

Foreword

To open its third year of publication, *AYOR* (*African Yearbook of Rhetoric*) offers an issue devoted to preliminary thoughts on surveillance and rhetorics of control. It stems from a 'Blue Skies' tentative project, financed by the National Research Foundation of South Africa.

These prolegomena are tentative insofar as we wish to break new ground for rhetoric studies, by bringing into their compass the study of secretive and covert protocols for intelligence gathering and surveillance, and by examining how public debate and public arguments are shaped by them — in short how the guarded informs the open.

To this end, and to keep the discussion as fluid as possible, ahead of a larger investigation, contributors have been drawn from a wide range of perspectives — from Marxist philosophy to the intelligence community. It is an odd assemblage intended to provoke questions and not to invoke answers.

To those who may question the relationship between “the uses of dialectics” and control (the subject of Antonio Negri’s paper), the answer might be that intelligence gathering and surveillance are tools of Capital and as such valid subjects to investigate how Marxism, as a materialist protocol, can provide a critical set of interpretations.

Those who may question the pertinence of a presentation on the state of intelligence studies in France, may also consider that rhetoric studies rely on material evidence and, consequently, a specialised analysis by intelligence experts is what we need in order not to presume we know more than we actually do about a field by and large outside the traditional ambit of rhetoric.

Last but not least, those who would be tempted to query the theoretical import of surveillance studies for rhetoric studies as a form of enquiry, would do well to ponder the meaning of “theorist” in Ancient Greece: a “theorist” was an observer sent by his city to look carefully (“to theorise”) at how other, rival cities were functioning. The “theorist” would gather information, bring it back and analytically inform his government. Often he was a philosopher, or rhetor, versed in arguments and in what we call nowadays strategic thinking. The “theorist” was a gatherer and an analyst (thus fusing together the two traditional activities of intelligence) and, in addition, an intelligent adviser. It was understood that only good *renseignement* (French for “intelligence”) about others would benefit one’s city and help her gain a better intelligence of her own affairs and thus gain the upper hand in the continuous rivalry that is the iron law of power among nations. Those “theorists” laid the foundation

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for the analytical and comparative study of political constitutions, political science in short, whether they operated overtly or covertly.

“To theorise” was and remains the political art of observing others, to emulate their strengths and to learn from their weaknesses, and to derive policies. Its new name is surveillance.

The Editor.