virtues of Marshall’s history of rhetoric is a contribution to important, late-modern debates about the public sphere and its media ecologies. When Marshall demonstrates how Vico transforms the paradigm for discussing what would be an appropriate quorum, agenda, sites, and procedure for discursive negotiation (p. 187), or how Vico’s law gives us a “phenomenology of social transactions” (p. 191), he shifts the context in which we might read more recent communication critics like Arendt, Habermas, and Luhmann, at the same time that he shifts our communication paradigm from interpersonal to “impersonal” (p. 29). Also by way of this revisionist genealogy, Marshall transforms the context in which we read key figures of the Enlightenment including Rousseau, Smith, and Kant or Herder, Beccaria, and Bentham (p. 28), as well as their most influential late-modern interpreters. Just as Marshall treats Vico in detail, we can productively treat other key figures of the Enlightenment in terms of a certain transformation from rhetoric to communication, not in terms of rhetoric’s end.

This suggestion is deeply productive, but historians of rhetoric will rightly object that the transformation is sometimes overdrawn to the detriment of explicitly rhetorical traditions that persist through the European Enlightenment and beyond. [A suitable point of comparison would be Dietmar Till, Transformationen Der Rhetorik: Untersuchungen Zum Wandel Der Rhetorik-theorie Im 17. Und 18. Jahrhundert.] When Marshall defines rhetoric as a “constantly evolving set of concepts that have come into focus as a result of work done by investigators sensitive to the inevitable diversity of human opinion” (p. 20), he emphasizes the cognitive over the practical and the habitual, which subordinates rhetoric in traditions of letter writing, criticism, religion, and education. Gratuitously, Marshall observes that school-book rhetorics which make up a large proportion of the historical record “plague the discipline” (p. 108), when he might instead emphasize how he uses the deeply pedagogical Institutiones to great effect in so far as it qualifies the rhetorical theory of Vico’s strange Enlightenment. Also Marshall’s ingenious excavation of rhetorical concepts in late-Vichian “science” sometimes appears overdrawn. For instance when Marshall considers historicism-as-contextualism the “radicalization of the rhetorical concept of decorum” (p.
254) he is not wrong strictly speaking, although the observation is too broad to be useful; “radicalized,” decorum can look like almost anything including Sunday brunch or the DMV Driver’s Handbook.

Ultimately these issues are minor when we consider the substantial payoff. David Marshall has written a deeply responsible book that moves with grace, chronologically through Vico’s entire oeuvre—including some notable rediscoveries in the archives and beyond—at the same time that it honors the weirdness that makes Vico indispensable.

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As he states in the preface to his Toward a Rhetoric of Insult, Thomas Conley’s explicit aim is to “stimulate some constructive conversation” (p. viii). Insults have admittedly been a serious political issue in the 2000s. Conley mentions in passing both the Danish cartoons depicting Mohammed (p. 8) and the speech by Pope Benedict XVI about Manuel II Palaeologus (pp. 121–122), and quotes one Iranian imam as saying: “I am for freedom of speech, but not the freedom to insult” (p. 1), which puts the problem of political correctness in a nutshell.

The style employed in this book is both expansive and discursive. Conley’s range of examples and sources is wide: from antiquity (Aristophanes, Cicero, Martial) to the early-modern period (the sixteenth-century Lutheran Flugschriften, Julius Caesar Scaliger’s attack on Erasmus, Shakespeare’s comedies); from the political cartoons and the anti-Semitism of the twentieth century (the leading nazi-ideologist Julius Streicher’s Kampf dem Weltfeind and the anti-Semitic insults disseminated by The Dearborn Independent, a Michigan newspaper published by Henry Ford) to TV series and movies created by the comedy group Monty Python. Presentations are generous, and the reader is invited to explore the many facets of the topic.

Although Conley’s expressed intent is not to theorize insult (p. vii), he nevertheless offers some useful semi-theoretical concepts, defining, for example, what he terms the “scenario” and the “intensity” of insults (p. 3–7). Referring to Saara Lilja’s work on insults in Roman comedy (from 1965), Conley underlines the importance of studying “who says what about whom and why” (pp. 13–14). These are more or less rhetorical issues, dealing with and specifying the rhetorical situation. Conley emphasizes that the rhetoric of insults does not concern only elocutio (diction, style), but also pronuntiatio (delivery) like the tone of voice, body language, and timing (p. 7).

One of the main arguments in Conley’s book is that there are also ‘positive’ or ‘nonserious’ insults, which have cohesive effects such as flyting