

Invitation from

Professor Simon Gaskell, Principal

To the Inaugural Lecture

'The Abuse of Rhetoric'

Nicholas O'Shaughnessy
Professor of Communication

Wednesday 10 March 2010 at 6.30pm

Skeel Lecture Theatre

People's Palace

Queen Mary, University of London

Mile End Road

London E1 4NS

A reception will follow the lecture.



'The Abuse of Rhetoric' Professor Nicholas O'Shaughnessy

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The great rhetorical monoliths of history such as Pericles's Funeral Oration or the Gettysburg Address are justly celebrated. But the focus of this talk will be not the use, but the abuse, of rhetoric, and it is a plea for the renewal of interest in rhetoric both as a public concern and as an academic study. Generally the talk argues for the connection between both the abuse of rhetoric and the failings of our own political and civic culture; in the rhetorical vision, words cease to be distinguished from action but become indeed the principal form of action. The further claim is that there exists a close link between abuse of rhetoric and war - that it is a major factor in its causation and sustenance. And, beyond this, we argue that the deformity of rhetoric is a necessary precondition for genocide in its construction of an existential threat; from Cato's refrain 'Carthago delenda est', an ancient drumbeat of genocide, to the Third Reich, to Radio Interhamwe in Ruanda, rhetoric has been the incendiary fomentor. For Victor Klemperer in fact, the Nazi regime was a triumph of rhetoric alone - of the colonisation of the language with 'words that think for you'; not of propaganda. To-day rhetoric manufacture has become the core political skill. When rhetoric drives policy it substitutes for critical interrogation; good rhetoric has an adhesive quality, it resonates, and an issue once framed in rhetorical terms ceases to offer the possibility of rational discourse. The conclusion is that rhetoric is not a trivial instrument or decorative motif in history but a primordial force that shapes the destinies of the collective.

Professor Nicholas O'Shaughnessy is Professor of Communication at Queen Mary. Previously he was Professor at the Universities of Brunel and Keele and Director of the Centre for Consumer and Social Marketing at Brunel. Prior to this he was a Fellow (now Quondam Fellow) of Hughes Hall in the University of Cambridge, where he was also University Lecturer in Marketing. He has degrees from London, Oxford and Columbia universities, and a PhD from Cambridge.

Nicholas is the author and co-author of numerous journal articles, chapters and books on marketing, propaganda (including terrorism) and political communication, including *The Phenomenon of Political Marketing* (Macmillan), *Persuasion in Advertising* (Routledge), *The Marketing Power of Emotion* (Oxford), *Propaganda and Politics: Weapons of Mass Seduction* (Manchester; Michigan). He is on the editorial board of various journals and is a Senior Editor of the Journal of Political Marketing.

He has also been a parliamentary candidate and an (informal) adviser to John Major when Prime Minister. As a student he was President of the Oxford Union.

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