FIGURES OF THE REPUBLIC

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About Rhetoric's Idiolect

Rhetoric has its own definitions for terms, not to say concepts, that often crop up, as if by themselves, in other disciplines, to the point that we tend to forget we fathered them. It is the fate of what I would call rhetoric's idiolect. Although rhetoric's complex intellectual history is common knowledge to rhetoric scholars, at times we tend to forget what our own idiolect encompasses, especially when some of it has been pillaged and served back to us in the form of dishes we hardly recognize as coming from our own kitchen—needless to say I use this allegory by reference to Plato's liking for analogies between domestic arts and intellectuals crafts.

One specific case: what does "figure" mean, in rhetoric's idiolect, and how can we make it useful again, for instance in the case of rhetoric and political action?

At a recent colloquium on "figures" I was stunned to realize that, after two long days of learned exchanges, no one had recalled the standard, idiomatic, definition of "figure." In spite of our deliberate deliberations on the liberation of debate in a democratic society, we had been behaving like sophomores – reading the critics (ourselves) and not the sources.[1]

This is how Quintilian defines "figure:" *Figura, sicut nomine ipso patet, est conformatio quædam orationis, remota a communi et primum se offerente ratione* (*Inst*. 9.1.4–5). A literal translation goes like this: "Figure, as the word says it, is a certain conformation of speech removed from a thinking commonly shared and presenting itself first."

Let put to rest "trope," so often wedded to, if not interchangeable with "figure." Quintilian expresses a received opinion when he mentions, in the next sentence, that "*in tropis ponuntur verba alia pro*

aliis, "as for the tropes it is matter of replacing words by other words." Some of us in rhetoric studies feel disquiet at the way "trope" seems to have gained the upper hand in many circles (from anthropology to psychoanalysis). I set aside the specialized meanings of "trope" in traditional modal logic and, in modern Anglo-American philosophy, as equivalent to "concrete property," although it is worth noting a puzzling commutability between oratorical and logical idioms—"predication" is another neat example. In the face of all this, "figure" rings hollow. To round off this survey, I want to mention my favorite, "scheme" (Greek for "figure"), which never managed to enter rhetoric's idiolect. It may gain currency soon. Who knows?

In any case, let us return to the definition of "figure:" Quintilian's epigrammatic phrasing, "*oratio*" balancing "*ratio*," is not simply a way the Latin language elegantly resolves the difficulty of translating polysemous Greek *logos* (Cassin and Auvray-Assayas 2004, 733–35). *Ratio* is a difficult term, which denotes "calculation, reasoning, method, manner." Contrary to *logos* it does not denote "speech." Quintilian's definition is therefore a way to signify that, in the process of producing "fictions" ("fiction," "figure," which are of the same *etymon*) aimed at producing persuasion and social action (a rhetorical action is fulfilled only when it is acted upon by the audience or part if it) through scenarios for decision-making, "figures" of speech behave like "calculations" that both depart from "communal" thinking and give formulations to that which does not "present itself first" to current, and common, opinion.

"Figure" allows for a reshaping (*conformatio*) not of language but of taken-for-granted thinking and argument (that is: lack thereof). The orator stands as a gateway, as it were, to allow this ushering in of a new "conformation" which, if the figure is used effectively in the persuasive act, should result in the proposed "fiction" (do, judge, value, this or that) becoming an action, a reality. Actually, a standard in rhetoric is to activate figures at the conclusion of a speech, when emotional identification is needed, either by evoking pity or indignation. This is done once authority-based and logic-based evidence, of the kind that requires sustained attention and hence incurs the risk of attention lapses, have been cleared out of the way. The aim of this process lies in allowing a "fiction," a persuasive scenario (let's do this, let's condemn her, let's celebrate this) to pass into social, political, civil life, and to

become in turn what is never was before: "common knowledge"—
common for having been acted upon, *knowledge* of the kind indicated
by the expression "commonplace."

I would like now to try and apply "figure" to the rhetoric of
republicanism, in Poland and in South Africa, and to revisit moments
of republican transformation, or "figuration."

Moving East

In 2005, I published, in French, a set of lectures by Polish poet
and republican, Adam Mickiewicz. In 1842, at the Collège de France
in Paris, Mickiewicz spoke to packed audiences, and, soon after the
December 1851 coup d'etat, and a few months before the renewed rape
of the Republic by a failed socialist, a Bonaparte, he was suspended,
along side historians Michelet and Quinet. He died, a couple of
years later, while he was gathering an anti-Russian legion in Turkey.
Mickiewicz is an emblematic figure of Polish vigorous republicanism,
a sort of Walt Whitman of the Slavs.

In the course of two lectures he offers "figures" of Siberia—Siberia
seen by him as the strongest commonplace in the Slavs' political
imagination. He describes the long, slow caravans of prisoners, or
the single-prisoner coach, *kibitka*, drawn at breakneck speed across a
wasteland, as far as Kamchatka. Fast or slow, these Polish exiles began
populating Siberia—adding a foreign population of Westerners, yet not
colonists or settlers, yet not Russian, to another dislocated population,
the local indigenous, animist tribes. The Yakuts were economically
and mentally displaced, forced to change their ways, near slaves. Slavs
and slaves populated Siberia (Mickiewicz 2005, Lectures 64 and 65).
He also describes how, for Polish republicans of the late 18th century,
the statement, "he is unhappy" meant, "he is in Siberia."

Unhappiness of the Polish republic, unhappiness of the original
rural *demos*, from both side on the world as it were, now fallen prey
to Empire. Mickiewicz was a believer in the medieval form of the
village, *mir*, a Russian concept, not a Polish one, to which he makes
a direct reference (Lecture 61), and which, for him, is generic for
Slavic republicanism—the *mir* destroyed by the importation of
Western bureaucracy under Peter the Great and the perverse effect

of homemade religious prophets. Since *mir* denotes both 'the world' and 'peace,' and is the term used to refer to the village as a communal organization (a term even *polis* cannot approximate), "unhappiness" went further than mere political exile: Mickiewicz infers that it is the republic-as-world-peace that went into cold Siberia. Siberia was the (political) world made unhappy.

For him there is, however, something shared between Polish republicans condemned to a terrifying silence and, in the silence of Siberia, the "moral knowledge" of Shamanism that still held indigenous people together. Silence is a figure. It hides the real cause for "unhappiness'—Siberia is merely a material cause. In it lies his stunning indictment of the Poles: they have to suffer at the hands of an autocracy, and be reduced to silence, for having (I quote) "abused speech," that is, having exceeded the virtues of deliberation, and turned the republic into a verbal demagogy. He sums up his argument with this sentence: "An abnormal development of intelligence necessitated an equally frightening *rectification*" (a term later used by Mao, may I add). He concludes that republican exiles, forced to reflect on lost speech and to live lives in terror to atone and be reconciled with politics, once deported to Siberia, now have to behave like Shamans: upholders of their republic, not of the republic borne out by an abuse of deliberation, they transform themselves into shamans of the republic, hallucinating intermediaries whose "unhappiness" allows them to access what Mickiewicz calls the "soul" of freedom.

Mickiewicz brings his argument to a rhetorical climax, an allegory really, when he summons up the image of convoys of republican deportees crossing convoys of dispossessed Yakuts. In this singular encounter, as their paths cross, as their gazes meet, something tremendous takes place between Slavs and slaves: a moment of truth, a moment of justice, a moment of humanity—you can call it a moment of recognition and reconciliation.[2]

I think that, perhaps, with this allegory Mickiewicz makes us touch three figures of the republic, the Republic which is in a sorry state nowadays. I do not refer here to Republics that are mere imagined republics, in name alone. I refer to the foundational models for republicanism: the American and the French republics. And to this end, let me summon a sort of imaginary, "figural," dialogue between East and South.[3]

Moving South

First Figure

If we accept the idea that the South African Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) was an "authentic" phase of a democratic foundation,[4] because it faced the violent past in a non-political manner, and brought it back to the present through the telling of "untold sufferings," and thus made possible the future inasmuch as the TRC is as "constituting" as the Constitution, if not more, then we are forced to reflect on what a "moment" is—the moment of perpetrators and victims meeting each other, the moment of the convoy.

On the one hand, it is a near definition of Hegelian *Aufhebung*, how this "becomes" that while being/having-been-this; and it is quite close to Heidegger's own definition for "moment"—*Augenblick*, "moment," the sudden eye opening, a blinking onto the now, an eye opening that is an eye opener.[5] The convoys crossing one another's path, and the TRC, were, in an *Augenblick*, a moment of recognition, of eye-opening authenticity that held past-present-future together.[6]

The analogy between Polish exiles meeting Yakuts and South African perpetrators meeting victims, may come as a surprise. However, there lies the power of a "figure": it forces analogical thinking and provokes an *Aufhebung*. The accidental encounter of republican exiles and dispossessed peasants, of catholics and animists, becomes non-accidental and transforms, as Mickiewicz would say, republicans into shamans. Similarly, the non-accidental encounter between perpetrators and victims, at TRC's hearings, becomes the accidental request for personal pardon—an event un-predicted by the TRC, and condemned by Derrida (2004) as burdening victims with yet another demand, just as violent as a torturer's demand.

Or, to re-use a development by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the moment of recognition shared by prisoners and peasantry, in the same way as the meeting of perpetrators and victims, creates "an authority that is no authority" (1762, bk. 2. sec. 7, par. 8), meaning, here "power."[7] These are authorial moments for the republic to come.

Specifically, as I have pointed it elsewhere, the fundamental tension in the South African republic, between the force of reconciliation and that of sovereign constitutional invention, has survived the passage to

organized democracy. This is how a Figure remains active, when the "moment" preserves its energy and continues to fulfil the shape it was intended to have in the first place. You will find a similar argument, among some Marxists, that 1917 "achieved" 1789—in the Aristotelian meaning of "to achieve," that is, to fulfil a potential, to fill it fully with agency.

The shamanic power Mickiewicz attributes to exiles in the "gulag" is akin to the TRC's function. Exiles, like Yakut shamans, envisioned the Republic to come, in Poland.

The South African TRC was, perhaps, a moment of shamanism, and shamanism itself can be recast in the tension between *auctoritas* and *potestas*. This is how and why the ex-TRC, when it recalls a "logic of reconciliation" as taking precedence on a "logic of State" (the case for reparations), affirms, even beyond its past moment, its *auctoritas* and retains what I have called a "censorial" power (Salazar 2004b). It allows Desmond Tutu to exercise an ethical censoring of government's actions when government is seen to retract from "promoting" reconciliation, or "well-being," happiness, a foundational requirement ensconced in the Epilogue of the Interim Constitution (1993), from which both TRC and government draw, ultimately, their legitimacy. It affirms the ethics of the republic, beyond and before deliberation, it affirms a radical break in history, an ante and a post for deliberative rhetoric, it guards against "abused speech." It acts as a Shaman, and, not unlike the Poles who rediscover how to deliberate for the *mir*, world-peace-republic, in the vastness of Siberia, a non-political site, it afforded South Africans to live, in the precinct of the TRC, a caravan-like de-territorrialized space, as if deliberation could effect "dignity."

The first figure of the Republic does not then pertain to a founding moment, but, rather, in a moment of eye-opening authenticity whereby agency delivers the possibility of thinking anew, audaciously anew.

Second Figure

What was at stake in this "moment of truth" was justice, or what I would call "happy" justice, "well-being" restored, "promoted" says the Epilogue of the Interim Constitution.[8] You can call it "grace" if you wish. Or even the "supreme good" in politics—politics' beatitude.

I will not belabor a point we all know (Arist. *Rh*. 1.13.11–19, 1374a-b): you can be just by playing the game of forensic rhetoric, evidence-counter evidence and persuasion, yet be lacking justice. You can also be just politically, and trample on established rights.

In each case, if we are interested in neat distinctions, there appears a conflict of rhetorics, forensic or deliberative; a conflict of persuasion, legal-rational or ethical-emotional; and a conflict on the notion and exercise of justice. The TRC acted like a moment of rhetorical "relief," as one talks of the "relief" of a besieged city; a relief of politics, including of its penal side, thanks to a deliberative, contemplative, justice; and a relief of political rhetoric, prudential or legalistic, thanks to having a group of people consider what happiness can be, in civil life. The TRC was a sort of Siberia.

The TRC moment was a happy moment of encounter. Not the happiness of the senseless, but the happiness of seeing order made by man out of violence. Erasmus: the opposite of truth is not fallacy but violence. This second Figure is about figuring out political violence.

Rightly, South Africans never talk about "civil war" (Salazar 2004a, 50–51). Indeed, as apartheid denied "civility," both as "citizenship" and as "civilization," to its Black (non) citizens, a "civil" war it could no be. It takes courage to declare a war to be "civil." It implies that the polity has reached real *stasis*, the moment of sedition where the fundamental model for any war, the *perduellio*, comes onto the stage of politics. *Perduellio*

is, the 'war' waged by a private citizen against his community.... High treason is not a war waged by a citizen against ethical and material patrimony; it is war that is perceived as a direct, intimate, attack to core values. Put differently: tyrannies do not experience war as a challenge to their ethos, simply to their power, and they naturally revel in such challenges. Post-Enlightenment republics understand war as an inner challenge to their very principle, a "treason" of standards they see as rational-universal: republics perceive war as a duel in which the opposite party is betraying human nature. By implication, if any of its citizens disagree with this inference, their mere expression of dissent will be presented as treasonable or anti-republican, and censored. (Salazar 2004b, 10)

Mickiewicz spends many pages describing how the tsarist regime was "an empire of terror." He goes as far as summarizing, in a strange sort of anthropology, the Russian ruling style as an "imperative" tone that creates a sense of terror in those who hear it,

and have to obey. He assimilates those who succumb to the power of this tone to Yakut peasants and hunters who think of the tsar as a totem, a great white eagle. He traces it back to the *halla* of the Mongol hordes (Lecture 74; see Axer 2005). However, this terror, or violence that can simply be effected by saying the word, is not what republican Terror is.

As a French republican, I have a sense of terrified respect for the Terror: the Republic reaches its purest essence in the practice of Terror.[9] Put differently, the Republic must place itself above pity, above compassion, above life even. In other words, political life, in a Republic, is something more than life in nature.

However, the TRC administered the proof, or at least the performance, that, at a foundational moment, pity can be republican. The purest moment is not terror but pity. To put it differently, the French Revolution had such a degree of piety toward the Republic, that it showed no pity. So did the Russian revolution that completed the French, and the Maoist one that completed the Russian. Terror is an integral part of the argument regarding human rights. However, these rights are not the psychologized and ethnicized versions that have currency today, but those stated in 1789 Declaration which provides for a political definition of humankind. Terror included.

Yet, the TRC has introduced in republican politics a conjoining of pity and piety. After all, pity and piety are simply said *pietas*.[10] Piety/pity entail both an outward gesture, by which the individual signifies that duty is paid to, let us call it, "justice," and an inward movement that helps constitute the individual as a person. There is a ceremonial, public, "rhetorical" display of pity that signifies the restoration of the person into the larger compass of human justice, piety. Put differently, the TRC made necessary the display, "performance," of acts of pity and of acts of piety—being moments of public reconciliation. The interesting thing is that, as we know, pity together with indignation is one the key passions that must be activated in the peroration of a speech, forensic in particular. It is an essential ferment for figures of speech of the most persuasive kind (Arist. *Rh*. 3.16, 1417a13). The TRC, by choosing pity, or invoking it, rather than indignation—the ferment of Terror, one might say—gave a specific rhetorical form to the South African republic.

Third Figure

My last, not least, interrogation: how do people meet, or, figure themselves out? Just place in parallel the meetings of the South African Constitutional Assembly with the "hearings" of the TRC, and you will visualize how a republic can conceive of two forms of democratic representation: one based on deliberation, the other on the display of pity; the one based on the exercise of delegation, the other on the performance of individuals; the one staging citizens, the other persons.[11]

You have all heard the French national anthem, or rather, republican rallying song, but perhaps not the lines French children learn at school: "Do you hear the soldiers of tyranny ravish our wives and children . . . March on, feed their blood to our ground." Blood, ground, growth.

Now, the point of this allegory is that the Republic—not a "French" republic, but the Republic—was made real, manifest, evident, when its people stood their ground and fought off the aristocratic armies.[12] At Valmy, the newly born republic, with its army of citizens, stopped the coalition of monarchies led by the Austrians. It was the founding moment of a nation-in-arms. An encounter of sorts took place when the present stared at the past, the republic stood its ground and stopped what was not "human." Above the heads of the tyrants, the people looked at peoples, and asserted a "universal deliverance, " a liberation" beyond liberty. William Pitt, in a series of speeches at the Commons, had literally no word to name it, although he could describe it by harnessing the resources of traditional rhetoric.[13]

To understand how territory is evoked, I must go back East. Reading an essay on Russian *postupok*, primarily translatable as "action," I am struck by similarities between the standard, wordy, translation for *ubuntu* and *postupok*.[14] *Ubuntu* defines, in South Africa, the communality of experience that makes humanity, and was often invoked by the TRC as the philosophical standard by which reconciliation must be measured (See Doxtader and Salazar, 2007). In this "standard" lies the argument I have proposed elsewhere against an anthropological or gnomic understanding of the Bantu word (Salazar 2005), and the parallel I see between *ubuntu* and *postupok*. In Bakhtin's philosophy of action, *postupok* denotes "a responsible action" which places "a person" in "ethical" "co-existence" (*sobytie*).

I find intriguing that the Russian term means, "originally," "a step taken." Territory is evoked.

That "liberation" is territorial is not immaterial, as it makes manifest the space of deliberation. It has to do with a phenomenology of rhetoric, how a "fiction"—liberty—is made material. This is Derrida on the difference between "liberation"-*Befreiung* and "liberty":

In sum, this is what Kant reminds us of at the beginning of his essay on Enlightenment, *Was ist Aufklärung*? Enlightenment requires nothing else that Liberty, even the least offensive of all liberties: to make a public usage of reason (*öffentlichen Gebrauch*). However, given to all men, this liberty presupposes maturity, an exit from minority (*Unmündigkeit*), therefore subjugation, from tutelage that are men's doing. Man is accountable, responsible, culpable for the lack of maturity which deprives him of responsibility and liberty. Hence a logic of rupture and of mutation by leap, which, so it seems, leads Kant to say *sapere audere*: be audacious, know how to be audacious, have the courage to use your *own* understanding (Kant underlines *own* by writing *deines* eigenen *Verstandes zu bedienen*). Take that leap by which you freely secure your own liberty, at that place where, nonetheless, you have it already, at that place where a lack of maturity, your *age*, still prevents you to appropriate to yourself what is *already* yours. (Derrida 2004, 132; my trans.)

The convoy conveys indeed that, in the moment of eye opening, human beings dare to take a leap of practical reason, that they ensure "liberation," that persons can be within citizens.

How do you talk of humanity while accepting the Terror? The link between what a person is and what a citizen is far from obvious, at least in post-Enlightenment 19th century republicanism to which Mickiewicz belongs. This posed a challenge to republicanism in the 19th century—a tradition we'd better look at carefully, from those who invented sociology to those who invented the Socialist movement. It is this concept that gave so much prominence, in the second half of the 19th century, to Charles Renouvier's reform of Kantian moral philosophy, centered on moral responsibility: "personnalism" (*Le Personnalisme*, 1903). Renouvier's influence, via *Esprit*, was felt right down to French wartime *Résistance* itself and to the constitution of a new social democracy, a republic that cares, after the Second World War.[15]

Renouvier's republicanism entails that the social contract is again and again grounded in the exercise of deliberation, conducive to moral autonomy. The social contract is not given once and for all,

but constantly self-reflected upon. This is how *contrat personnel*, autonomy, precedes and accompanies political liberty, or, as Derrida says, a "liberation" not a "liberty." Between the convoy, the TRC hearing and solidarity evoked by Renouvier there is common ground.

The fact is, in the tension between republic, religion, and the individual, the TRC advanced a political or civil or "pious," definition of the person, *ubuntu*. Interestingly, *ubuntu* functions with regard to reconciliation in the same manner in which shamanism functions with regard to the convoy: both are functions of intermediation, both stem from a gnomic vision of mental life but are uplifted to political life, both reveal something of the necessary passage from being to "deliverance." The figure here summoned is, ultimately, that of passage, trans-formation, *meta-noia* of the person reaching moral autonomy as citizen, not merely as a private person.

Moving ahead?

You may ask me: where does this lead us? To a simple statement: the Republic necessitates the audacity of reason. South Africa, at the time of foundation, invented a new rhetorical regime, audaciously based on the deliberative value of pity. In France, the young immigrants' uprising followed by the mass movement of jobless youth in 2006 showed how an educated youth can achieve change, or try to achieve it, when their elders have lost audacity. In the third republican model, the American, we witness the stupefied silence of the young in the face of history. Which leads me, taking a leaf from Polish Republican Mickiewicz's book, to wonder whether rhetoric should not search for the roots of its idiolect and regain a modicum of radicalism. Time to revisit what we mean by the words we use, and question the efficacy of our teaching, for the sake of a true republic.

Notes

1. The present essay is, in part, a reworking of a paper I gave at that conference, which was a scholarly event of great intensity ("Figures of Democracy," organized by Maurice Charland, Concordia, Montreal, October 2005). It dovetails with Salazar 2006. Some of its research falls under a grant by the National Research Foundation, South Africa (collaborative project

Poland-South Africa, International Science and Technology Agreement, GUN 2063121).

2. You will find similar example of "convoying recognition" in the autobiography by Slavomir Rawicz (1956), a Polish POW, deported to Siberia, who walked from Yakutsk to India, through Mongolia, the Gobi, China's Kansu, Tibet and the Himalayas. On Mickiewicz, see Axer 2005.

3. See, for instance, Salazar 2002; 1989; and my edition of the TRC report (English-French), Salazar 2004.

4. For a somewhat different analysis of the reconciliation moment, not incongruent with mine, see Doxtader 2001.

5. I draw on Balibar, Büttgen, and Cassin, 2004; Hegel 1929; Heidegger 1962.

6. On Aristotelian recognition, I refer to my analysis in Salazar 2007.

7. Indeed, here, on *auctoritas/potestas*, see Agamben 2003.

8. In South Africa's first democratic Interim Constitution (adopted on 17 November, formally passed on 22 December 1993). On what an "epilogue" is, see Salazar 2004a, 38–44.

9. The Terror lasted from 17 September 1793 to 27 July 1794. The victims of Terror and those of apartheid (as certified by the TRC) are equal in number, roughly 20,000.

10. On *pietas* see Colot 2004, 942–45. This is my take on the subject, not hers.

11. I have tried to sketch a genealogy of "assembly" in Salazar 2003. In addition, "hearing" has to do with "rainbow" and the concept of "restorative justice," via a reading of Tutu's own reading of the Scriptures, what I call Tutu's "fifth rhetorical articulation" in Salazar 2004c. All this can be encapsulated in a single word: "entente."

12. The Republic began on 22 September 1792.

13. See my remarks on Pitt's *Orations* on the French Revolution (1793–1801) in Salazar 2005, 3–5.

14. On *postupok* see Vasylchenko 2004, 978–79; on *ubuntu* see Salazar 2004a, 70-71.

15. See Swarzmantel 2003, 45–46. Renouvier 1896–1897 was the result of a long-standing Socialist republican engagement (compare Renouvier 1848; 1851).

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