

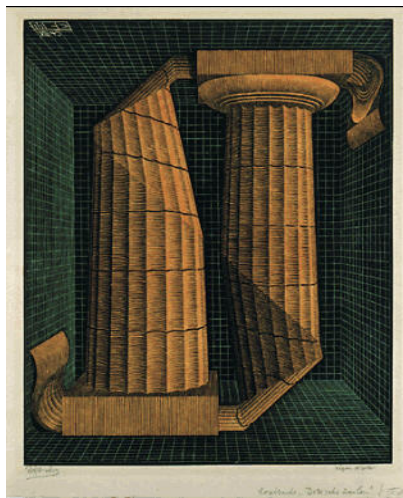
# Faculty Talk

Friday, January 13, 2012

1:00-2:00

English Department Conference Room

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***Professor of English***



## Discursive Ideologies: Reading Western Rhetoric

European rhetoric is an anthology of stories about language and discourse, interrelated by appeal to a common theme which can be expressed as a question: what encourages us to believe that language acts are meaningful? Each story's answer to the question constitutes its distinctive elaboration of the theme, the positing of its "ground of meaningfulness." The stories are discursive ideologies, comprising the West's "common sense" about discourse, explaining its nature and uses while announcing the "truths" that permit language users to trust its efficacy. The six stories are titled Magical Rhetoric, Ontological Rhetoric, Objectivist Rhetoric, Expressivist Rhetoric, Sociological Rhetoric, and Deconstructive Rhetoric. Their sequence should not be taken to imply any hierarchy of intellectual privilege: each "ground" may be critiqued from any vantage point except its own. Discourse is meaningful in magical rhetoric because of the intrinsic power of utterance; in ontological rhetoric because of the relationship between language and metaphysics; in objectivist rhetoric because of the relationship between language and sensory or phenomenal experience; in expressivist rhetoric because of the relationship between language and consciousness; in sociological rhetoric because of the material intersubjectivity of language-users; and in deconstructive rhetoric because of the situatedness of subjects within the intertextuality of verbal statements. What makes the stories important ultimately is the role they play as power brokers, largely behind the scenes, in the discourses that most matter to us as people and citizens: religion, education, public policy, science, law, history, and others—their ideological competition.

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