

Argumentation in rhetoric Argumentacja w retoryce

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SPRAWOZDANIE / REPORT

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Report/Sprawozdanie: *Rhetoric as Strategic Thinking*. 8th Rhetoric in Society Conference, June 1-3, 2023, Tübingen University, Germany

After a hiatus of several years due to the pandemic, rhetoricians not only from Europe but also from around the world finally managed to meet at the most important rhetorical event of the Old Continent, the 8th edition of the Rhetoric in Society conference. The three-day-long academic event took place at Eberhard Karls University (one of Germany's oldest universities) in Tübingen on June 1-3, 2023. It was organized by the Rhetoric Society of Europe in collaboration with the Institute for General Rhetoric and the Institute of Media Studies at Tübingen University.

It is worth mentioning that in 2021 the conference team at Tübingen University, Germany, hosted the Virtual Gathering. Instead of the postponed on-site conference, a two-day-long online meeting (so-called Preview of 2023 Conference) included three panels and a keynote address entitled “Constricted and Constructed Potentiality: An Inquiry into Paradigms of Strategic Change” by Karen A. Foss and Sonja K. Foss. It gave possibilities to meet, chat, exchange ideas, and discuss current topics, including pandemic and rhetoric.

The previous on-site conference (7th edition), “Rhetoric as Equipment for Living” was hosted by Ghent University in Belgium in September 2019. It has been focused on interpretations of Kenneth Burke's description of human beings as “symbol-making, symbol-using and symbol-misusing animals”. The event gathered almost 150 participants.

This year's conference by Rhetoric in Society was unique, as the first face-to-face event after a 4-year covid-caused interruption. The authors who submitted their proposals for the symposium postponed from 2021 were also invited.

Each day the conference consisted of at least 16 panel sessions, which makes for an impressive number of over 150 participants. It is worth noticing that there was a remarkable representation of scholars from the United States including

distinguished academics as well as Ph.D. scholars. Numerous countries of the Old Continent were also represented, such as Germany, Italy, Greece, Finland, Netherlands, Croatia, Hungary, and Portugal. Poland was proudly represented by several members of the Polish Rhetoric Society.

First, an informal opportunity to get to know the participants was a welcome event at Zimmertheater Tübingen with a beautiful view of the Neckar River. Another non-scientific opportunity to widen academic circles was a conference dinner held in Silchersaal of Restaurant 1821, the traditional home of the Tübingen Museum Society. The main venue of the conference was Neuphilologikum, better known as Brechtbau. The building named after the German playwright Bertolt Brecht is a habitat of the Department of Rhetoric, Institute of Media Studies, and departments for modern languages of Tübingen University.

The welcome addresses at the official opening of the conference were followed by a lecture by Professor Dietmar Till who not only recalled the history of rhetoric studies at the University of Tübingen, but also elaborated on the main conference's idea of rhetoric as strategic thinking.

The culmination of the first day of the conference was a panel called Ten Years and Counting: A Network of Scholars in and Beyond Europe with Dietmar Till and Anne Urlich as hosts and Foteini Egglezou, Jessica Enoch, Maria Freddi, Ivanka Mavrodieva, Kris Rutten, and Lisa Storm Villadsen as panelists representing not only Rhetoric Society of Europe, but also rhetoric scholars from various geographical locations in Europe and in the United States. The speakers not only briefly summarised the history of society and its most remarkable achievements but also drew some plans for further collaboration and initiatives with establishing a journal as one of them.

Besides that, the range of topics presented by the speakers during the conference days was impressively diverse – covering historical and modern approaches. Research projects were based on classical rhetoric as well as on numerous contemporary research trends. The talks referred to timeless cultural artefacts (literature, archetypes, memorial sites), current media phenomena (artificial intelligence, social media), as well as the present social and political events (war, pandemic, demonstrations, elections, political conferences).

Papers were compiled into panel sessions, the titles of which reflected the broad research interests of participants, but also indicated the strategic goals that guided the organizers: Rhetoric against Racism, Rhetoric in Times of Crisis, Rhetoric and Migration, Rhetoric against Discrimination, Rhetoric and Propaganda, Rhetoric between Tactics and Strategy, Rhetoric and Debate, Rhetoric and Deliberation, Political Rhetoric, Rhetoric and Aesthetics, Rhetoric and the Arts, Rhetoric and Cooperation, Rhetorical Negotiations.

The largest thematic panels have been divided into up to 6 sessions, each with a minimum of three papers, e.g. Rhetoric and Strategy (6 sessions) Rhetoric in Education (5 sessions), Political Rhetoric, Rhetoric and History, Rhetoric and Science Communication (4 sessions).

For instance, Professor Jens E. Kjeldsen (University of Bergen, Norway) presented a talk entitled “Crafting a crisis. How the genre of the justifying press conference constituted the COVID-19 pandemic as an emergency and legitimised the power of the authorities”, which started a discussion on the topic of media genres and media communication styles during the pandemic and other contemporary crises.

One of the most recognizable researchers of *ethos* and argumentation, Professor Ruth Amossy (Tel-Aviv University, Israel) delivered a speech entitled “Can Chat GPT deploy rhetorical strategies?”. This thought-provoking question holds significant relevance in today’s era of widespread AI adoption in the realms of science and communication.

Professor Cheryl Glenn’s (Pennsylvania State University, USA) talk “Hope as Rhetorical Strategy” was met with a standing ovation. It was not only adequate to the anticipated attitudes in the current, turbulent times, but also moving due to the quoted personal history and distinct argumentation of the speaker in the sphere of *pathos*.

As the organizers wrote: “The conference discusses the ways we define rhetoric as a specific form of communication, argumentation, persuasion, or mediation. Strategic thinking as a complex cognitive activity involves the mental representation of a goal as well as an understanding of the ways and means to achieve this goal through communicative action.”

The biennial conference was also an occasion for the General Assembly of the Rhetoric Society of Europe. RSE is an organization for European researchers and teachers working on the art of rhetoric, however, it is also open to members from all over the world.

The purpose of RSE is to promote and advance the research, study, and teaching of rhetoric especially in Europe, and to facilitate professional cooperation between its members. The society provides a forum where researchers and others involved in rhetorical research and teaching can meet and exchange ideas, information, and documentation about their work.

During the 2023 General Assembly, the new Executive Board with Michael Hoppmann (USA/Germany) as a President was appointed. We are pleased to announce that Prof. Maria Załęska, the President of the Polish Rhetoric Society’s board – the “Res Rhetorica” publisher – will serve as a RSE board member for the following term.

It is worth recalling that in 2015 the fifth “Rhetoric in the Knowledge Society” conference was organized by the Polish Rhetoric Society in collaboration with the University of Warsaw. The valuable outcomes and insights from this scholarly gathering have been documented in the following monographs:

- *Rhetoric, Knowledge and the Public Sphere*, eds. Agnieszka Kampka and Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska (Peter Lang 2016, Series: Studies in Language, Culture and Society, Volume 8);
- *Rhetoric, Discourse and Knowledge*, eds. Maria Załęska and Urszula Okulska (Peter Lang 2016, Series: Studies in Language, Culture and Society, Volume 9).

Following the great tradition of rhetorical conferences that have been organized by the Rhetoric Society of Europe since 2006 (Aalborg/Denmark), we are waiting for the announcement of the 2025 RiS9 location.