



GRESHAM COLLEGE
Founded 1597

The Art of Rhetoric Transcript

Date: Thursday, 17 May 2012 - 6:00PM

Location: Barnard's Inn Hall



17 May 2012

The Art of Rhetoric

Simon Lancaster

I was interviewed on Five Live just after Barack Obama's election. They asked me whether I thought rhetoric was the new rock n roll. I laughed and said that was hyperbole. But I've been thinking about it ever since... I wonder if they just got it the wrong way around.

Rock stars are increasingly growing in influence – Bob Geldof was out just this week telling G8 leaders what to do – whilst politicians are increasingly decreasing in influence. So what I wonder is this: not that rhetoric is the new rock n roll, but whether rock n roll is in fact the new rhetoric.

That is my theme for tonight.

You see, I've always had two careers running in parallel: 'speechwriter to anyone who's prepared to pay' and 'musician to anyone who's prepared to listen'.

My first job on leaving school was as a pianist in a French restaurant... This was the most amazing job in the world: I rolled out of bed mid-afternoon, strolled through Kensington Gardens - wearing my big Sony Walkman, listening to EMF - to get to Chez Solange, a restaurant just off Leicester Square. Whilst I was there I played songs from the shows and was paid the princely sum of £30 a night which I could double in tips as long as I doled out the odd request: Happy Birthday, The Lady in Red or Saving all my love for you. I'm still playing keyboards today - in an Acid Jazz band called Funkologist. Last week, we played Merthyr Tydfil. The pinnacle of glamour!

So I've been scuttling between these two worlds over the last twenty years – speechwriting and music – and the thing that has always struck me is this: how incredibly easy it is to move people from a stage when you're playing music and how phenomenally difficult it is to generate almost any meaningful reaction at all when you are making a speech.

When you're playing music – even if you're playing badly – it's still relatively easy to make people smile. When you're making a speech however, you're in a constant fight for attention. It's the never-ending battle against the blackberry - and it's a battle many speakers lose. What I'm going to explore in my speech is whether our political and business leaders could learn something from the rock stars who keep us so captivated. And I mean the REAL big beasts – the Jagers, McCartneys and Townshends – the sky-scrappers of rock: the guys who are still dominating radio airplay and filling out stadiums, despite touching seventy.

If Aristotle, Cicero or Demosthenes came back to earth tomorrow to host a special X Factor of rhetoric – looking for the people who most move and motivate society – who do you think would win? Politicians? Monarchs? Businesspeople? Or rock and roll stars. One hundred and fifty years ago, the prize *might* have gone to politicians. Back then, people travelled hundreds of miles to watch political speeches – like Gladstone's Midlothian Address. Today though, most political speeches are only seen in musty basements by a handful of spotty interns who like to imagine they're extras in the West Wing.

People do however travel hundreds of miles to go to Hyde Park to see McCartney, Blur or Stevie Wonder.

Another way of looking at it: who puts on the best rhetorical show? Who creates the best environment for persuasion? Who does the dimmed lights? Who does the slow chanting? Who gets everyone facing the same way – upwards. Three hundred years ago, I would have been describing a church. Today, it's a rock concert. It's not unlike one of my favourite favourite Who songs, 'Won't get fooled again', where Pete Townshend angrily berates his audience as the 'hypnotised'. Another way of looking at it: who in society is held in highest regard?

In the past, magnificent new places were named in honour of religious figures – like St James Park, St Pancras station, St Barts Hospital. Occasionally, they were named after monarchs as well – like the Victoria and Albert Museum, Regent Street or the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre. But, in 2002, Liverpool wanted to choose a new name for its airport. They chose not to name it after a monarch or a saint: instead they named their airport after John Lennon. There was no controversy, yet, imagine the fuss if they'd tried to call it The Margaret Thatcher Airport! Utterly inconceivable.

Some of you might think... Yes, yes... That's all very well, but rock stars are different. They're only concerned with entertainment, not persuasion. That is not entirely true: rock stars *do* need to persuade us to buy the records. And most of the time, when we buy their records, we are also buying into their values and their beliefs. In fact, we'll pay more for values and belief! There is a premium on that! It's the value of values. And the record companies know this, which is why in Jamiroquai's early albums he banged on about saving the environment at the same time as he was screeching up the M1 in his Ferrari.

Some are more sincere.

I'm not a collector of rock memorabilia by any means but a few years back I did buy at auction the files which

John Lennon kept on the Biafra conflict in the Sixties. It was extraordinary how involved he became: making plans to fly there, getting in touch with leading academics to learn more, and eventually sending his MBE back to the Queen in protest. John Lennon felt deeply about this. Of course, musicians are prone to feelings of great depth: it's an intrinsic part of the artistic temperament. And it's because rock stars feel things more deeply that we are more likely to follow them. We feel their pain! They activate what brain scientists call mirror neurons: these weird little things in our minds which mean that when we see someone hurt themselves - prick their finger, trip up or even miss a bus - we feel their pain.

Aristotle said the big emotional appeals included anger, jealousy, hope, pride, pity, envy, shame, fear. So who pushes those buttons better - rock stars or politicians?

Which of these moved you? And be honest! Gordon Brown's impassioned speech to London Citizens on African development or Band Aid's 'Do they know it's Christmas'? David Cameron's 'Let sunshine win the day' speech or John Lennon's 'Imagine'. Tony Blair's speech about the 'people's princess' speech or Elton John's 'Candle in the Wind'.

So where are politicians going wrong?

Just look at Ed Miliband attending the TUC rally in Hyde Park last year. Compare him with John Lennon addressing a peace rally in 1972. Seriously. Where to begin? I know where to begin. The tie. I've not been on many marches, but I do know this: you don't wear a tie to a march.

So how can politicians and business leaders get over this? What are the features that make rock stars so persuasive? There are a number of ways I could have cut this up...

50 ways to leave your audience gobsmacked...

ABC - easy as 123...

Instead, I decided to run with a song that some of you might remember. A song from the early 90s by The Shamen - Love Sex Intelligence.

I went with this for three reasons - 1. because it connects almost perfectly to Aristotle's idea of pathos, ethos, logos - head, heart and soul. 2. Because I did actually have the Shamen on my Walkman all those years ago - so it brings back happy memories for me. And 3. Because it includes the word sex which will hopefully activate some happy memories for you!

So I'll start with intelligence - starting at the top and working down.

1. INTELLIGENCE

Aristotle said, 'The greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learned from others; it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an eye for resemblance.'

Today, neuroscientists agree: the part of our brain which deals with metaphor is also the part that is associated with greater intelligence. There is a clue to this in the word intelligence. It is derived from the Latin: inter legere... This means reading between. And 'reading between' is exactly what you do with metaphor... You take two disparate fields and talk about X as if it were Y. So you're 'feeling blue', 'grinding on' or have 'a weight on your shoulders'.

When we use metaphors, as we do 8 times a minute on average, we paint a picture. These are then planted like seeds in our minds that will grow - eventually they will grow and we will share them with others...

You see the metaphor? This is why propaganda is called propaganda. The very word contains a metaphorical idea: that of planting seeds which propagate.

Metaphors can be used for better or for worse.

For better: if I talk about giving a speech life, or saying that a speech has legs... I am using the metaphor that the speech is a person. That is my X=Y. Speech = person. By picking this metaphorical frame, I'm suggesting I love this speech, because we are used to loving people. I'm then imposing *my* image on you, forcing you to see the world through *my* eyes. People just do talk about things they love using the metaphor of personification. Mum might talk about the kitchen as 'heart of the home'. Dad might say about the car that he's 'taking her out for a spin'. Business leaders who personify their companies reveal their passion for them... Richard Branson talks about Virgin's spirit. Steve Jobs used to talk about Apple's DNA.

These are positive metaphors. Some metaphors can be used in a far more negative fashion.

If I call someone a rat, I'm saying they're vermin. This plants in your mind the idea that extermination would be sensible. So you should always beware when you see this metaphor being used! The mafia use it when they talk about rats. Vermin metaphors appear in the run-up to genocide. Hitler called the Jews snakes; in Rwanda, the Hutu called the Tutsi cockroaches; and it's used now in the way that the press reports about Muslim extremism.

Bin Laden, Saddam Hussein and Gaddafi were all spoken about as vermin – smoking them out; ensnaring them; hunting them down. Of course they were all discovered in caves, holes in the ground or in pipes – like vermin – or so we were led to believe. This metaphorical frame meant a civilized people barely raised an eyebrow when these men – leaders in their way, revered in their own lands – were executed.

There's an even more recent and desperately tragic example: that of the heart-breakingly awful fire in Derby over the weekend in which six young children were killed. The newspapers are now reporting what a tragedy this is. And it is. Horrific. But these self-same newspapers once described this poor family using the metaphor of DIRT, inviting us to think they needed to be cleaned away. One newspaper ran the story about them under the headline: 'Scum mothers do ave em'. Some people might just see this as a funny play of words. But it is far more than that. It plants the seed of an idea, and that idea grows and grows.

You can track this growth on the web. You can see the conversation moving from the press to the blogs to vigilante chat rooms. The metaphorical frame remained constant. Dirt. In one chatroom, the father was described as a 'piece of shit', urging vigilantes to sort him out.

That is how powerful metaphor can be in extremis. Sorry to lead us into such dark territory. But the point is that metaphors extend beyond the way we talk; they shape the way we think, feel and act. They are incredibly powerful.

So you would think that leaders would take care to get them right! You'd be wrong. Instead, what we find more typically is not metaphors that clarify and illuminate, but metaphors that muddle and confuse! One leading politician who I usually admire – I won't name him – recently said...

"These problems existed beneath the radar before the recession struck but were masked by the fruits of an economic system that has now laid us low."

This single sentence contains five very different metaphors and visual ideas... The radar... being struck... masking... fruit.. laying low. What do you take from that? Absolutely nothing. It's too much! Too tangled!

It's like the beauties you had in Yes Minister, 'gritting your teeth whilst biting the bullet'.

Rock stars do metaphor so much better. They create a simple image which is easy to visualise and therefore more likely to last. Take the clear, pure simplicity of The Beatles' Long and Winding Road, or Marvin Gaye's 'Ain't no Mountain high enough', or Dylan's 'Blowin in the Wind'. All are beautifully simple images: images that can, would and in fact have, on occasion, been used by great leaders... Mandela's road to freedom, King's promised land, Macmillan's wind of change.

Incidentally, I had a German businessman on one of my courses the other day: we analysed the 'wind of change' metaphor. He said to me, 'This is all very interesting but why are you reading so much into a song by the Scorpions'.

These are not isolated examples. There are plenty more I could have used. Wild horses, Knocking on Heavens Door, Another Brick in the Wall. You compare this with some of the guff our esteemed political leaders come out with – the squeezed middle, the axis of openness! Give us some rock n roll! Please!

There are many other stylistic devices which show intelligence. Demetrius wrote in 'On Style' that style can be used to demonstrate balanced thought, rigorous thinking and show the completion of ideas. But style is hard to find in politics these days. Perhaps it's because there has been so much criticism of politicians in the past for focusing on style over substance that they have now gone the other way: they see a virtue in being totally and utterly devoid of style.

Who knows? Maybe that's why Ed Miliband became leader?

There are dozens of different stylistic devices that can be used. One of the best is antithesis, where you create a point of contrast or comparison: this creates the illusion of balance. It makes you sound more considered, more balanced, more likely to be right. Many of the greatest quotations in history have been based upon a rhetorical antithesis: from Hamlet's 'To Be or Not to be' to John F Kennedy's 'Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country' through to George W Bush's 'You're either with us or you're against us'.

We get similar in rock: but perhaps even more beautiful. Paul Simon's 'Why am I soft in the middle when the rest of my life is so hard.' David Bowie's 'Put on your red shoes and dance the blues.' Pete Townshend's 'Meet the new boss, same as the old boss.' There's also 'Too much too young', 'No woman, no cry', 'Get up stand up!'

These are powerful lines, memorable lines, persuasive lines.

One producer who worked with Madonna in the 80s said that, when she grew impatient, she was prone to shouting 'Time is money and the money is mine'. The line was so strong he recalled it word for word almost three decades later. That's rhetoric!

Of course, today's business leaders try to emulate these stylistic devices. But they don't do so with quite as

much elegance. 'Opportunity, not threat.' 'Forward, not backward'. 'My way or the highway'. They're not as stylish. They're not as inspiring.

They also try in politics. Ed Miliband used his party conference speech last year to draw a new dividing line in modern business: between producers and predators. But no-one really knew what he meant. Even he didn't really know what he meant, it became apparent when he was interviewed about it. So the whole thing came tumbling down.

You do get some gems of course. Vince Cable had a good one when he said that Gordon Brown had turned from Stalin into Mr Bean. David Cameron did as well, when he said Brown had turned from the Iron Chancellor into the Plastic Prime Minister. Ed Miliband mimicked the formula in Prime Minister's Questions last week when he said that the Prime Minister had turned from David Cameron into David Brent.

The other stylistic device we see a lot of is tri-colon. The rule of three. When groups of three are clumped together it creates the illusion of completeness and finality. Again, this is a well known rhetorical device: 'Friends Romans Countrymen.' 'We came we saw we conquered.' 'Government of the people by the people for the people.' It makes things memorable. I saw Justin Fletcher - better known as Mr Tumble as any parents here will know - interviewed in the Guardian the other week. He said that when he was given his first job at the BBC sixteen years ago the Commissioning Editor told him there were three secrets to children's television: Contact, Clarity and Commitment. Beautiful! Rule of three. Alliterative to boot. And that's why he could recall the advice word for word sixteen years later.

The rule of three is all around us. We see it in photography. We also see it in music. Not surprisingly - as musical harmony is based around the triad. Our receptiveness to threes is hard wired. Our minds are used to processing things in threes. That's why we like them. So we get the rule of three in band names: Earth Wind and Fire, Wet Wet Wet and Blood Sweat and Tears. Blood Sweat and Tears is a fascinating example: they'd taken a Churchill quote that was originally a four - Blood Toil Sweat and Tears - and turned it into a three because it sounded better.

We also get tricolon in songs. We had The Beatles' 'She loves you! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!' and The Stones' 'Jumping Jack Flash - it's a gas, gas, gas'. There's also 'Money Money Money', 'Signed, Sealed, Delivered (I'm yours!)' and of course - one of my own favourites - Ian Dury's 'Sex and Drugs and Rock n Roll'. Although I think I prefer Robert Rankin's take - 'Sex and Drugs and Sausage Roll.'

The other thing is that rock stars choose their words carefully.

I'm an avid reader of Beatles' books and there's a story about Lennon and McCartney writing a song together in the sixties. This was about the time of 'Help', when they still collaborated closely, and they were struggling over one line. John's wife Cynthia was with them and she suggested a possibility... It was something like: 'It's just the way it is'. Lennon instantly flew off in a rage. 'You can't say 'just' in a song! It's a nothing word! Every word has to mean something!'

If only politicians thought like that!

Here's a paragraph from one of Oliver Letwin's biggest speeches from the last year: his statement to Parliament on the public services White Paper.

"To strengthen accountability, the White Paper also sets out the most radical programme of transparency for Government and the public sector anywhere in the world. To unlock innovation, the White Paper commits us to diversity of provision, removing barriers to entry, stimulating entry by new types of provider and unlocking new sources of capital. To ensure that public sector providers can hold their own on a level playing field, the White Paper sets out measures to liberate public sector bodies from red tape."

Holy cow. If only John Lennon had been in on the drafting session for that one! Songwriters would only use words like that if they served a specific purpose.

I've just read Nile Rodgers' autobiography. Nile Rodgers was the guy behind Chic who wrote or produced many of the biggest hits of the 70s and 80s: 'Let's Dance', 'Like a Virgin', 'Good Times' and many more. There are some great insights into the way he thought about style when he talks about writing Diana Ross's song, 'Upside Down'.

"We included excessively polysyllabic words like 'instinctively' and 'respectfully' because we wanted to utilize Diana's sophistication to achieve a higher level of musicality. Along with the complicated verse, we deliberately made the chorus rhythmically more difficult to sing than the catchier, one-listen song hooks for Chic."

So we get 'Instinctively, you give to me, the love that I need, I cherish the moments with you. Respectfully, I see to thee, I'm aware that you're cheating, but no-one makes me feel like you do.'

They've thought about the linguistic style as a way to project character. It's easy to understand. The contrast with Oliver Letwin is stark. Who knows what Letwin was trying to achieve with his prose. I can't imagine it served any purpose - apart from providing me with some excellent material for my lecture.

This is the trouble with politicians. Noel Gallagher was recently interviewed. They asked him what he thought of the new Labour leader. He couldn't even remember which brother had won. He said, 'You can't tell them apart. They all speak that funny way.' He's right.

I can say as someone who studies the language of all of them very closely: they really do speak the same way: from a technical perspective there is genuinely very little difference between the rhetorical styles of Ed Miliband, Nick Clegg and David Cameron. They really do speak the same!

The other stylistic device which rock stars rely upon is rhyme. Now I'm not proposing politicians or business people should make speeches in rhyme: that would be very funny, but it would also be vaguely insane. I will however just say this: from a rhetorical point of view, people are more likely to believe things which rhyme than things which don't. Rhymes suggest simplicity. They are therefore a great way of smuggling logical fallacies into your speech undetected.

'A Mars a day helps you work rest and play.' Really?!

Jonny Cochran in the OJ Simpson trial: 'If the glove doesn't fit, you must acquit'. This was based on false premise: that the glove didn't fit. The truth was that it had: OJ just made a meal of putting it on.

'If you can't do the time, don't do the crime.' Again, this is based on a false premise: that people who commit crime will a) get caught and b) get imprisoned – a very far fetched idea!

Or 'I before e except after c..' Where did that idea come from? Science?

I recently made this point to someone who works at an investment bank. He worked for one of the banks that was at the centre of the financial crisis.

He said, 'Wow! So you mean like 'You've got to speculate to accumulate.' Blimey! If only *that* aphorism exposed as a fallacy before not after the crash. Perhaps 'Speculation means liquidation' would have been better.

So that's intelligence.

The next thing is love.

2. LOVE!

The relationship between a rock star and their fans is at its essence an emotional transaction: based upon them both meeting one another's emotional needs. The rock star provides the fan with love and emotional protection. In return, the fan gives them the adoration they crave and makes them a leader.

That's the basic contract which underscores most leadership. But to keep it going, the leader must focus on their fans' needs.

Rock stars know this. That's why stars go on about their fans.

It's why every X factor contestant starts by thanking 'all the people at home who voted for me' before their parents or anyone else. It's excruciating, it's predictable but it's also vitally important.

Aristotle said, 'Of the three elements in speechmaking – speaker, subject and person addressed – it is the last one, the hearer, that determines the speech's end and object.' The modern way of putting this is best expressed by Frank Luntz, a US comms specialist: 'It's not what you say that counts, it's what people hear.' So you *have* to care about your audience to be an effective persuader.

But the truth is that most politicians don't care about their audiences. They don't care about them because they know they don't have to care about them. Politics is fundamentally tribal: most voters – not all, but most – vote for the same party their whole life. Leaders know this and exploit this. Many trade unionists couldn't stomach Blair. They had to hold their noses when he walked into the room. They saw him as a closet Tory. But they still voted for him! What alternative was there? They had nowhere else to go.

Even Michael Foot managed to win 9 million votes on a manifesto which Gerald Kaufman famously described as a suicide note. So what are we left with: politicians who spend all their time worrying about and addressing the tiny number of swing voters in swing seats whilst ignoring everyone else.

This complacency about the wider audience is incredibly corrosive. It drives more and more people away from politics. The reason most people don't care about politics anymore is simple: it is because most politicians don't care about people. Rock stars couldn't get away with this. They *have* to care about their audiences. They have no choice. Because, where political audiences are very tribal, rock audiences are incredibly fickle. There's no such thing as loyalty in rock. Many of the big beasts have discovered this to their cost. Paul McCartney, Gary Barlow, David Bowie all saw their audiences literally decimated when they produced a stinker. Gary Barlow went from the pinnacle of success with Take That to being dumped by his record company in three years! The best rock stars keep their audiences close. They play the crowd pleasers. They touch their hands. They crowd surf. They have a few groupies around the back! They let it all hang out – literally in Iggy Popp's case.

The best businesses do the same. Everything starts with what the customer wants. And when you get a similar complacency in business, it creates a similar backlash. Remember when Ratner basically castigated his customers for buying products that were 'crap'.

The best politicians put their audiences first. Remember: Obama's mantra was yes WE can, not yes I can. Bill Clinton never had any problem engaging directly with audiences. To succeed, politicians need to get right up close to the people they profess to serve.

That takes me to the third point.

3. SEX

Aristotle's ethos, pathos and logos were based around the way the Ancient Greeks saw the human body- in three parts - head (logos), heart (pathos) and stomach (ethos), but ethos extended down as far as the genitals. The idea that our character comes from deep below remains prevalent today - we talk of gut instinct, politicians having balls, people shooting from the hip. We think with our heads, feel with our hearts, act with our... Stomachs. But essentially what we are taking about here is our spirit, our character.

Aristotle wrote in Rhetoric, 'Moral character nearly carries with it the most sovereign efficacy in making credibility.' He wrote about the characteristics we like to see in our speakers: health, fortune, strength, power, beauty and gymnastic excellence... Such characteristics remain admirable. But are these features ones we would readily associate with today's politicians or today's rock stars? What do you think? Jagger and McCartney vs Prescott and Pickles?

Rock stars seem to defy the ageing process. Brown and Blair were both put out to pasture before they had even seen out their fifties. The big beasts of rock are still going strong in their late sixties.

Why did Michael Foot and Neil Kinnock lose elections? Professor Jonathan Charteris-Black wrote in his book the Communication of Leadership that their problem was that they were 'not naturally endowed with appearances conducive to positive media representations.' Which is probably the politest way you can find of calling someone ugly.

Look at Boy George, Lady Gaga, Annie Lennox, Tina Turner, Freddie Mercury, David Bowie. They're beautiful. But there's also something else about them. They look different. They don't look like the rest of us mere mortals. But isn't this an essential requirement? Isn't it true that our leaders, by definition, have to be different to the rest of us?

A great leader must be removed from where other people are if he is to lead: otherwise he's not leading, he's just standing in line. A leader needs to stand outside the establishment, not in it.

This seems counter-intuitive. We imagine most leaders come from the establishment. Real leaders do not. Most experience real struggles to get up to the top. It is that struggle which we admire. It is that struggle which inspires. And perhaps it is the emotional turmoil of isolation and their journey to the top that endows them with leadership qualities. Look at the great leaders of our history.

Jesus, Mohammed and Buddha all spent long periods in isolation during their formative years. All of the great dictators - Stalin, Hitler and Napoleon - were ethnic minorities in the lands they went on to conquer - Georgian, Austrian and Corsican respectively. Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher were both outsiders in the Tory Party: Churchill crossed the floor twice in his career. Tony Blair was an outsider in the Labour Party. And Barack Obama was a definite outsider in the Democratic Party - knocking the establishment shoo-in, Hillary Clinton, right out of the way.

It is true that in business as well, leaders must also be outsiders. Jobs, Branson and Murdoch have always played around the fact that they are outsiders. They kept the position up throughout their lives. Even as they became the establishment, they constantly shifted the perspective so that they remained the rebels, not the insiders. And it's no co-incidence perhaps that all of them have brushed up against the law at different points in their career.

Steve Jobs put it beautifully.

'When you grow up you tend to get told the world is the way it is and your life is just to live your life inside the world. Try not to bash into the walls too much. Try to have a nice family life, have fun, save a little money. That's a very limited life. Life can be much broader once you discover one simple fact - that everything around you that you call life was made up by people that were no smarter than you. And you can change it, you can influence it, you can build your own things that other people can use. Maybe the most important thing is to shake off this erroneous notion that life is there and you're just gonna live in it, versus embrace it. Once you learn that, you'll never be the same again.'

But read this across to modern business. Where are the outsiders in business today? More and more FTSE CEOs are now coming up from Finance Director posts. They're people who have grown up within the company. They're insiders. So they're struggling to connect.

And what about politics? Where are the outsiders? You look at Miliband, Clegg and Cameron. They're not outsiders. They're insiders. And not just insiders within their own parties, but insiders to the whole political establishment. They have identikit CVs. They're insiders. So they're struggling to connect.

The outsiders are there. You can spot them easily in Parliament. Watch PMQs. They're the ones wearing grey suits, rejecting the normal blue or black. They're rejecting the instinct to conform. Skinner. Hughes. That lot. But they tend not to get on. The Conservative Party in particular seems to have been taken over by insiders. The few working class members to have joined their ranks have been treated disgracefully. David Davis, Nadine Dorries, John Bercow. Briefings against them from their COLLEAGUES suggest that they are 'unbalanced', 'mad' or 'an oik'.

It's not hard to see the class prejudice which lies beneath the surface of these attacks.

That is a great shame. The Tories seem to have forgotten that their largest ever popular vote was won by a working class Prime Minister - John Major. Major was also an outsider, also briefed against and also rock n roll, as we found out later with Edwina Currie?

So, it seems to me that rock stars are outperforming politicians and business leaders and there is much that can be learnt from them.

Let me be clear: I'm not saying I want more Kinnock at Sheffield - 'Alright!', or Hague in baseball caps, or Brown talking about the Arctic Monkeys, or, god forbid, David Cameron pretending his favourite song was The Jam's Eton Rifles when he clearly hadn't even listened to the lyrics.

I am saying that we need more rock n roll leaders. And rock n roll can't be acted. Rock n roll just is. It's part of your being. It's flowing through your veins.

It's Steve Jobs - with his acid trips, his permanent revolutionary mindset, his constant quest for perfection.

It's Richard Branson - with his supermodels, his 'screw it, let's do it' attitude to business, his rather unorthodox office - on a barge in Little Venice.

It's Tony Blair - the frustrated musician, once lead singer in a band called the Ugly Rumours, carrying his guitar into Downing Street.

So turn off the parliamentary channel off - turn on the iPod!

Show the passion. Share the dreams. Reveal weakness.

One way of putting it: ethos, pathos, logos.

Another way of putting it? Move like Jagger.

Thank you.

© Simon Lancaster 2012