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Remarks on the Power of Rhetoric and the Radical Consequences of its Application

The main subject of my paper is rhetoric, which is quite often approached instrumentally and superficially. We should continually try to understand its inherent power and fear it. Words can engender peace and empathy, but also murderous desires. I will analyze Dan Diner's thesis about the similitude of the enemy figure in Nazism and Stalinist communism. Although the thesis is controversial as comparisons of Nazism and communism always are—it helps us to understand that the enemy figure, apprehended as a rhetorical construct, can explain the striking similarity between many of the social practices of the two systems. I will end with an analysis of the rhetoric of Polish historiographers, who make the same subject unrecognizable, as it is located in a totally different rhetorical medium.

Key words: rhetoric, historiography, racism, class enemy, agrarian reform