

# Debate vs Public Conversation in the Network Society rhetorical verse in Shakespearean sonnet form [01 DEC '01]

## {1/5} VALENTI VS LESSIG

ILLUSTRATES

what happens when two pugilists swap blows  
while standing on two baseball parks' home plates  
on diff'rent planets, aiming at the nose . . .

. . . of their proud foe —wherever he may be.

And though (on split-screen) we enjoy the show  
of two athletic verbalists set free  
to unleash flurries of what all they know, . . .

. . . it can't be said democracy was served.

Collective insight was not raised one notch.

The status quo: effectively conserved.

But like Butch Cassidy's kick to the crotch . . .

. . . of his opponent, not without some mirth.

The question is, just what was that noise worth? >>>

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## {2/5} WHEN TWO WORLD VIEWS COLLIDE FROM WALL TO WALL

with rhetoric in adversar'al form —  
not one bright clearing, but a global sprawl  
of contestation — all we get's a storm . . .

. . . of unpersuasive argument that fails  
to bring a common view (as one might hope).

As each side wields its totems and assails  
the other's logic, sees replies as rope . . .

. . . with which to hang the other in their turn.  
The audience may laugh at clever twists,  
but in the noise there's not much we will learn.  
We'll cheer our bias echoed, shake our fists . . .

. . . at other worldly visions of the game.

And when we leave, we won't know why we came. >>>

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{3/5} BUT IF INSTEAD OF THROWING  
RANDOM BLOWS

(which may appear —or not — to find their mark  
depending on “what ev’rybody knows”),  
a diff’rent kind of rhetoric might spark . . .

. . . collective insight — bridging the two views  
in their apparent conflict and transcend  
the boxing ring. (So easy to confuse  
a knock-out blow as how debates should end.)

A diff’rent metaphor is what we need  
to draw a new ring for contending thought.  
Since never would one arguer concede  
that by a foolish foe they’d been outfought.

Yes, even if we voted who had won,  
it’s not like Bonaparte and Wellington. >>>

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{4/5} OF COURSE, DEMOCRACY

DOES NOT REQUIRE,

like juries, a consensus of all minds.

But public conversation can aspire  
to public exploration, where one finds . . .

. . . a shared experience to analyze.

Although from different angles, the same scene  
sliced from the human drama — hows and whys  
revealed upon a common TV screen.

The rhetorician-storytellers share  
their insights, commentary, and reframes  
of one clear case examined with great care —  
instead of gen'ral slanders and broad claims.

With one shared story to direct our gaze  
enlightenment outshines sharp turns of phrase. >>>

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{5/5}

NOW IF THIS SEEMS UNFAIR

TO EACH KIND GUEST —

a brutish, rude broadside for their time's gift —

it should be noted Lessig has confessed

that years of arguments like his can't shift . . .

. . . opinions — so he's gloomy to the core.

(And though Valenti feels the future's his,

I doubt he thinks his phrases yield that score.)

In Lessig's book "The Future of Ideas" . . .

. . . a Mach'avelli quote frames what he sees:

In battles of the old against the new

the old has all its rats to guard the cheese

of how things are. The future has so few.

Nic added (quote) "armed prophets" do prevail.

"Armed" how? A rat with some much better "tale?" □