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Introducing the New Rhetoric into organization studies

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to introduce the New Rhetoric and show its relevance for organisation studies. The expression "New Rhetoric" refers here to the theory of argumentation that Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca have originally presented in *The New Rhetoric—A Treatise on Argumentation* (1969) [hereafter the Treatise], originally published in French as the *Traité de l'argumentation – La nouvelle rhétorique* (1958). The paper follows the presentation of the New Rhetoric in the Treatise, but with illustrations taken from managerial and organisational contexts.

Purpose of the paper

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1. Argumentation theory in organisation studies

Organising has been widely acknowledged as being a matter of sensemaking (Weick 1995), sensegiving (Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991), mise-en-sens (that is the agency of producing meaning out of agency *and* of giving direction to agency) (Corvellec and Risberg 2007) and, more generally, communication (Cooren 1999). Quite surprisingly, however, whereas how people persuade each other to do or not do things is a key aspect of organisational behaviour, the potential for organisation studies of argumentation theory (see, for example, Van Eemeren et al (1996)) remains under-exploited.

Most organisation studies on argumentation simply refer to the same Toulmin's (1958) model according to which an argument is a claim bound to some data by a warrant. This model has been used to analyse decision options (Mitroff et al, 1982; Locks 1985), decision support systems (Sillince, 1996; Yearwood and Stranieri 2006), or decision-making in complex environments (Brønn 1998). It has also been brought into use to assess beliefs (Benson et al 1995), formalise argumentation (Bui et al 1997/1998), evaluate the level of argumentation rationality (Werder 1999) or criticise the Balanced Scorecard (Nøreklit 2003). At times, Toulmin's model is used in combination with other theoretical approaches, such as pragma-dialectic and rhetoric in Sillince (2000) or story telling in Gold et al. (2002).

Studies that rely on other theoretical approaches to argumentation are fewer. Symon (2008) uses rhetoric to unfold the political dimension of technological change, and Watson (1995) brings rhetoric together with discourse and speech analysis to describe how managers argue when they make sense of their day-to-day

[1] I am particularly indebted to my friend Mats Rosengren whose patient answers to my repetitive questions have enabled me to follow the philosophical implications of the New Rhetoric. I am also grateful to Tomas Nilsson and Filippa Säwe for their perceptive comments on a previous draft and to Pat Zukowski for her patient and supportive editing.

[2] There are many studies on the New Rhetoric. For a concise although nuanced introduction see Gross and Dearin (2003), which also contains a fairly detailed bibliography of works by and about Perelman, both in French and in English.

activities and defend their interests. Shapiro (1998) synthesises the treatments of fallacies in van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1987) and Walton (1995) cleanses the accounting setting debate from spurious arguments (see even McKernan 2007). Adamides and Karacapilidis (2006) refer, for their part, to van Eemeren et al. (1996) to structure dialogue and formalise argumentation in innovation processes. Lischinksy (2008) underscores the key role of examples as arguments in popular management literature. Sillince (2002) combines the semantic (how discursive formations determine which meaning, among several, a word will be given) and the pragmatic (how the arguer's personality or characteristics of the situation influence argumentation) to establish the importance of context for argumentative efficacy. Carter and Jackson (2004) use the New Rhetoric to advocate the need to adopt one's arguments to the audience as in the case of management knowledge diffusion. And I use the New Rhetoric to study the development of infrastructure projects (Corvellec 2001), how organisations produce arguments (Corvellec 2006), argumentation in the wind-power sector (2007), or risk communication in environmental impact assessments (Corvellec and Boholm 2008).

Toulmin's data-warrant-claim model has major advantages for analytical purposes. It is extremely efficient to clarify the structure of arguments. But because it assumes that the strength of an argument depends on how well the warrant connects the claim back to the data, it has the major weakness of equating persuasiveness with rationality. This is an unwarranted equivalence: all that is rational is not persuasive and all that is persuasive is not rational. Argumentative practices cannot be reduced to the practice of logic. To lay "the foundations of an organizational theory of argumentation," as Sillince (1999, p.796) puts it, there is a need to go beyond the limitations that logic puts on our understanding of argumentation and to call upon all that enables a genuine understanding of the production and communication of meaning. The present introduction to the New Rhetoric is an effort to meet this need.

The next section introduces the main notions of the New Rhetoric. It depicts the opposition that Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca make between demonstration and argumentation; it also features their notion of adherence—to be understood in the sense of considered approval and support, as in the French term *adhésion*. The section thereafter presents the analytical framework of the New Rhetoric, that is the argumentative techniques by association and those of dissociation

2. Introducing the New Rhetoric

Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca's New Rhetoric is neither a collection of new rhetorical devices nor a comparison of today's rhetorical practices as opposed to yesterday's. It is instead an attempt to re-conceptualise rhetoric as a practical theory of argumentation, alternatively to re-conceptualise argumentation as a rhetorical practice—the inversion that took place between the title and the sub-title of the Treatise when it was translated into English being an indication of this ambiguous duality of purposes.

The New Rhetoric intends to break with two major intellectual traditions at the same time: one in the humanities and one in philosophy. In the humanities, the New Rhetoric breaks with the tradition that since the late Middle Ages, rhetoric had been conceived of as an ornamental art: the art of good speech (*ars bene dicendi*). This tradition has narrowed rhetoric to a study of the techniques of persuasion or, even more restrictively, to an intricate classification of figures, for example *anadiplosis*[3]*, anaphora*[4] or *antanaclasis*[5], to mention three figures based on repetition that all start with an A, and thereby produce an *alliteration*[6]. Rhetoric is for the New Rhetoric radically different from a catalogue of ornamental techniques. It is a descriptive theory of truth in the sense that it tells why and how an audience adheres to some theses, opinions, or beliefs presented for its agreement, and thereby hold these theses, opinions or beliefs true, even if only in parts and only for a while (more about the key notion of adherence below). The claim that truth is a rhetorical product is radical and raises numerous questions: epistemic ones about the nature of knowledge; political ones about how to organise social life when there is no absolute truth to agree upon and hold to; philosophical ones about how to face the Other. This leads to the New Rhetoric's break with philosophy.

As for philosophy, the New Rhetoric breaks with the Cartesian concept of reason and reasoning according to which whenever two persons arrive at opposite decisions about the same matter, at least one of them must be in the wrong. As Descartes put it in *Rules for the direction of the mind*:

> Whenever two men come to opposite decisions about the same matter, one of them at least must certainly be in the wrong, and apparently there is not even one of them who knows; for if the reasoning of the one was sound and clear, he would be able to lay it before the other and finally succeed in convincing his understanding also. (quoted in the Treatise, p.2)

The New Rhetoric challenges the related claims that disagreement is a sign of error, that one should distrust what is merely reasonable or plausible (in the sense that there are good, although not compelling, reasons for accepting it as correct), or that one should limit rationality to logical demonstration. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca intend to reconnect rhetoric to Ancient Greece and Aristotle.

[3] *Anadiplosis* - The repetition of the last word (or phrase) from the previous line, clause, or sentence at the beginning of the next. (Burton 2008)

[4] *Anaphora* - Repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginning of successive clauses, sentences, or lines. (Burton 2008)

[7] *Antanaclasis* - The repetition of a word or phrase whose meaning changes in the second instance. (Burton 2008)

[8] *Alliteration*--Repetition of the same letter or sound within nearby words. (Burton 2008)

Advocating the idea of a specific rhetorical rationality, the New Rhetoric intends to show that rhetoric can be a means to reason not only on what is exactly true or false, but even on beliefs, opinions, or values. This brings us back to the New Rhetoric as a political project and the issue of how to socially negotiate values. When offering to reason on questionable claims, it opens up the possibility of finding an alternative in cases of disagreements to the use of lies, manipulation, or simply brute force and violence.

2.1 Demonstration vs. argumentation

The New Rhetoric claims a sharp contrast between, on the one hand, formal logic or demonstration, and, on the other hand, everyday reasoning or argumentation. Demonstration corresponds to the Cartesian ideal of reasoning. A demonstration stems from clearly stated premises and moves with logical stringency from these premises to a conclusion that cannot be challenged, at least as long as one accepts the premises and the rules of the logic in use. Simply, as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca observe, this way of reasoning imposes an unwarranted and unjustified limitation on our faculties of reasoning and proving.

Demonstration is a mode of reasoning that one-sidedly relies on the idea of self-evidence (French *évidence*) as a characteristic of reason. The various steps of a demonstration are organised in such a way that self-evidence makes it compulsory to move from one step to the other. Self-evidence is a force to which every normal mind must yield in a demonstration so that: "All proof would be reduction to the self-evident, and what is self-evident would have no need of proof" (Treatise, p.4). Mathematics is the implicit ideal, but, as the authors observe, mathematics, along with formal logic and the experimental sciences, are among the very few intellectual domains where such a mode of reasoning is fully possible. In the humanities or social sciences, where management belongs, another mode of reasoning prevails, that of argumentation.

The New Rhetoric defines argumentation in contradistinction to demonstration. Whereas demonstration goes irremediably from premises to conclusions, argumentation refers to a mix of opinions, justifications, and criticisms. Whereas demonstration reasons on truth, argumentation reasons on values. Whereas demonstration belongs to the domain of the rational, argumentation belongs to the domain of the reasonable. Whereas demonstration is eternally valid, argumentation never stands as definitive. More generally, the order of demonstrative steps is a matter of internal logic, answering to the requirements of rational consistency, that which makes a demonstration a-contextual and irreversible. On the contrary, argumentation evolves over time and remains open-ended; it is embedded in the timely contingency of individual, social, and historical conditions. So that when demonstration proceeds through the constraint of self-evidence and imposes itself upon the audience, argumentation carves out the approval and support of the audience by progressive repetitions and modifications, staying as close as possible to the audience at each and every moment. The New Rhetoric is not only an assault on self-evidence and demonstration, and the equivalence that it establishes between the psychological and the logical. It is also a petition to acknowledge argumentative rationality as a way to practically guide our reason.

A study of the project to increase railroad capacity through central Stockholm illustrates the relevance for organisation studies of this contrast between demonstration and argumentation (Corvellec 2001). This project has produced one of the lengthiest public controversies in contemporary Sweden. The controversy deals with the question: should one add a so-called Third Track to two surface tracks that exist, or should one instead drill a tunnel for local trains?

If one focuses on the period in the controversy where a surface solution is the main alternative, pro-Third Track partisans appear to approach the debate differently from anti-Third Track, tunnel partisans. Partisans of a surface solution are a cohesive coalition of organisations and institutions, such as the Chamber of Commerce or the Department of Trade and Industry. They advocate their views by bringing to the fore what can be schematised as: a) There is a need for increased track capacity; b) There are two possibilities, either a third surface track or a train tunnel; c) The first of these two solutions is cheaper, faster to implement, and fully satisfying from a traffic management point of view; d) It also respects all environmental rules; e) One should therefore build a third surface track. This is as close as one can come to a demonstration in plain language.

Anti Third Track partisans are a loose network of anonymous or prominent individuals, organisations (for example, the Green Party) and institutions (for example, the Department of Culture or the Public Building Board). These approach the debate in a different way. For example, anti Third Track partisans question *both* whether one really needs a third track when an improvement of the signal system could suffice *and* whether three tracks can really be enough if train traffic is to answer to long-term future needs for urban mobility. They also keep producing alternative solutions, for example, alternative tunnel-solutions, but even defend the status-quo or suggest a redesign of the Swedish capital into a poly-nuclear city. (A trait of argumentation is to keep producing new alternatives, whereas demonstration is, by definition, bound to its original options). Anti-Third Track partisans also let their demands evolve over time. Originally opposed to the project on the basis that it encroaches on two historic buildings, they later demand a solution that preserves the beauty of Stockholm when the project is modified to no longer affect these two buildings. Or, somewhat schematically, when supporters of the Third Track anchor their claim in cost or traffic computations, critics refer to non-quantifiable values such as beauty or responsibility. They also stage happenings, events, concerts, and the like whereas the pro-side is active in formal settings. Anti-Third Track partisans approach the debate according to an argumentative logic.

What is remarkable in the Third Track controversy is that when the surface option is abandoned as the main proposal, and is to be replaced in this role by the tunnel option, not only do the roles of pro and anti get reversed; even the ways each side approaches the debate get reversed. Those who have been using an argumentative logic start adopting a demonstrative logic to promote their solution; inversely, former supporters of demonstration start adopting an argumentative approach to stop the project, and manage to do so for another ten years.

Formal logic does not explain the dynamics of the Third Track controversy, but the New Rhetoric does. The Third track project provides a strong indication that, in plain terms, a project's pro-side tends to formulate its view as a demonstration whereas the anti-side tends to use all available ropes of argumentation to stop it, and that it can to succeed to do so for quite some time. Thanks to the New Rhetoric, we gain unique insights about a decisive phase in the life of projects, namely when alternative proposals are in competition without any having been preferred yet.

2.2 Adherence

To render the fact that contrary to demonstration, argumentation does not involve a binary "do not know" / "know for sure" state of knowledge in the audience, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca introduce the notion of *adhésion.* The French term *adhésion* turns out to be difficult to translate into everyday English. It suggests both the idea of support (*adhésion* to a political party or to a cause) and that of sticking (as of glue and wood). I believe that the authors of the New Rhetoric appreciated the combination of these two meanings into a single term. Following the translators of the Treatise into English, I render *adhésion* with adherence. I would however like to underscore that the term should not only be understood in its physical sense of the property of sticking together, but even in the sense of giving a considered approval and support to something or someone.

Adherence is pivotal to the New Rhetoric. The New Rhetoric could indeed be considered as revolving around the single question of what determines an audience's adherence to theses, opinions, or beliefs presented for its agreement. As the authors put it:

> The object of the theory of argumentation is the study of the discursive techniques allowing us *to induce or to increase the mind's adherence to the theses presented to its assent* (Treatise, p.4, emphasis in original)

Although one could consider the New Rhetoric as a treatise on the rhetorical conditions of public adherence, adherence remains a highly problematic notion within it. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca do not elaborate on its nature. For example, they do not delve into the psychological, anthropological, or sociological aspects of it. We are told that adherence is a matter of degree and that it can be strong or weak. We are also told that it can evolve over time and can be temporary. The only thing that is for certain is that it concerns something that the audience does.

This last aspect of adherence is essential since it entails an approach to argumentation that expressly focuses on the audience. The contrast is clear with approaches to argumentation in terms of logic and/or argumentative structures (for example, Toulmin 1958). Such approaches focus on the argument per se. Correspondingly, they regard the audience as at best, implicit and at worst, absent. In contrast to this, the New Rhetoric restates for its own purpose the classic rhetorical claim that persuasion requires that the orator successfully manages to meet the audience: "it is in terms of an audience that an argumentation develops" (Treatise, p.5). Adherence is a distinctive trait of the New Rhetoric in that it connects argumentation theory and rhetoric in its classic vintage of the art of persuasion.

The New Rhetoric's focus on adherence might be its strongest contribution to organisation studies. Replace the audience with the workforce, the customers, the investors, or the public at large and the relevance of the notion of adherence for management or organisation studies will blatantly surface. There are few managerial situations that do not involve gaining adherence, for example for a figure, a feature, or a future; if it is not someone else's adherence, it is one's own. Management is an argumentative practice. Spoken and written words, diagrams and pictures, designs and brands, or suits and buildings are all means of persuasion. From business schools to advertising agencies through financial road shows, sales meetings, or motivational speeches, the business of adherence is worth billions of Euros. When the New Rhetoric unfolds the schemes that orators—to be understood in a broad sense—use to gain adherence for their theses, it takes us to the heart of the art of management as a communicative practice. Let me now describe these schemes in more detail.

3. The analytical framework of the New Rhetoric

A major analytical contribution of the New Rhetoric is its classification of argumentative techniques into two main categories: schemes of association (French *liaison*) and schemes of dissociation (French *dissociation*). To put it briefly, schemes of association are argumentative techniques that bring together elements that are usually kept apart, whereas schemes of dissociation are argumentative techniques that separate elements that the common opinion considers as connected. For didactic purposes, I will present these two categories of schemes separately. However, I would like to point out that Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca insist that all argumentation occurs *in situ* and that argumentative techniques are, in practice, always composite (see Corvellec and Boholm (2008) for an illustration of this particular point in the specific case of risk communication).

3.1 Argumentation by association

The first of the two main categories of argumentative techniques is that of schemes of association. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca first give a broad definition of processes of association:

> By processes of *association* we understand schemes which bring separate elements together and allow us to establish a unity among them, which aims either at organizing them or at evaluating them, positively or negatively, by means of one another. (Treatise, p.190)

They refine this definition considerably, however, when they list many ways to create associations between two or more terms, and classify argumentative schemes by association into three types: quasi-logical arguments; arguments based on the structure of reality; and arguments establishing the structure of reality.

3.1.1 Quasi-logical arguments

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's first type of argumentative technique by association refers to quasi-logical arguments. These try to draw an argumentative advantage from the ideological prestige of scientific reasoning in Modernity. Their characteristic is that they explicitly try to fit the data into schemes that borrow from formal logic, and lay claim to a certain power of conviction from their resemblance to formal reasoning in logic or mathematics. But this is only matter of resemblance. As the authors observe:

> Submitting these arguments to analysis, however, immediately reveals the difference between them and formal demonstration, for only an effort of reduction or specification of a nonformal character makes it possible for their argument to appear demonstrative. (Treatise, p.193)

This is why Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca call them quasi-logical.

The penchant for business life's putting things in rational ways makes management a breeding ground for quasi-logical arguments. For example, managers point to contradictions that cutting research expenses go against the company's goal to improve its competitive edge. Unions invoke the compelling strength of symmetry and claim that if high bonuses are supposed to enhance motivation, small ones are likely to discourage the workforce. A variant in its own right of the argument of symmetry is the argument of justice, according to which all individuals who share a common trait should be treated in the same way. The best known use of the argument of justice is the legally supported equal work/ equal pay argument. Or corporate communication invokes transitivity. When in 1985, the Swedish producer for Absolut vodka commissioned an ad from the world famous artist Andy Warhol, it was to suggest that since renowned artists stand for quality, and a renowned artist such as Andy Warhol paints for Absolut vodka, then Absolut vodka is a premium quality product (see Warhol's painting at V & S Vin & Sprit 2004). Yet another way to argue in a quasi-logical manner is to reason on probabilities. By definition, probabilities are silent on individual events, but they stand for controlled certitude about the category to which these events belong. Much risk management rests upon the quasi-logic of stochastic reasoning.

All that is given a logical shape is not logical, however. Logic in quasi-logical arguments is most often a matter of appearance only. For example, consider the argument that "nuclear power is environmentally friendly as it produces no greenhouse gas emissions," a claim that the nuclear power industry spreads to promote itself. The argument may seem to be logically compelling, but it is fallacious. That the proposition (a) [CO2 emissions induce (=>) climate problems] is true does not entail that the proposition (b) [Reduction of CO2 induces (=>) a reduction of climate problem] is true. As every logicians knows, it is not because [A=>B] that [(non-A)=>(non-B)]; the logical equivalent of [A=>B] is not [(non-A)=>(non-B)] but [(non-B)=>(non-A)]. The argument "nuclear power is environment friendly as it produces no greenhouse gas emissions" sounds logical, but it is not. The correct argument should be: If climate problems are solved, this means that problems with CO2 emission are solved (Corvellec 2006). But such an argument would be of a lesser interest to the nuclear industry that prefers to build its argument on a fallacy, confident in the argumentative power of quasi logic.

To stay with climate change based arguments, another example of pseudo-logic is offered by the Swedish wind farm industry when it pleads for the development of wind farms in Sweden. Its line of reasoning unfolds as follows: a) It is urgently necessary to develop non-fossil forms of energy production (argument of necessity) ; b) The wind industry is now able to produce large production units that are both reliable and cost efficient (argument of ability); c) Wind farms are developed under strict conditions of governmental and public control, and only if they have been granted a building permit (argument of legality); d) Therefore wind farm developers should be allowed to develop the projects that comply with the existing legislation. The necessity/ability/legality line of argument resembles a logical reasoning, but strictly speaking, it is not logical. It is sufficient to observe that just because someone can do something that just this person should be in charge because, for example, others might do it cheaper or better. The argumentative line of the Swedish wind farm industry seems logical, but it is not logically compelling (Corvellec 2007). Likewise, one could show that none of the arguments above about the need to maintain research budgets, distribute high bonuses, or trust artistic endorsement is logically compelling.

3.1.2 Arguments based on the structure of reality

The second type of argumentative techniques by association that Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca describe consists of arguments based on the structure of reality. Instead of referring to a resemblance with logic or mathematics, arguments based on the structure of reality intend "to establish a solidarity between accepted judgements and others which one wishes to promote" (Treatise, p.261). The rationale of arguments based on the structure of reality is to transfer some adherence from accepted premises about the world as it is (or is accepted to be) onto some claim by relating this claim to these premises. Arguments based on the structure of reality are not a matter of an objective description of reality. Rather they are a way of presenting reality so that the quality of the real is extended from what the audience accepts to what the orator aims to substantiate. Arguments based on the structure of reality are invitations made to the audience to accept stepwise extensions of what it is ready to adhere to. And there are various ways to bring about such extensions.

Arguments based on the structure of reality can be built on sequential relations, for example relations of causality. Relations of causality are reminiscent of quasi-logical arguments in their vocabulary; but they refer to situations where something is featured as being the outcome of something else. They are explanatory schemes that describe the world in terms of causes and effects. A company's good financial performance is, for example, said to be the result of the CEO's competence, the corporation's long-term strategy, the stock market's trend, fortuitous events or demographic changes. Every explanation singles out a specific ground that is presented as the origin to this success. Causal links let outcomes concur with something that precedes them, and distribute praise and reward (or blame and penalty) accordingly.

Another form of sequential relations is the so-called pragmatic argument. Instead of going from cause to effect as the causal argument does, the pragmatic argument goes from effect to cause. It values an act or an event in terms of its favourable or unfavourable consequences. A decision is praised or blamed on the basis of its outcomes, regardless of whether it made logical sense or was morally defensible at the moment the decision was made. Pragmatism in argumentation, like consequentialism in moral theory, operates by transferring value from the consequences of an act to this act itself. Most management literature sold at airport news-stands follows the same pragmatic argument that has made successful *In search of excellence* (Peters and Waterman 1982) and many books after it: this management recipe is good because it has proven to be efficient.

When outcomes are not yet known, one can neither go from causes to effects nor from ends to means; but it may be possible to use the argument of waste. The rationale of this argument is to call for the continuation of something on the basis that sacrifices should not be made in vain. For example, one can call for the continuation of a project on the grounds that many resources have been ploughed into it that cannot be recovered, sunken costs, and that these resources would be wasted if the project is terminated. One can likewise argue for the continuation of a technological choice on the grounds that it is a well proven technology, which is not the same as a relevant one, and thereby deliberately create a technological path dependency.

All arguments based on the structure of reality are not built on sequential relations, though. They can also be built on relations of coexistence such as when the value of an act is derived from traits associated with the person who has committed it, for example her professional competence or moral rightfulness. For example, a decision is deemed to be brilliant because it comes from the CEO, which eases its implementation and reinforces the image of the CEO as someone with a capacity to make things happen. According to the rationale of arguments of coexistence, the traits of the agent are considered as more explanatory than the characteristics of the act. The act is not regarded in and of itself but after the agent who has produced it. There is again a transfer of values, but not over time as in the cases of arguments based on sequential relations, such as the argument of causality, the pragmatic argument, or the argument of waste. The transfer goes from an essence, for example, the competence of the CEO, to its manifestation, for example, the decision that she has taken.

It is noteworthy that this essence can be attributed not only to individuals, as in virtue ethics, but even to groups that individuals are considered to belong. For example, an analysis is considered as flawed because it comes from a communist, a victim, or a non-practitioner; or a proposal is exoticised and marginalised because it is proposed by a temporary worker, a woman, or an immigrant. The characteristics that an audience attributes to a group can determine the quality that this audience attributes to an act. Arguments of coexistence can therefore gain a dangerous strength from prejudices.

Generally, the capacity to generate adherence with arguments based on coexistence depends on the institutional context. Much risk communication rests, for example, on variants of the argument of authority, according to which experts do not over- or underestimate the issue at stake or simply cheat (even when they have a big stake in the issue). Not all the public submit to the argument of authority, though. People can challenge an institutional order in the name of another that they consider to be superior, the so-called argument of double hierarchy. Sophocles's Antigone might provide the most beautiful use of this argument as she answers Creon, "I did not think your edicts strong enough to overrule the unwritten unalterable laws of God and Heaven, you being only a man" (quoted in Treatise, p.340). Antigone sets the standard for argued disobedience and reminds us that managers always have the possibility to resist orders by invoking morality, the superior interest of the company, technological imperatives, or the demand of the market. What matters is to anchor one's argument in a social order of superior dignity.

3.1.3 Arguments establishing the structure of reality

The third and last type of argumentative technique by association regroups arguments establishing the structure of reality. Arguments based on the structure of reality have their starting point in some accepted view of reality;

arguments establishing the structure of reality have instead as a rationale to build a representation of the world.

One can try to establish reality by resorting to the particular case, such as an example. An example can support a move from the particular to the particular, as in historical studies. It can also be used as a precedent, like in law. Or it can be used to generalise from the particular to a theory. Anyone familiar with management literature should be able to come up with her own illustrations of theories that are built on well chosen examples, from textbooks to best sellers through monographs or research papers. This does not only concern qualitative studies, since even quantitative studies are example-based studies, simply based on a few more cases. It is not a matter here of the conditions of induction, as discussed in the theory of science. What matters in argumentation is to provide telling enough examples that the audience finds it legitimate to come to some kind of generalisation. "Telling" examples in management studies are, as a rule, examples of successes; in this regard, arguments by example are similar to the pragmatic argument (see 3.1.2 Arguments based on the structure of reality).

Examples can also serve to invalidate a theory. Noticeably, this is not often done in management where counter examples are used to launch a new theory rather than to falsify an existing one. Falsification is not the forte of organisation studies.

Another way to establish reality is to produce a model of it. Models are not to be understood here as simplified representations of reality, like in computerised project planning models. They refer instead to ideal descriptions that are featured as indicative of a norm that one should follow, such as an ideal society or a perfect organisation. Models are normative statements that describe an ideal world to influence behaviour in a certain direction. The field of economics is replete with explicitly normative models, free trade being currently one of the most influential ones. Models in management are in comparison more often occurrences of what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca call the Perfect Being argument. The Perfect Being is someone who is elevated to the status of a myth or a legend to serve as a normative model for others. In corporate life, this could be John F. (Jack) Welch Jr, Warren Edward Buffet, or William (Bill) Gates III if we look for flesh and blood individuals; but it could just as well be organisations, such as Toyota for its industrial organisation, Novo Nordisk for its corporate social responsibility, or the Catholic Church for its longevity. Organisation studies are keen on producing heroes to serve as models.

Instead of reasoning on particular cases, one can also reason by analogy. Analogy is a proven factor in creative thinking. It is an operation of transfer based on an alleged resemblance in structure, the most general formulation of which is: A is to B as C is to D. A and B together is the theme of the analogy, and C and D together is its phoros, the point of the analogy being that the theme and the phoros belong to different spheres. In the ordinary course, the phoros is better known than the theme. This is however not necessarily the case. When competition is described as being a war or when an organisation is said to be chaotic, the characteristics of wars or chaos are not necessarily better known than those of competition or an organisation. Analogies can even work illogically by moving from a lesser known phoros to a better known theme.

The best known type of analogy is the metaphor. There is no longer any need to argue for the pervasiveness of metaphors in organisation studies. Companies are metaphorically compared to a family (the employee is to the CEO as the daughter is to the father) or a network (with the Internet as mental representation). What the New Rhetoric draws our attention to is that the relationships between the phoros and the theme are particularly unstable, which makes analogy, and thus metaphors, particularly productive but changeable argumentative tools.

3.2 Argumentation by dissociation

The classification of argumentative schemes by association above is an important contribution of the New Rhetoric to our understanding of the mechanisms of argumentation. An even more important contribution, though, is Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's explication that it is also possible to argue through dissociation of concepts. To the series of schemes of association just described, the authors oppose a series of schemes of dissociation. They define processes of dissociation in the following terms:

> By processes of *dissociation*, we mean techniques of separation which have the purpose of dissociating, separating, disuniting elements which are regarded as forming a whole or at least a unified group within some system of thought: dissociation modifies such a system by modifying certain concepts which make up its central parts. (Treatise, p. 190, emphasis in original)

Techniques of dissociation unduly resort to pointing at links between elements that should remain separate and independent.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca explain that the "appearance-reality" pair is the prototype of all conceptual dissociations. The rationale of this argumentative scheme is to make a distinction between reality as it is presented and reality as it is. On some occasions reality is invoked to support (or question) appearances; on other occasions appearance is invoked to support (or question) reality. A strategic choice of corporate diversification is, for example, criticised for being justified in appearance but not in reality; inversely, a good performance can be featured to advocate that a strategy that has had its realism questioned actually meets the market's requirements.

More generally, the rationale of dissociative schemes is to introduce a hierarchy between two terms that values the one term and depreciates the other term *and* uses the valued term to "explain" the devaluated one. The logic of dissociation is to create hierarchised dichotomies where the higher term is used as means to question the lower, of course to the benefit of the former.

A few examples will illustrate this notion of hierarchy between terms (allow me to assume that the reader will be able to put a name of her own on every one of them).

- Speed is featured as superior to slowness to launch a new technology or product, from cars to processors through pizza delivery or access to a dental appointment.
- Global is presented as superior to local to justify the delocalisation of a head-office or defend a campaign that declines the same ads in several countries.
- Machine-made is featured as superior to hand-made to promote modernisation or promise a better quality management.
- European is described as superior to American to promote social dialogue in the workplace.

The rationale is to present the audience with a hierarchy between two terms to gain acceptance for the superiority of one of these terms, in the case at hand: speed, globalisation, machine-made, or European.

Hierarchies in dichotomies are not fixed, however. They can be reversed and it just as possible to argue that:

- Speed is inferior to slowness, which is the argumentative line of the slow food movement or the well-being industry
- Global is inferior to local, which is a standard argument of economic nationalists, but even the argument of those who mean that a logic of proximity is part of the solution to climate change-related problems, for example for food production.
- Machine made is inferior to hand-made; Rolls-Royce declares: "Building a Rolls-Royce Phantom is a unique process, which combines pioneering technology with exceptional hand-built craftsmanship." (Rolls-Royce 2008). And most of us take pride in serving guests with a home-made rather than ready-made dinner.
- Made in the USA is to be preferred to Made in the EU according to most campaigning by the US presidential candidates.

Dissociative schemes simply create polarised value inequalities.

Generally, dissociations in management tend to create new conceptual apparatuses that are featured as better to explicate and solve existing problems. This is how New Public Management has been launched in contradistinction to the traditional welfare state; female leadership in contradistinction to male leadership; or Eastern management in contradistinction to Western management. All are examples of managerial trends born out of a dissociation introduced where there was none before, and where the newly introduced term is elevated to a higher dignity. A more conservative discourse would do the opposite and elevate instead what is old to denigrate what is new.

Developing further the idea of hierarchised dichotomies, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca claim that it is possible to characterise societies not by the particular values that they prize most, but by the intensity with which they adhere to one or the other of a pair of antithetical values. The authors illustrate their views by opposing Romanticism to Classicism: the former privileging quality, emotion, or uniqueness and the latter quantity, reason, and universality. The authors consider value hierarchies as ways of seeing specific to a socio-cultural context. This is an interesting entry into the study of the dynamics of organisational culture, for example, in the context of the cultural dimension of mergers and acquisitions.

Indeed, people often prove to argue less about values than about value hierarchies. People who agree on the importance of values may disagree about how to rank (or implement) them. In the Third Track project described above, most participants share a concern for values such as accessibility, beauty, economy, or environmental friendliness; but they disagree how to rank these values. Roughly, partisans of the third track value economy before beauty or environmental friendliness whereas critics of the Third Track favour the reverse order. It is a major contribution of the New Rhetoric to show that controversies may be less about values than about values hierarchies and that these are crucial to how audiences manage their adherence.

Concluding remarks

The New Rhetoric provides a systematic understanding of the mechanisms of association and dissociation that condition an audience's adherence to some theses. As an analytical framework, it enables us to better understand the pervasiveness and diversity of argumentation in managerial and organisational settings, taking our understanding far beyond the limitations of logic. More generally, the New Rhetoric enables us to better understand the communicative dimension of management, which is why the New Rhetoric should be of interest to all those who share the view that the production and diffusion of meaning is a pivotal aspect of management, from motivation or culture specialists to interpretivist researchers, corporate story-tellers, or economic journalists.

There is more to it. The New Rhetoric enables us to reason on values, in absolute (values *per se*) as well as relative terms (value hierarchies). This is of crucial importance since the ability to *reason* on values is an alternative to the use in social relationships of brute force and violence, or of lies and manipulation. Perelman (1912-1984) belongs to a generation that has had many occasions to witness barbarism, not the least during the Second World War. It is not senseless to see in his New Rhetoric a theoretical effort to build the practical premises for a social life shielded from the throes of absolutism.

In my view, Perelman shares with his contemporary, Emmanuel Levinas, (1906-1995) the conviction that humanity is enacted in the relationships between human beings. In the wake of their respective breaks with Cartesianism, Levinas and Perelman share a similar obsession with ways of living with – not killing –

the Other. Levinas ([1969] 2005, [1981] 2004) theorises the moral responsibility that facing the Other involves. Perelman develops ways to practically understand and manage the misunderstandings, disagreements, or differences in views that occur in encounters with the Other. Similar concerns for practical tolerance and understanding is to be found in both Levinasian moral philosophy and the New Rhetoric. Such concerns should have an endless bearing for organisational life.

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