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THE IDEA OF POLITICS IN "POLITICAL" RHETORIC

The author claims that analyses of "political discourse" or "political rhetoric" should be grounded in what it is that participants try to do *politically* with language. Words, actions, and events work together; words interpret events or actions, as well as constitute political facts, while actions in various ways help words gain their *political* efficacy. Analyses of political rhetoric (or discourse) should treat discourse as an instrument of *doing* politics, either in a strategic or constitutive sense, a functional component of the political system and of the rhetor's political engagements, if one is to avoid the pitfall of metadiscursive interpretation, i.e. identifying rhetorical devices or discursive constructions in a text putatively labeled as "political" through ascription to a "politician" or to a political subject matter or context.

Introduction

The close relationship between language and politics has always been central to both Western political thought and rhetorical tradition. In the *Politics*, Aristotle famously equated the very possibility of politics with the possession of language: "man is by nature a political animal [*politicon zoon*]" because "man is the only animal" whom Nature, which "does nothing in vain", "has endowed with the gift of speech" (*Politics*, 1253a 1-10). Indeed, language and other forms of symbolization appear indispensable to the constitution and maintenance of human communities, the working of organizations and institutions, the activities of politicians, and the civic lives of ordinary people. "Politics as we know it," James Farr concludes,

"would not only be indescribable without language, it would be impossible. Emerging nations could not declare independence, leaders instruct partisans, citizens protest war, or courts sentence criminals. Neither could we criticize, plead, promise, argue, exhort, demand, negotiate, bargain, compromise, counsel, brief, debrief, advise nor

consent. To imagine politics without these actions would be to imagine no recognizable politics at all” (Farr 25).

“The activities of a politician, such as seeking consensus, elaborating policy, negotiating and mediating in conflicts, representing interests and opposing the policy of others are all fundamentally linguistic activities,” echoes Paul Bayley (Bayley 8). Paul Chilton and Christina Schaffner even propose a kind of chiasmic relationships between language and politics: on one occasion they note that while it is “clear that political activity does not exist without the use of language” (Chilton and Schaffner, “Introduction” 3), while on another occasion they suggest that “it is probably the case that the use of language in the constitution of social groups leads to what we call ‘politics’ in a broad sense” (Chilton, and Schaffner, “Discourse and Politics” 206). This virtual identification of political activity with linguistic activity implies, Chilton and Schaffner suggest, “a close alliance of the study of politics with the study of language” (Chilton and Schaffner, “Introduction” 4).

The argument of the present essay, however, is that while it is indeed the case that “politics” as we know it may be impossible without linguistic/symbolic activity, it does not follow that any use of language or symbols, even by agents we label as “politicians,” necessarily *ipso facto* constitutes “politics.” Analyses of “political discourse” or “political rhetoric” require attention to the nature of the activity that they presumably describe. To put it plainly, the question of (the working of) language and rhetoric in politics involves reflection on what is meant, in any given case, by “politics.” In many analyses of “political rhetoric” (or “political discourse”), such reflection is short-circuited by a near automatic identification between political and linguistic activity. The next section will examine the problem in more detail.

Politics and Political Rhetoric: Posing the Problem

In a well-known critique of what he sees as the tendency to treat rhetoric as a universal interpretive metadiscourse, Dilip Gaonkar has suggested that scholars often tend to “place... things under the sign of rhetoric more to make rhetoric intelligible than the things subsumed under it” (Gaonkar 34). What Gaonkar calls “coarticulation” – speaking of “rhetoric” in tandem with something else that presumably grounds and instantiates it, in constructions such as “rhetoric

of X” (rhetoric of science, rhetoric of technology, rhetoric of literature, and so on) – often involves metadiscursive interpretation that reduces the putative object of (rhetorical) description to a free-floating modifier.

The especially close association between language and politics makes “political rhetoric” (as well as “political discourse analysis”)¹ especially susceptible to the temptation of metadiscursive interpretation. The common charge against political language as being “so much rhetoric” (a charge rarely used in the context of scientific or technical controversies, for instance, but frequent in political debates) makes “political rhetoric” a term permanently poised, is it were, on the verge of undermining its claim to explanatory sense.²

Any description of political discourse must resist this temptation. At the most basic (and least descriptively or theoretically interesting) level, any linguistic activity involves “rhetoric” as long as it is intentional, addressed, and meaningful. Long ago, Northrop Frye pointed out in his classic *Anatomy of Criticism* that “anything which makes a functional use of words will always be involved in all the technical problems of words, including rhetorical problems.” “The only road from grammar to logic,” Frye argued, “runs through the intermediate territory of rhetoric” (Frye 331). Thus, saying that a certain symbolic activity involves “rhetoric” merely restates the given.

In his critique of the “rhetoric of science,” Gaonkar points out that rhetorical analyses of scientific discourse have to reflect, first and foremost, on what they understand by “science” as well as observe, as social studies of science have done, what it is exactly that scientists do when they believe they are doing science, and what exactly such doing involves. Gaonkar also notes the “thinness” and abstractness of much analytic rhetorical vocabulary (such as ethos, pathos, and logos), which, he points out, may in some shape be found in any discourse. “Thin” description may, Gaonkar suggests, be adequate as a heuristic aid in performance (which is how it was originally conceived of in classical rhetoric), but it is “inadequate for a critical reading of what gets ‘said’ (or ‘done’) in [any kind of rhetorical] performance” (Gaonkar 33). “The classical vocabulary of production,” Gaonkar

1. In the context of the present essay, I speak rhetorical and discourse analysis as if they were interchangeable, following Christl De Landtsheer, since the issue I am addressing applies to any attempt to analyze the “language” of politics. De Landtsheer also uses these terms interchangeably (see De Landtsheer, Christl. “Introduction to the Study of Political Discourse.” In De Landtsheer, Christl and Ofer Feldman, eds. *Politically Speaking: A Worldwide Examination of Language Used in the Public Sphere*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998. 1-16.)

2. In the case of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, the term “political rhetoric” would indeed be tautological.

argues, “does not give us sufficient resources to apprehend how a speaker imagines and fills out a project conceived in the face of an exigency” (Gaonkar 33).

Rhetorical or discourse analyses that depend on the assumption that one analyzes “political” rhetoric because one is examining discourse by a “politician” or about “politics,” or that come down to blanket generalizations of the form “politicians do or say X”, leave out the sense of the cultural, historical, and *political* (thus *ipso facto* also to a large extent rhetorical) location of “politics” and “politicians” – in effect leaving unexamined what are perhaps the most salient issues from the perspective of *political* rhetoric and of the relationship between language and politics. I recently reviewed a collection of manuscripts on “political rhetoric,” one of which concluded that “politicians” attempt to “project the image of being well-mannered” (since it had not, as of this writing, been published I cannot cite it). What politicians, one wants to ask? In what “political” context? What kind of “political” action was facilitated by the assumption of such an ethos? Would “well-manneredness” constitute a successful ethos equally in the British parliament and the court of Genghis Khan? Another manuscript concluded that “[i]n trying to produce rhetorically efficient and appealing political messages, politicians often use *commonalities*, namely sets of values, beliefs, shared experiences, elements that bind a community”. On the other hand, another manuscript in the same collection averred that “[p]olitical discourse is deeply polemical: the reason of its existence is addressing an adversary discourse...”. The last two contentions appear, in the blanket manner in which they are couched, to be contradictory. Is “political” discourse always adversarial? What about alliance building as a constituent of political behavior? Clearly, such statements can only make sense if provided with some descriptive “depth” in terms of the specificity of contexts, agents, purposes, and so on—in other words, if grounded in some conception of what is meant, in any given case, by doing “politics.”

Surely, politics is not only confined to the activities of “politicians”. As Clifford Geertz had once observed, “[t]he political processes of all nations are wider and deeper than the formal institutions designed to regulate them; some of the most critical decisions concerning the direction of public life are not made in parliaments and presidiums...” (Geertz 316). Ordinary people, especially in the course of professional activities and in institutional contexts, routinely engage in “politics”, for example, in faculty meetings, corporate boards, in committees, and so on. In his study of “political styles”, Robert Hariman includes “office culture” among the milieux he recognizes as “political” (that is why we speak of

“office politics”). On the other hand, in other situations, the same people, perhaps even saying substantially the “same” things, might not be engaging in “politics”, even when ostensibly talking *about* “politics” or discussing “political” subjects. For instance, a husband and wife talking in the kitchen about the federal budget deficit may be talking *about* politics but are most likely not *engaged in doing* politics (unless both of them happen to serve on a Congressional Budget Committee or some such body), while two members of the Congressional Budget Committee ostensibly engaged over lunch in a discussion of golfing may, in fact, be “doing politics” insofar as their “lunch” (and planned golfing trip to the Bahamas) may be part of behind-the-scenes negotiations accompanying the pending bi-partisan budget “deal”. “Doing lunch” (along with the routine symbolic activities that may transpire in the course of it – such as the tax-deductible “two martinis”) may be part of “doing politics” if it brings people together to hammer out an agenda for action in the face of a pending issue. The “political” aspects of lunch may thus be those that, for instance, facilitate the forging of a “strategic” *relationship* between given participants directed at some *purpose* with a public character (within a given domain of “publicness”, i.e. the government, an organization or institution, a movement, or some other collective body).

“Politics” and the “political,” as well as “politician,” are historically, culturally, and, well, politically variable and dependent categories.³ Graffiti on a wall may be a political act to some and simple vandalism to others. What is considered “political” depends to some extent on ideological (thus also “political”) assumptions and agendas.⁴ “Political” purposes such as gaining power or building alliances may require different rhetorical strategies in different political contexts; by the same token, a given rhetorical strategy may have different “political” effects depending on the context. In the competitive arena of the Elizabethan court, for example, in which praising the sovereign and showing off one’s verbal facility were important ways of gaining competitive advantage (thus influence and power), poetry constituted an important genre of “political” discourse (Whigham).

3. I notice that after the transition of 1989, former members of the communist establishment began referring to themselves as “politicians,” a usage that was not customary prior to the political transition. I read that as part of their self-justifications for the decisions made while they were in power, decisions they now claim had been the kind of decisions any “politician” in any society might make (see especially Jaruzelski, Wojciech. *Byc Moze Ostatnie Slowo (Wyjasnienia Zlozone Przed sadem)*. Warszawa: Comandor, 2008).

4. Aaron Wildavsky has suggested that in the broader public arena “what we-the-people decide to politicize constitutes ‘the political’ at any one time” (*New Politics* xx).

Doing “politics” implies a different sort of enterprise in a one-party state, a personal dictatorship, or a parliamentary democracy. It implies different tactical goals (even if the strategic aim is gaining or retention of “power” – perhaps the primary but not the only aim of political action) and different means for their attainment – all within specific ideologized vocabularies and pragmatic “rhetorics” and within the institutional structures and mechanisms that constitute the “political” system. Besides characteristic structures, mechanisms, and ideologies, the latter includes also ways of *doing* things, *saying* things, and performing specific acts (taking part in a Mayday parade was as much a part of the “system” of real-socialism as speaking of “class consciousness” – they were part of existing as “political” subjects). Political regimes, as Thomas Farrell has noted, are also rhetorical regimens: they imply specific ways of speaking, arguing, writing, thinking, and being in the world that foreclose, limit, or proscribe other ways of speaking, arguing, writing, thinking, or being. Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* includes a recognition that different regime types (monarchy, aristocracy, and polity – the “good” types of regimes – as well as tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy – the “corrupt” types), evince their own “character or “tendency,” and that this character is related to both ethos – the primary factor in persuasion – and rhetorical practice.

In his study of “political styles,” Robert Hariman relates particular (historical as well as existing) ways of exercising political power to specific institutional arrangements, conceptual (including ideological) frameworks, rhetorical practices, and forms of performance: the republican, the Macchivellian, the courtly, the authoritarian, the bureaucratic. Hariman’s study demonstrates that doing “politics” in different contexts (both “global” or “macro” ones, such as the Renaissance Italian republics, as well as “local” ones, such as a specific college dean’s office) may involve doing very different sorts of things even when the goal is the same: exercising power, gaining support for agendas, or securing cooperation.

The “politician” as rhetor or “politics” as subject matter are not sufficient descriptors of a discourse as “political.” In doing “*political* rhetoric” or “*political* discourse analysis,” the close historical association between language and politics does not release the analyst from having to deal with the nature of “politics” as the object, in any given case, of (rhetorical) interpretation. While the use of language or symbols may be necessary to engage in politics, it does not *ipso facto* follow that to have said something about language or symbols in any given case

is to have said something (or at least something interesting) about politics.

Paul Chilton and Christina Schaffner have noted that studies of political language often beg the definition of politics, which, they note, “varies according to one’s situation and purpose” (Chilton and Schaffner, “Introduction” 4). The “task of political discourse analysis”, they suggest, “is to relate the fine grain of linguistic behaviour to what we understand by ‘politics’ or ‘political behaviour’” (Chilton and Schaffner, “Discourse and Politics” 211). In a similar vein, Teun van Dijk argues that “a study of political discourse is theoretically and empirically relevant only when discourse structures can be related to properties of political structures and processes” (van Dijk 203).

What is called for, however, is not so much some definitive conception of “politics” as such (the term is too historically, culturally, and politically contingent for any one definition to be useful) but rather a sensitivity of the analysis, in any given case, to the explicit or implicit framework of assumptions, purposes, relationships, and institutionalizations that defines, at least for the rhetor if not also for the analyst, the nature of the act as “politics” and thus that motivates specific rhetorical (linguistic and symbolic) choices. To put in more plainly, I am arguing that analyses of “political discourse” or “political rhetoric” should be grounded in what it is that participants are trying to do *politically* with language.

Do We Mean by “Politics”?

According to political scientist Stephen Tansey, politics in its most general sense deals with “the social exercise of power” (Tansey 5). In the specific sense, it refers to the art and science of government (the province of “Politics” with a capital “P”), while in the broader sense it refers to the exercise of power in relations among people. Although in the former sense politics exists in all types of societies – authoritarian and totalitarian ones as well as democratic ones – the modern idea of politics tends to focus on relations within the polity and to involve, in Roger Scruton’s words, the “recognition and conciliation of opposing interests” (Scruton 361).

The conception of politics as associated with plurality and thus with the necessity to negotiate opposing interests is fully in the spirit of Aristotelian rhetoric. In Book II of the *Politics*, Aristotle argues that “the nature of the state is to be a plurality” and that “extreme unification” results in the destruction of the state (II, 2,15-20). What Aristotle considers as the “political life” (II, 6, 20-25),

the only life worthy of a free Greek citizen, is life within a polity understood as an aggregate of many diverse members, otherwise the state merges with the family or the individual, thus obviating the need for rhetoric understood as the art of persuasion (since the household was, as Hannah Arendt has observed, the realm of “oikonomia”, biological necessity, as well as of absolute authority). This becomes the basis for Aristotle’s criticism of Plato’s *Republic*, in which rhetoric is reduced to what we would today call propaganda.

Chilton and Schaffner note that in his famous association of politics with speech (see the beginning of this essay) Aristotle does not simply mean language as such, but rather speech in “functional” terms: as indicating “what is useful and what is harmful and so also what is just and what is unjust” – hence speech as a tool for *reflection*, *deliberation*, and *negotiation* (Chilton and Schaffner, “Introduction” 2). Aristotelian rhetoric was thus a handmaiden to politics as the art of *doing* things – with language, because that is how *political* things were done – in the political arena of democratic Athens. That is why George Kennedy added the subtitle *A Theory of Civic Discourse* to his translation of the *Rhetoric*. The *Rhetoric* represents, in effect, a handbook for a felicitous performance of speech acts in the Athenian political arena. As Gerald Hauser has pointed out, the classical “union of politics with rhetoric is distinctive for its emphasis on the former as a *practical* art” (Hauser 616, emphasis added). In contrast to the modern science of politics, “the rhetorical concern of politics historically has been with the ongoing negotiation over how we shall act and interact,” Hauser notes. “Although that negotiation always involves questions of power, it is also concerned with enabling practical judgment” (Hauser 616).

However, even the “power” view of politics (which includes also politics not necessarily based on equality and consensus) sees rhetoric as an integral element in politics conceived as a strategic calculus aimed at securing relative advantage (Hariman). Hariman speaks of “politics” (especially of the post-Machiavellian variety) in terms of exercising power, securing advantage, and “relations of *control* and *autonomy*”, functions that are “negotiated through the artful composition of speech, gesture, ornament, *décor*, and any other means for modulating *perception* and shaping *response*” (Hariman 2, emphasis added).

The point is that politics, whether of the democratic, totalitarian, institutional, or interpersonal kind, is something people *do*, something they engage in through symbolic and other means: discussion, negotiation, marching, chanting, singing, composing poetry, staging performances, carrying slogans, spraying

graffitti, fighting, or throwing Molotov cocktails. In the conduct of politics, words, actions, and events work together; words interpret events or actions, as well as constitute political facts, while actions in various ways help words gain their *political* efficacy (as, for instance, during the 1980s in Poland, where both spontaneous and orchestrated strikes and protests alternated with, and supported, attempts at political negotiation).

Whether at the “grand” level of Politics as the art and science of government and governance or the more “ordinary” level (relations among people in civic, professional, and other public capacities), politics is fundamentally about accomplishing aims in a given socio-cultural, ideological, and/or institutional context. Whether those aims are mastery of the world, struggle for power, access to resources, or promotion to management, they involve specific goals: garnering support, enforcing compliance, persuading to embrace positions or courses of action, justifying commitments, negotiating compromises, and so on. Most routine political action and discourse are directed at such goals rather than ideological advocacy; most of such routine “politicking” does not call for oratory, which is but one aspect of political discourse. Even in “grand” political settings such as parliaments, much if not most of the rhetoric that “gets the job done” is of the “ordinary” kind: most actual politicking in parliaments is done in committee and in personal encounters, rather than in the chamber. More often than not, “grand” political discourse such as speeches, proclamations, and policy statements reflects deals already made.

Aaron Wildavsky, a political economist at the University of California, Berkeley, in a now classic work on the politics of the U.S. budgetary process, has suggested a pragmatic conception of politics that captures what much “ordinary” politics is about: a social process by which a governing body, an institution, or an individual “mobilizes resources to meet pressing needs” (Wildavsky, “Politics” 94). Wildavsky poses specific questions about the “politics” of the budgetary process (which he sees as lying, “in the most integral sense... at the heart of the political process,” “Politics” 4-5): How does a given agency or special interest determine how much it will try to get in a given year? How does it go about achieving this goal? Where does it get clues how much is likely to be acceptable to other participants? What is the pattern of consultations with counterparts throughout the government? What does it have to do to be successful? (Wildavsky, “Politics” vi). In his study, Wildavsky contextualizes his account of the calculations made by participants and the strategies used by them to accomplish

their goals within a description of the larger context of institutional and communication mechanisms characteristic of the federal budgetary process. Being a good politician in the context of this process, Wildavsky suggests, requires cultivation of an active clientele, development of confidence among government officials, and skill in following strategies that exploit one's opportunities to the maximum (Wildavsky and Caiden 57). All of these actions involve at their heart discourse and other symbols (financial numbers).

Political discourse appears thus best approached from a pragma-rhetorical perspective in terms its functions, rather than subject matter, within the specificity of the socio-cultural, institutional, and ideological (such as it may be) context. The political functions of discourse appear to fall into two broad categories: strategic and constitutive. Strategic functions are those that involve goal-oriented influence across relationships, while constitution refers to the dual fact that discourse to a significant extent "constitutes" both the terms in/of which it speaks (including the terms "politics" itself) as well as the audiences it ostensibly addresses and mobilizes.

Chilton and Schaffner offer an example of an approach to political discourse analysis in terms of its strategic functions. By "political," Chilton and Schaffner understand actions (linguistic or otherwise), that involve "power, or its inverse, resistance" ("Discourse and Politics" 212). In relation to "politics" understood in terms of power and resistance, Chilton and Schaffner distinguish four categories of "strategic" functions for discourse: coercion (speech acts backed by sanctions, such as commands, laws, edicts, etc., as well as setting agendas, selecting topics, censorship or access control); resistance, opposition, or protest; legitimization and delegitimization (expressions that create a climate for obedience and control, such as appeals to voters' will, legality, and so on), and representation and misrepresentation (including representations of reality, events, and information). ("Discourse and Politics"). To view discourse and behavior as "political," they suggest, is to view them in relation to these functions.

The task of political discourse analysis, Chilton and Schaffner argue, is to examine, through "close participatory analysis of linguistic detail" at three levels (pragmatic, semantic, and syntactic) how these four strategic functions are enacted through linguistic choices (Chilton and Schaffner, "Discourse and Politics" 213, 214) in "texts that discuss political ideas, beliefs, and practices of a society or some part of it" ("metapolitical" discourse) or texts that constitute the political community or group. The latter group consists of "inner-state" (domestic)

discourse, “inter-state” (foreign policy and diplomacy) discourse, “internal-political” discourse (politicians planning and deciding), and “external-political” discourse (politicians communicating with the public) (“Discourse and Politics” 215). In all cases, Chilton and Schaffner distinguish micro- and macro-levels of study: “politics” as interactions between individuals, groups, genders, or classes (micro level) or as involving the political institutions of the state: parties, politicians, governments, parliaments, social movements, interest groups, and so on (macro level).

The constitutive function of discourse in politics implies, on the one hand, that “[t]he social and political world is conceptually and communicatively constituted, or, more precisely, preconstituted” (Ball, Farr, and Hanson 1-2) and, on the other hand, that discourse plays a role in the ‘process of identity formation... where audiences are called upon to materialize through their actions and identity ascribed to them’ (Charland 616).

The “linguistic constitution of politics” implies not only that political actions are in large part carried out in language but also that, in the words of James Farr, “political beliefs, actions, and practices are partly constituted by the concepts which political actors hold about those beliefs, actions, and practices” (Farr 26-7). As Stephen Tansey suggests, “the very language used to describe political events is the product of struggles between different users of language” (Tansey 21). According to this *constitutive view of language*, “who and what we are, how we arrange and classify and think our world – and how we act in it – are deeply delimited by the argumentative and rhetorical resources of our language...” (Ball, Farr, and Hanson 1-2, emphasis added). “Political language,” Ball, Farr, and Hanson propose, “is a medium of shared understanding and an arena of action because the concepts embedded in it inform the beliefs and practices of political agents” (Ball, Farr, and Hanson 1-2).

As Maurice Charland has argued, discourse also “constitutes” – in effect produces – the “identity and character of an audience” (Charland 616). Constitutive rhetoric constructs its addressed audience and provides it with an identity through positing a subject position that the audience can assume: it “simultaneously presumes and asserts a fundamental collective identity for its audience, offers a narrative that demonstrates that identity, and issues a call to act to affirm that identity” (Charland 2001, 616). Charland suggests that narrative is fundamental to constitutive rhetoric, because narratives “constitute subjects, protagonists, and antagonists” (Charland 617). Just such a narrative of protagonists

(rebel colonies) and antagonists (British oppressors) is provided in the *Declaration of Independence* with the goal of finally positing “We the People of the United States” in the invocation that opens the U.S. Constitution. Constitution, like persuasion, is, according to Charland, “one of rhetoric’s functions. It is an element in the process through which language renders possible *political* community, action, and judgment” (Charland 619, emphasis added).

Conclusion: *Political* Rhetoric vs. Political *Rhetoric*

The argument of this essay has been that analyses of political rhetoric (or discourse) should treat discourse as an instrument of *doing* politics, either in a strategic or constitutive sense, a functional component of the political system and of the rhetor’s political engagements, if one is to avoid the pitfall of meta-discursive interpretation: identifying rhetorical devices or discursive constructions in a text putatively labeled as “political” through ascription to a “politician” or to a political subject matter or context. A *political* discourse analysis calls for an examination of the relationships between rhetorical strategies and deployments of discourse and symbols on the one hand and “political” decisions and actions on the other within the context of a “political” system that consists of an explicit and implicit framework of assumptions, purposes, interpretive templates, performance models, relationships, and institutionalizations that motivate specific linguistic and symbolic choices.

Hariman’s study of “political styles” (an attempt to examine “how power is composed” in historically, culturally, and “politically” variable yet internally consistent contexts) provides a good starting point for such an analysis (although his is not an analysis of discourse, especially a discourse, as such). One of the chapters, the description of the political culture of the court of Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie (based on a book by Ryszard Kapuscinski), examines the structuration of a system of power that depended on hierarchy, punctilious performance of ritual roles, bodily discipline, deportment, and decorum to accomplish the “essential task of any political system: regulating subordinate behavior without force” (Hariman 54-55). Hariman suggests that “political life is ineradicably a mixture of persuasive techniques, aesthetic norms, and political relationships working together in cohesive patterns of motivation activated through speech” (Hariman 53).

Ofer Feldman’s *Talking Politics in Japan Today* offers an example of *political*

discourse analysis based on a detailed examination of context and function. Feldman focuses on the “functions that language plays in Japanese polity” (Feldman 1). The study grounds analyses of discourse by politicians and the media in a detailed description of Japanese political institutions, traditions, processes, and terminology. Among other things, Feldman examines how the metaphors used by Japanese politicians facilitate an understanding of political processes and roles; how the duality of façade and substance functions in Japanese culture and politics; how face-saving strategies are deployed; and how political alliances and antagonisms are negotiated within the specificity of the Japanese political system. In its orientation toward the exploration of what it means to *do* “politics” in Japan and what actions that involves, Feldman’s study is similar to Wildavsky’s examination of the politics of the U.S. budget process.

At stake in analyzing *political* rhetoric rather than just political *rhetoric* is both a better understanding of one’s, and one’s community’s, own “political” situation, and perhaps of potential for empowerment, as well as, in the broadest sense, a better understanding of the discursive and symbolic dynamics of the human collective experience.

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Idea polityki w retoryce „politycznej”

Autor dowodzi, że analizy dyskursu politycznego czy retoryki politycznej powinny odnosić się przede wszystkim do tego, co uczestnicy próbują „politycznie” zdziałać z pomocą języka. Słowa, działania i wydarzenia w polityce są powiązane ze sobą, słowa interpretują wydarzenia i działania oraz konstytuują polityczne fakty, podczas gdy działania pomagają słowom osiągnąć ich polityczną skuteczność. Aby uniknąć pułapki metadyskursywnej interpretacji, analizy

politycznej retoryki (lub dyskursu) powinny traktować dyskurs jako instrument „robienia” polityki, zarówno w strategicznym jak i konstytutywnym sensie, jako funkcjonalny element systemu politycznego i politycznego zaangażowania retora, nie ograniczać się zaś do wskazywania narzędzi retorycznych czy konstrukcji dyskursywnych w tekstach określanych jako polityczne poprzez przypisanie ich politykom lub ze względu na poruszane w nich kwestie polityczne.