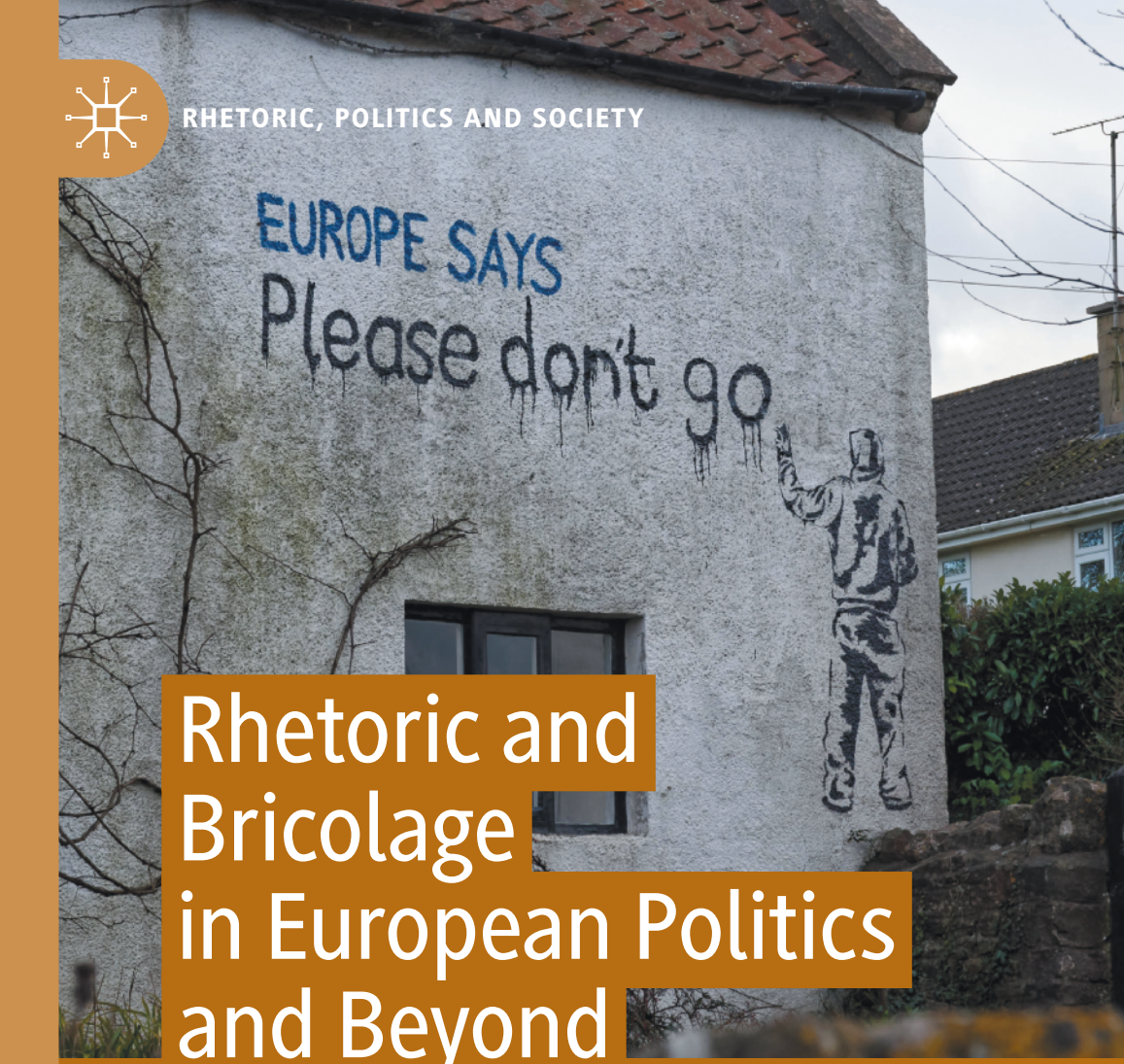


RHETORIC, POLITICS AND SOCIETY

# Rhetoric and Bricolage in European Politics and Beyond

## The Political Mind in Action

*Edited by*
Niilo Kauppi · Kari Palonen

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Niilo Kauppi · Kari Palonen
Editors

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ISSN 2947-5147 ISSN 2947-5155 (electronic)
Rhetoric, Politics and Society
ISBN 978-3-030-98631-5 ISBN 978-3-030-98632-2 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-98632-2



This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

# Acknowledgements

This volume is the result of a collaborative effort that started in 2015 with the Academy of Finland funded research project TRACE, 'Transformations of Concepts and Institutions in the European Polity' affiliated with the University of Jyväskylä. The project included a Finnish Distinguished Professorship (Niilo Kauppi from 2015 to 2019), the authors of this book as project members as well as Kari Palonen as host from the University of Jyväskylä. The book's title refers to a constellation of linked research topics that relate to higher education, knowledge production, transnational exchanges, the EU and European integration, concepts, debates, and conceptual and intellectual history. On the latter, TRACE continued the work of the Finnish Centre in Political Thought and Conceptual Change and other major Academy of Finland funded projects at the University of Jyväskylä. The project members analysed historical and contemporary forms of political thought and concepts, including the new geopolitics of conceptual and intellectual transfers; debates as the uniting theme of parliamentary and university cultures; and European Union politics with a focus on political agency and the rhetorical strategies used in power struggles. The focus was on the *political* aspect of the creation of new spaces for action and new interpretations of struggles and debates. The research connected three closely interrelated research fields: conceptual transfers between contexts, links between political and academic cultures, and the European Union as a new type of polity.

We would like to thank the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy at the University of Jyväskylä for hosting the project, and particularly Anna Björk, Jenna Grundström, Anitta Kananen, Marjo Kuronen, Lea Naumanen, Mira Söderman and Tuula Vaarakallio for their help in setting up the project and organising the events and yearly symposia. Thank you also to Timo Turja from the Parliament Library for hosting several workgroup meetings. The project owes a great deal to the keynote speakers and foreign participants who took part in our events and without whose input the project would have been considerably less stimulating. We wish to extend our warm thanks to Cristina Anderson, Caitriona Carter, Dimitris Chryssochoou, Alan Finlayson, Michael Freeden, Elena Garcia Guitián, Cornelia Ilie, Mika Pantzar, Simona Piattoni, Olivier Rozenberg, and Ingeborg Tömmel; Estelle Badie, Ruth Bevan, Ben Duke, Jaanika Erne, Laura Landorff, Anastasia Mitronatsiou, Jofre Rocabert and Neslihan Temelat.

Helsinki, December 2021 The editors and project members

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CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

*Niilo Kauppi and Kari Palonen*

Academic political science seldom deals with the political aspect of thinking and judging. Through a wide set of empirical objects, this volume fuses sociological analysis of political thought and culture with conceptual, historical, and rhetorical approaches to thinking politically. In everyday speech, 'political' commonly alludes to partisanship or to expediency, as opposed to normative judgement. With the term political mind, we understand 'political' in a formal sense as a way of thinking and judging, leaving it to the actors to take a stand on phenomenon.

The book explores both discursive and non-discursive power strategies in the EU and beyond. Instead of grounding their analysis in established and ossified theories like neofunctionalism or intergovernmentalism, the

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N. Kauppi and K. Palonen (eds.), *Rhetoric and Bricolage in European Politics and Beyond*, Rhetoric, Politics and Society,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-98632-2_1

chapters scrutinise how political actors engage in action at different polity levels, shedding light on the creative political mind in action. This point of view seeks to capture the dynamic contingency, reflexivity, and uncertainty of political action (Kauppi, 2018; Palonen, 2018; Wiesner, 2019).

The contributions fuse theory and empirics, drawing inspiration from two sources. The first is a concept provided by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss in his book *La pensée sauvage* ([*The Savage Mind*] [1962], *bricolage* [2009, 568–593]). By *bricolage,* Lévi-Strauss meant the practical logic of the actors involved in various everyday activities such as collecting medicinal plants, classifying animals, or composing myths (intellectual *bricolage*). In this volume, the authors analyse *bricolage* as a logic of practice in relation to political action (for similar analysis, see Bailey, 1966; Bourdieu, 1977; Carstensen, 2011, 2017; Kauppi, 2005, 2016, 2018; Mérand, 2001; Mittelman, 2013) and taken-for-granted practical and ideological assumptions (cf. Freeden, 1996), the common sense that drives it and the conceptual and non-conceptual instruments that are available to the actors. Such a view of political *bricolage* as the 'science of the concrete' reflects the experiences of professional politicians and experts facing complex issues and heterogeneous audiences, making use of academic theories but combining and modifying them according to the situation, or even ignoring or discarding them when facing unprecedented situations.

Another source of inspiration in the volume is Max Weber's concept of *Chance*. It evokes another feature of political action: its contingency in the face of the multiple facets of possible, opportune, optional, or occasional outcomes. Weber interprets his key concepts such as power (*Macht*), rulership (*Herrschaft*), or the state (*Staat*) through their different profiles of *Chancen,* thus leaving them to depend on the actors in each situation. Confronting more or less open situations that may provide them alternative power shares (*Machtanteile*), political actors must judge and choose between them, even when all are undesirable (Palonen, 1998, 2017; Weber, 1904/2012, 1922/2019). In this Weberian vision, political institutions such as the European Union differ in the type of chances and opportunities they offer for politicians acting through them. This research perspective enables the contributors to avoid both theoretical expositions devoid of empirical work and empirical studies that seek to explore reality without an ideal–typical view of what is possible in a specific situation. Both can be considered methodologically problematic, as the only way

to adequately make sense of complex reality is to engage in theoretically informed empirical work. Although the concepts of *bricolage* and *Chance* have different origins, both present contingency and lack of control as inherent to the political aspect of human action.

The everyday practice of parliamentary politics illustrates the link between *Chance* and *bricolage*. It is frequently said that a government's policies should follow a coherent plan or programme. This idea is contrasted with another, namely allowing Parliament *Chancen* to thoroughly debate government proposals in the plenary and committee sittings and giving the opposition and backbenchers the right to alter, adjourn, or amend the proposals. Instead of pushing proposals through unchanged, wise governments use these opportunities for their own purposes. Periodic concessions to the opposition are not the only outcomes of the thorough parliamentary debate of motions, bills, budgets, plans, and programmes. Parliamentarians in the governing party can also judge the strengths and weaknesses of their proposal in detail and consider amendments or adjournments worth adopting as tacit ways of strengthening the proposal. The text that is finally passed by the Parliament tends to be less systematic and more complex than the original proposal. It is a *bricolage*-like product to which both government and parliamentary actors have contributed when the proposal was still—to use a Westminster term—'in the possession of the parliament'.

Analogous but even more complex problems appear at the EU level, when the Commission, the Council, the European Council, and the Parliament must reach agreement. Unexpected concessions and compromises are required. Different rhetorical genres and tools can be identified both in the debates and in the final EU-wide legislation. Accusations of slowness and incoherence in EU decision-making are all too easy and misleading.

While ideas like second-order elections (Reif & Schmitt, 1980) minimise the political dynamics of European integration (Kauppi, 2021), established normative approaches impose a nation-centred framework to the study on the EU. As a result of this capacity to define reality and relevant knowledge, they hide, minimise, and delegitimise other possible, potential political developments and seek to 'normalise' and legitimise a certain interpretation of the current situation. Although well realised by many politicians participating in the early European integration debates, the original politicising momentum provided by European integration,

the introduction of a supranational polity level has not been fully understood as an opportunity to overcome the quasi-naturalised character of the nation-state.

This volume offers a political perspective on the EU that explores the power struggles in which individuals and groups are involved. The focal points are political action, the evolving perimeters of political action, the possibilities these present, and the missed opportunities for politicised action in contexts that are subject to sustained structural change and contingency. Examples of the former include the deepening and expanding processes of EU integration, technological change, and nation-building that proceed by experimentation and through unforeseen developments such as Brexit and Covid-19. The focus of the contributions is on counter-powers and attempts to present critical elements that seek to build something politically new that does not yet exist.

Some of the chapters deal with the political values and spaces of the possible that serve as background for political life that 'sets the problems for political theorists' (Skinner, 1978). Established theories appear as conservative straightjackets that prevent imagining alternative futures. The following chapters present historical approaches to analysing past debates that provide elements for creating new ideologies and institutions (cf. also Epstein & Fuchs, 2017; Haapala, 2016). Although all contributions of the volume do not use rhetorical language, in a broad sense all of them exercise a textual analysis of politics, as present in debates, documents, or scholarly publications. The chapters share with rhetorical traditions such common features as a critical distance from mainstream interpretations of European Union in the different academic disciplines, a willingness to explore less obvious alternatives and thus alter the entire agenda-setting in the study of European and EU politics.

The problematics and perspectives of these chapters can be understood as rhetorical (Martin, 2014). The argumentation *pro et contra* or weighting the strengths and weaknesses of different views and approaches is common to all chapters. The same holds for the practice of rhetorical redescription that takes distance from common-sense assumptions and classifications and, through practical experimentation and *bricolage*, sometimes succeeds in introducing new perspectives that enable changes in scholarly agenda-setting.

The volume is partially organised in chronological order, beginning with chapters on the turn of the twentieth century (Chapter 3) and the

period after World War II (Chapter 4) to chapters on modernism/ postmodernism (Chapter 7) and the current challenges to parliamentarism (Chapter 8). Chapter 2 aims to bring conceptual unity to the volume. Most chapters deal with Europe or the EU (Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, and 8) or with the US (Chapter 6) and modernism/postmodernism (Chapter 7). All focus on rhetoric and political *bricolage* in different contexts and at different times.

In Chapter 2, Niilo Kauppi analyses some of the knowledge dynamics and conceptual politics involved in EU theory building. It is said that outside the academic world little attention is paid to academic theories and concepts, and that practitioners in political and economic life ignore them. It is true that some practitioners (politicians, civil servants, activists…) conceptualise European integration history as a theory-free zone. However, for social scientists, various types of knowledge play into the construction of reality. This knowledge is not merely descriptive and backward-looking, but above all forward-looking and performative as it seeks to reinforce a certain political order. Politicians constantly build bridges between their political interests and academic knowledge. Kauppi explores political *bricolage* as the logic of practice in EU theorising, its taken-for-granted practical and ideological assumptions, the 'common sense' that drives it, and the conceptual and material instruments that are available to the actors who compete and collaborate while promoting their interests. He discusses the variety of EU theories, both academic and lay theories (i.e. common-sense explanations people give of the EU) as well as established and emergent theories, and continues with an exploration of strategies of legitimation and 'theoretical warfare'.

In Chapter 3, Anne Epstein explores the strategies used by a diverse group of French-speaking European women and men, proponents of expanded citizenship for women, to create common ground among emerging national feminisms at the turn of the twentieth century. This specific effort to 'transnationalise' so-called first-wave feminism in Europe and beyond, she argues, can be seen as an example of what anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss identified as *bricolage*, of a conceptual as well as practical nature: that is, a strategically improvised mobilisation and repurposing of existing intellectual networks, actions, expertise, and of course, ideas. At a time when both nationalism and internationalism were at a height, the rise of so-called first-wave feminisms benefited from the expansion of gender-inclusive intellectual networks and international political and cultural spaces—such as Universal Expositions, scientific and

cultural associations, and political movements—that encouraged knowledge exchange and practical cooperation across borders. Focusing on the French-speaking sphere (French being a language that continued to be widely spoken by educated elites at the time), Epstein looks at how national politics, shared values and social ideals, and the recognition of expertise across borders conditioned the incorporation of nation-specific information and debates about women and gender within evolving transnational feminist discourses.

In Chapter 4, Taru Haapala focuses on the British debates on European unification that took place prior to the Hague Congress in May 1948, leading up to the founding of the Council of Europe in London a year later. Political *bricolage* is used here as an analytical approach to understand the rhetorical strategies of British Members of Parliament (MPs) in a political context full of uncertainties and calls for expediency. The author argues that the rhetorical tools available were more conducive to parliamentary than to plebiscitary democracy. Even though Britain was considered as the model in rebuilding parliamentary democracies in Europe, both government and opposition party leaders were uninterested in joining a European organisation that could undermine the Commonwealth. Despite their reluctance, British parliamentarians were instrumental in saving European democracy after the war. The chapter shows how that political *bricolage* in British debates on European unification can be located mainly in arguments against the Labour government's foreign policy. Provoked by the party leaders' intergovernmentalism, Labour backbenchers used the ideas of internationalism and federalism, which were also utilised by Winston Churchill's United Europe Movement.

In Chapter 5, Claudia Wiesner argues that the building of the EU as a polity has been and still is shaped by conceptual politics, and more specifically by conceptual innovations and controversies. Alongside the EU Treaties that were negotiated by heads of government and state, the building of the EU as a polity has been decisively conditioned by political conflicts and micropolitical struggles that were driven by actors based in EU institutions. Core conflicts centred on controversial interpretations of key concepts such as democracy, parliament, or citizenship. Conceptual politics and controversies are particularly fruitful objects of analysis, as they relate to the realms of political theory and institutional practice as well as to the functionality and normativity of new norms and institutions. She discusses two cases of such conceptual controversies, EU citizenship

and financial crisis governance. The development of EU citizenship has been decisively influenced by the interaction between conceptual innovations, law-making, and their implementation into institutional practice. The impact of the financial crisis' governance structures on the quality of democracy in the EU and at national levels has been significant.

Chapter 6, by Anna Kronlund, analyses congressional debates on the National Science Foundation (NSF) and more specifically how the concept of 'national interest' is employed in those concerning the NSF. That items are put on the political agenda and discussed in Congress is already a political act, meaning that motions can be amended, and they can be delayed or voted against. Therefore, in parliaments and in legislatures such as the US Congress, items that are themselves considered 'political' and the very fact that something is argued to be political or apolitical should be seen as a political strategy or as a political act.

In Chapter 7, Kim Zilliacus shows how the basic structures and functions of democracy are continuously challenged through the surging political role of digital disruption coupled with new divisions created by social, economic, and technological forces cross-cutting the public terrain of democracy. There are several key dimensions of politics that have been affected by the accelerating pace of technological change such as political participation, communication, decision-making, policy-making, legitimacy, agency, and rhetoric. The author maps the conceptual underpinnings of this dialogue between social and technological change using key theoretical concepts to catch the essence of the political aspects of these transformative dynamics. One of the main conceptual frameworks explored in the chapter involves the dynamics of different societal modes, notably the modern and the postmodern, which rather than replacing each other are interacting with one another to alter the grids of political life. In clarifying these properties of politics, the author defines *bricolage* politics as a conceptual tool that may be used to cast light on emerging dilemmas of sync between public preferences and policy on pressing issues such as Covid-19, shedding further light on political agency and rhetoric.

*L'enfer, c'est les autres*, declared Jean-Paul Sartre. In the context of the corona pandemic, Sartre's statement has gained a new level of existential significance. The proximity with others, possible bearers of the virus, is now a vice to be avoided. More prosaically Max Weber demanded from politicians *Distanz zu den Dingen and Menschen*. Combining Weber and Sartre requires a politics that cultivates distance and neutralises proximity. In Chapter 8, Kari Palonen compares the challenges of two ideal types

of political action, movement politics and signature politics, present to parliamentary politics as a paradigmatic example of politics-at-a-distance that still requires a certain proximity. While movement politics relies on proximity and identity, 'signature politics' cultivates distance but excludes debate, the main merit of parliamentary politics. All three share the principle that the persons supporting a policy or decision will be counted and not weighted. Combining presence and distance in parliaments, the author discusses the dangers proximity and action at a distance face in digitalised debates. Beyond spatial distance, Palonen analyses the parliamentary requirements of orality and visibility as well as the possibilities of presence of other debates. He also explores how parliamentary distance can be utilised as a medium to extend the politics of parliamentary presence.

The perspective taken in this volume on agency in the EU contrasts with theories that take as their starting point either institutional (intergovernmentalism) or technocratic structures (neofunctionalism). Until recently, these emphasised the systemic character of the EU as a *sui generis* polity that cannot be compared to other political systems. Even today, dominant theories conceptualise the EU as either an institutional order or a playing field of high politics. It is clear, however, that these theories have become quite useless in the face of the growing complexity of both EU and national politics. More recent approaches like 'postfunctionalism' (Hooghe & Marks, 2009) introduce some form of agency through the concept of politicisation, understood as a sudden and historically unique intervention of the 'people' into European politics. But then politics and political action are not conceived as ongoing, regular phenomena but rather as an exceptional one (cf. Kauppi & Wiesner, 2018 for a critique, also Kauppi et al., 2016).

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