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## Shaping a pluralistic community

### Ambiguous epideictic rhetoric facilitating cooperation

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*Panel: EPIDEICTIC AS EQUIPMENT FOR POLITICS*

## **Shaping a pluralistic community. Ambiguous epideictic rhetoric facilitating cooperation.**

**By Tommy Bruhn, Department of communication and media, Lund University.**

Heterogeneity and disagreement enjoy a paradoxical status in deliberative discourse. On the one hand, a plurality of perspectives engaged on common issues is necessary for the quality of deliberation. On the other hand, polarization and disagreement can pose threats to the possibility of decision and common action, and existential threats to the community engaged in deliberation. In this presentation I discuss how rhetors addressing audiences divided on controversial issues can enact an epideictic rhetoric that orchestrate difference, shaping “fundamental grounds” for cooperative dialogue, rather than striving for unity and consensus outright. I illustrate this discussion with an analysis of the keynote speech given by then chairman Lars Werner at the 1990 party congress of Vänsterpartiet Kommunisterna (formerly Swedish Communist party), that sought to facilitate deliberative relationships between traditionalist Marxist and progressive currents in the wake of the fall of the east bloc. The analysis show that the speech, by means of its rhetorically ambiguous symbol-use of history, contemporary issues and political theory, performed different simultaneous epideictic addresses for its target audiences. Underlying these several offered symbolic equipments for cooperating with political adversaries in the party, lied a fundamental ground that enabled certain deliberative outcomes.

I argue that by reading epideictic rhetoric through the lens of Bakhtinian dialogic and all three of Perelman’s concepts of audience (*specific, composite and universal*) simultaneously, analysis can uncover how a speakers adaptation to the complexities of controversy can devise a community that transcend divisions between its participants. Examining the rhetorical subtleties of address that navigate deep disagreement within its audience can make us wise to the ambiguous and fluctuating nature of symbols in complex modern societies.