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RHETORICAL AUDIENCE STUDIES AND RECEPTION OF RHETORIC

Exploring Audiences Empirically

Edited by
Jens E. Kjeldsen



Rhetoric, Politics and Society

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Rhetorical Audience Studies and Reception of Rhetoric

Exploring Audiences Empirically

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Audience Analysis and Reception Studies of Rhetoric

Jens E. Kjeldsen

Without audiences, there would be no rhetoric. Understanding audiences, therefore, is essential for understanding rhetoric. If we do not understand when, how and why audiences are influenced by communication, or see how they negotiate and reject rhetorical messages, then we do not understand rhetoric. In light of this, it is surprising that rhetorical scholars have paid so little attention to audiences—or to be more precise: to empirical audiences. This book encourages researchers to do more studies of empirical audiences and their reception of rhetoric. The chapters offer examples of central methods of understanding reception and empirical audiences: historical approaches such as archival-historical methodology and historiography, interviews and focus group research, protocol analysis, ethnographic participation and observation, appropriation as reception and finally triangulation, where the researcher applies several methods in unison. While these methods are common in media studies, anthropology, cultural studies and other fields of research, they are surprisingly rare in rhetorical studies.

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In the beginning, there was only text. Rhetorical research was more or less identical to rhetorical criticism. Even though neo-Aristotelianism encouraged attention to social settings, was eager to measure effectiveness and considered this effectiveness a function of audience adaption, text was king (Thonssen and Baird 1948). In the decades after the Second World War, rhetorical criticism, close readings and ideological studies were generally performed as textual analysis. Then the 1980s and 1990s witnessed an increased interest in empirical audience studies, reader response and reception research. The trend continued in media studies, cultural studies and other fields, where such approaches are now an important part of the research tools available. Strangely, though, rhetoricians lost interest in these methods and mainly went back to the text. Today empirical, qualitative audience studies are rare in rhetorical research. Reading the publications in rhetoric, the journals, books, and anthologies, we seldom find qualitative studies on empirical audiences. Given the fundamental importance of audiences in rhetoric, this is both peculiar and unfortunate.

Of course, rhetoricians have always been thinking about audiences. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle determines that there are three kinds of rhetoric, because there are three kinds of audiences. It is the listener that determines the end and object of the speech, and listeners are three in kind: either a judge to decide about things past (forensic) or future (political) or an observer of the orators' skills (ceremonial) (I.3). The main part of book II in the *Rhetoric* deals with audience matters by accounting for the various emotions and human characters that audiences may consist of (II.1–17).

Since the revival of rhetorical studies in the second half of the twentieth century, leading researchers in the field has contemplated on the role of the audience in rhetoric. In *The New Rhetoric*, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca define an audience as “*the ensemble of those whom the speaker wishes to influence by his argumentation*” (1969, 19; italics in text). While this may sound as an actual audience, *The New Rhetoric* only deals with the audience as a construction of the speaker (ibid.). In contrast to this view, Lloyd F. Bitzer’s theory of the rhetorical situation more clearly approaches the audience as an empirical matter. A rhetorical audience consists of “those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change” (Bitzer 1968, 7). Bitzer’s theory describes how certain situations and rhetorical responses transform individuals into a historically concrete audience. However, even though Bitzer describes

the situations and audiences as real and publicly observable (Bitzer 1968, 1980), he does not examine empirical audiences.

The most common treatment of audiences in rhetoric are as instances of textually constituted constructions in the tradition of Booth's (1983) and Iser's (1978) notions of implied and implicit reader (e.g. McCloskey 1985). Edwin Black argues that every text has an implied author, which is not the real person of the author but the rhetorical presence of the author in the text. He calls this the first person. However, texts and discourses also have a second persona implied, "and that persona is its implied auditor". An implied auditor "does not focus on a relationship between a discourse and an actual auditor. It focuses instead on the discourse alone, and extracts from it the audience it implies" (Black 2013, 597). Black calls this implied audience "the second persona". This second persona can be judged, because "[t]he critic can see in the auditor implied by a discourse a model of what the rhetor would have his real auditor become" (Black 2013, 598). Philip Wander later described what he called "The third persona", which is "the concept of audience in rhetorical theory to include audiences not present, audiences rejected or negated through the speech and/or the speaking situation" (Wander 2013, 614).

A similar ideological approach characterizes Maurice Charland's treatment of what he terms the *constitutive audience*. Charland sets out to "show the degree to which collective identities forming the basis of rhetorical appeals themselves depend upon rhetoric" (Charland 2013, 437). In line with Althusser's theory of hailing Charland explains how rhetorical structures and appeals not only persuade people but also create, *constitute*, people. In an analysis of the rhetoric of the independence movement of Quebec, the French-speaking province of Canada, Charland demonstrates how the rhetoric of a white paper calls the Quebecois into being, thereby constituting them as an audience and a people.

In his studies of rhetorical argumentation Tindale explores the issue of audience identity and make-up (Tindale 2013, 2015). Using Perelman's universal audience and applying the notion of "cognitive environments" (Sperber and Wilson 1995), Tindale argues that the idea of "a fixed audience is as obsolete as the idea of a fixed argument, unmoored from the dynamic situation of which it is an integral part" (Tindale 2013, 529). Audience identity, he suggests, is especially important since questions of persuasion and evaluation of argument either depend on this or can in some way be reduced to it (Tindale 2013, 516). Even though Tindale is

concerned with the cognitive environment of audiences, with audience identity and with the make-up of audiences in relation to their different subgroups, his account is still predominantly theoretical and philosophical.

These are some of the most cited and acknowledged accounts of audiences in contemporary rhetorical research. They all have one thing in common: They are speculative, theoretical constructions of the audience. Audiences are either perceptions of the speaker, implied by the text, left out by the text or constituted by the rhetoric. While all these accounts are essential theoretical contributions to our field, none of them deals with actual audiences or takes into consideration any kind of real reception or factual response given by an existing audience. Even though there has been some rhetorical research attending to actual audiences, studying reception (e.g. Condit 1990; Stromer-Galley and Schiappa 1998 [reprinted as Chap. 2 in this book]; Ceccarelli 2001; Kjeldsen 2007) and especially using ethnographic approaches (e.g. Middleton et al. 2015), rhetorical scholars have mostly limited themselves to textual analysis and rhetorical criticism. This is a pity because treating “audiences as hypothetical or easily manipulated or even beside the point” (Houck 2015, 283) will prevent us from understanding the workings, influence and effects of rhetoric.

WHY DO RHETORICIANS NOT PERFORM AUDIENCE STUDIES?

So, why don't we study empirical audiences more? One reason may be the redefinition of rhetoric as the study of meaning and symbol use that began in the late 1960s and developed in the decades that followed. Blair put it this way: “An exclusive focus on symbolicity diverts us from rhetoric's capacity to *do* things, rather than simply *mean* something” (Blair 2015, 41). Another explanation might be the movement towards critical theory and ideological critique, which—quite surprisingly—seems to consider reception, effect and real audiences rather irrelevant, or in Houck's words “a quaint scholarly anachronism in the age of domination and interpellation” (Houck 2015, 288). Houck also points to a more quotidian explanation: Doing empirical audience studies is cumbersome, time consuming, and it requires resources. It is much simpler and less demanding just to focus on rhetor and text, instead of trying to study the way real audiences are exposed to and negotiate the rhetoric they encounter.

The neglect of reception studies may also be connected to more ideological aspects of academic identity and scholarly self-understanding. The rhetorician sees himself as an intellectual who interprets the world and its rhetorical complexities through his special intellectual capacities and his academic ability to analyse and provide judgement. This puts the scholar in a privileged position. He becomes the “expert reader”, the brilliant, discerning mind (cf. Middleton et al. 2015, 10f., Stromer-Galley and Schiappa, Chap. 2 in this volume). From this point of view, doing reception studies and listening to audiences entails a loss of position and power. In a more modest version of this self-image, rhetorical critics see themselves “function as surrogates for audiences” (Campbell 1989, 2). However, as Bjørkdahl and Carlsen argue in Chap. 10: critics cannot function as surrogates for audiences, simply because they are very different from those audiences.

Celeste Condit has argued that the growing emphasis on audience studies in the late 1980s exerted a pressure on rhetorical critics that had unfortunate consequences. The focus of audience studies on the polysemy of texts, active audiences, and the importance of decoding, challenged the legitimacy of speaker and text-oriented interpretative practices. On the one hand, it led a critic like Michael Leff to “retreat from responsibility to any audience at all” (Condit 1990, 333). On the other hand it led a scholar like Michael McGee “to abandon text altogether in favour of the audience” (ibid.). Condit was disgruntled with McGee’s claim that that texts in a traditional sense do not exist in our contemporary world and that “text construction is now something done more by the consumers than by the producers of discourse” (McGee 1990, 288). She did not, then at least, see audience research as an alternative. Such research, she claimed, had fallen into two intellectual voids. In the first chasm, social scientific audience research creates “false universals”, and ethnographic studies produce particularistic analyses that are often “hopelessly individual”. In the second chasm scholars that read audiences as their texts end up with a view of rhetoric that is “formless”, since there are no texts proper consisting of content and form in a specific context—there are only fragments gathered by the critic. These failings, Condit claims, are “inherent in audience research because rhetoric is neither individual nor universal, but collective” (Condit 1990, 341).

Yes, rhetoric is collective and social, and there is much to agree with in Condit’s paper. Still, I believe it underestimates the value of audience research in rhetorical scholarship. The chapters in this book are all good

examples of how empirical audience studies provide valuable insights into rhetoric. Even Condit herself has demonstrated the value of rhetorical reception in her own studies (Condit 2013; Condit and Williams 1997). In one study of two viewers' responses to an episode of the television series *Cagney and Lacey*, for example (Condit 2013), Condit found that the "dominant reading" (cf. Hall 1980) of the episode was easily engaged by the viewer who agreed with the message, but required effort to resist by the viewer who disagreed. In spite of the possible polysemy of the episode, both viewers understood the dominant message, but only one agreed. This leads Condit to suggest that many texts may be *polyvalent* rather than polysemic ("polysemous"): Texts generally have a dominant or preferred reading, and people will normally understand it. While this has made some suggest that audience research is less urgent, Stromer-Galley and Schiappa see it as a reason to do more audience studies (see Chap. 2): If texts really are polyvalent, then reception-oriented studies are one of the best ways to examine when and how this is the case.

WHY RHETORICIANS SHOULD PERFORM AUDIENCE STUDIES

As the chapters in this book illustrate, audience studies provide many benefits for rhetorical research. One value of such methods is that they provide an opportunity to examine the rhetorical, interpretative labour done by audiences. Rhetorical utterances have neither one unequivocal and definite meaning nor a universal deterministic effect on audiences (Stromer-Galley and Schiappa, Chap. 2, in this volume). That is why rhetoric has been termed the study of misunderstanding and its remedies (Richards 1936). We also know this from a broad spectrum of theories, which teaches us that audiences are always active participants in any communicative exchange. Reception theory describes how a reader must cognitively fill out the gaps and open places in any text (Holub 2003). Semiotics demonstrates how communication in general is polysemic and open (Eco 1979; Barthes 1977). Pragmatics and relevance theory shows how language works through implicature, requiring conversational partners to constantly make inferences (Clark 2013; Wilson and Sperber 2012). All these theories point to the fact that in communication, the audience does much of the communicative labour. This is particularly relevant for rhetorical argumentation, because it is enthymematic and leaves it to the audience to fill in the gaps and missing premises (Bitzer 1959). If we want to find out how the communicative work done by audiences is carried out, and establish what

it means—which are essential rhetorical tasks—then the best way to find out is do audience studies (cf. Benoit and Smythe 2003).

Not only are rhetorical texts polysemic, it can be difficult to determine exactly what and where the rhetorical text is. While traditional rhetorical criticism analysed discrete and clearly demarcated texts, a researcher in our contemporary and fragmented media environment will often find it challenging to determine which text an audience has actually experienced (Kjeldsen 2008)—or even who the audience is (Livingstone 2004; Radway 1988; Tindale 2013). This is especially pertinent online where communication is constantly produced, copied, shared and changed. Online communication is interactive, intertextual and transitory. It is increasingly segmented and personalized by the use of algorithms, creating different texts for different groups—even for individuals. In this situation, the best way of finding out which texts—or rather flow of communication—people have experienced is to talk to them or observe them.

Audience studies not only help us see that texts are polysemic and audiences are active, but also that audience interpretation and decoding are not completely free and incidental (Condit 2013). Audience studies, then, are not only a way of understanding the power of the audience, it is also a way of understanding the power of rhetoric—in situ and in general.

Audience and reception studies also offer a way to understand “the other”. If we truly wish to understand the persuasiveness of appeals we find surprising, or even worrisome, we will not find good answers by speculating about the values or (lack of) intelligence of the audience. If we seek answers only by putting ourselves in the place of “the other”, playing the role of people different than ourselves, we will neither understand them nor the rhetoric they find appealing. It is obvious, for instance, that the rhetoric of Donald J. Trump in the US election campaign of 2016 was received very differently by supporters and opponents. To many, the appeal and success of Mr. Trump’s rhetoric was surprising, almost inexplicable. The answers could have been found by paying more attention to the audiences that found his rhetoric convincing, for instance, through studies of the reception of his speeches and tweets.

Finally, as pointed out in Chap. 12 by Kjeldsen and Andersen, *reception-oriented and ethnographic approaches* offer a way for rhetorical research to acknowledge the impact and effect of rhetoric without relying on a simple transmission model of communication. Rhetorical reception studies acknowledge that rhetoric has the power to do something to audiences but also that audiences have the power to do something to the rhetoric

they encounter. The main aim of rhetorical audience studies is to understand the interaction between the rhetorical situation, the characteristics of the utterances, and the audience uptake and its negotiation of the rhetoric. Instead of moving conjecturally from textual traits to assumed effect, reception studies allow the researcher to also move from response to text, in order to establish the rhetorical traits that may have contributed to the response.

DOING RHETORICAL RECEPTION AND AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

This book is not a handbook of research methods. There are plenty of these for the student who wants the nuts and bolts of reception studies that uses archival research methods, interviews and focus groups, protocol analysis or ethnographic methods. However, even though *Rhetorical Audience Studies and Reception of Rhetoric* is not a methodological handbook, it does seek to offer a basic understanding of how audience research are carried out. It also aims to offer an understanding for the value of these methods for the study of rhetoric—as well as the value of rhetorical theory for the methods.

In providing a basic understanding of the craft of rhetorical audience studies, it is informative to distinguish between three types of rhetorical research texts (Fiske 1986; Gentikow 1998, 1997). *Primary texts* are created by a rhetor: a speech by Churchill (Chap. 3), political ads from a party (Chap. 4) or a piano concert by Edward Elgar (Chap. 7). Such texts are the most studied though history of the study of rhetoric, and the most used research method in the field is rhetorical criticism of these.

Secondary texts are naturally occurring reactions and responses to primary texts that are not initiated by the researcher. This could be applause to a political speech or letters to the editor about it; it could be comments in a commentary section (Chap. 12), attributions of iconic images (Chap. 11) and the liking and sharing of material on social media (Chap. 5). The amount of secondary texts have increased vastly with online communication and social media, allowing everybody to comment and provide responses at any time. The distinction between primary and secondary texts is fluid. Reactions and responses to rhetorical texts can be viewed and analysed in their own right as primary texts, and they may lead to new reactions creating other secondary texts. As instances of reception of rhetoric, secondary texts are relevant object of studies, because they offer natural responses to rhetoric and allow the researcher to establish connec-

tions between the rhetorical situation, the rhetorical utterance and the responses it evokes (cf. the textual-intertextual analysis of Ceccarelli 2001).

Tertiary texts (also called empirical texts) are scholar-generated texts such as qualitative interviews (Chaps. 10 and 12), focus group conversations (Chaps. 4 and 5) or protocol analysis (e.g. think-aloud readings, cf. Chaps. 6 and 7). Survey material and different kinds of texts and research data created through experimental approaches are also tertiary texts.

Whereas secondary texts are notations of responses that occur in real time without the influence of researchers, tertiary texts are generated by artificial and constructed research situations. These forms of texts, thus, are also labelled *data made*, while primary and secondary texts are labelled *data found* (Jensen 2012). The benefits of secondary texts are that they provide the researcher with access to the more immediate real-life reactions. Research leading to tertiary texts, on the other hand, makes it possible to understand reception where secondary texts are not available. The scholar-generated texts also make it possible to choose the primary texts for reaction, to select the material that is most suited for the research questions and to control the types of response to be studied. Having informants looking at selected forms of pictures, for instance, could either help the researcher to explore how visuals cue arguments in audiences (Kjeldsen 2015b) or how visuals evoke emotions.

Ethnographic rhetorical research can include all three types of texts and will sometimes be a fusion of these. Ethnographic observation and participations, for instance, can generate notations and descriptions of rhetorical behaviour and response in actual communication situations, which is a form of data found. At the same time such ethnographic accounts often depend on the researcher intruding in the normal rhetorical situations and the reception of the audiences in case. To the extent that this leads to a change in the usual behaviour of the audience, the accounts should be considered an instance of data made, a form of tertiary texts.

The chapters in this book are both academic contributions in their own right, and introductions to different forms of rhetorical audience and reception research, functioning as examples of selected qualitative and reception-oriented approaches. The remaining part of this chapter provides brief accounts of these approaches by suggesting how they are carried out and how they relate to rhetoric. They are historical approaches, focus groups and qualitative interviews, protocol analysis and think-aloud reading, participatory rhetoric and rhetorical ethnography, appropriation and triangulation of methods.

HISTORICAL APPROACHES TO RHETORIC AND RECEPTION

Researching rhetorical audiences empirically seem to exclude the study of historical situations and audiences. We are far removed from the historical events we wish to understand, without opportunity to talk to people who experienced the speeches or the other kinds of rhetoric in case. Even if we could talk to audience members who were present at the time, they would be limited by the shortcomings of memory. Still, there are sources and ways of understanding reception of rhetoric in the past. Amos Kiewe (2015), for instance, has studied the letters sent to Franklin D. Roosevelt after his First Fireside Chat. After Roosevelt's speech on the banking crisis, trust in the banking system was restored, people redeposited money, and the US economy recovered. Was this an effect of the speech? Yes, the speech was a primary cause for the renewed trust, Kiewe argues (2015, 187). The thousands of letters sent to Roosevelt document the citizens' renewed trust and their intentions of redepositing. Kiewe establishes the success of the speech by collating the macro-level effects in the economy and the micro-level effects of the sentiments expressed in the letters.

In a similar way Houck and Nocasian (2002) have examined Roosevelt's first inaugural address, telling the nation that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself" (1933). They studied the creation, drafts and final version of the speech, the context, and the letters and telegrams sent to Roosevelt in the immediate aftermath of the delivery. The speech restored confidence in the nation and administration. By correlating the patterns of response, the reception, with the rhetorical strategies in the text, and the intentions of the president and his speechwriters, they show how and why the speech succeeded. However, they also move beyond correlating, by showing that careful study of reception "can reveal the organic nature of text and context", in order to "gain greater insight and understanding into how a text actually worked within a historical moment to influence an audience" (675).

In the UK Amy Whipple (2009) has examined the reception of the infamous anti-immigration "Rivers of Blood Speech", delivered in 1968 by the right-wing conservative politician Enoch Powell. While consulting both opinion polls and previous readings of the speech, her approach was to qualitatively study the reaction in a sample of 2000 of the over 100,000 letters Powell received after the speech. Like much audience analysis, Whipple's study seems to say more about the audience than about the speech itself. She shows that many of the people who wrote to Powell

apparently had misunderstood what he was trying to say; instead, they strongly approved of what they *thought* he was saying. The speech did not persuade the audience to take a new point of a view but triggered an outpouring of already existing sentiments.¹

In Chap. 3, Richard Toye uses a similar *archive-based methodology* to examine the empirical responses to post-war speeches by Winston Churchill (Toye 2013). Toye's approach uses sociological research done by the British authorities including questionnaires and diaries. Like Kiewe, Whipple, and Houck and Nocasian, Toye insists on examining rhetoric in historical and situational context. Their approaches urge us to take into consideration the ideas and values of the time as well as the constraints of technology and communication forms used. Read together, these studies offer general topoi of research for doing reception studies of speeches from the past:

1. *Context*. Establish the historic and situational circumstances surrounding the speech.
2. *Creation of speech*. Examine and assess evidence that casts light on the drafting process of the speech. This may include the so-called context of anticipation (Toye 2013, 69), which is the writer's understanding of the audiences, their possible objections to the message and the thoughts on how one might meet them in advance. Knowledge about this may be found in archives containing letters, drafts and other material. Biographies and media material may also be a source of knowledge to this.
3. *Text and delivery*. Perform appropriate rhetorical analysis of manuscript and delivery. If possible, check delivery by attending to the original audio or film where it exists. Evidence of interruptions, laughter or applause can be very useful. As pointed out by Max Atkinson (1984), different forms of audience responses to delivery can be read as a barometer of approval. The immediate response to a speech can also be determined through descriptions of delivery and response found in newspapers, biographies or other historical texts.
4. *Reception and response*. Establish a wider understanding of the reception by examining material such as memoirs and diary accounts by people who were physically present. Numbers for radio and television listeners may provide a sense of the size of the audience. While such numbers and statistics may not be perfect, and may only apply certain parts of the population, they can provide a sense of the

relative popularity of a given speech. Newspaper and radio editorials as well as commentaries can be used as sources for audience response. Public or scientific statistics and studies of reception and public opinion can also be consulted. Toye, for instance, used the results of the research organization Mass Observation and the Home Intelligence reports of the Ministry of Information. This gave access to field reports, letters and diaries by members of the public (Toye 2013, 231–232).

Toye points to Anna Greenwood and Andrea Bernardi (2014, 917) for a condensed explanation of the method of the historian relevant for rhetoricians. This explanation is worth reproducing here as well:

Key is the investigation of primary sources (archive work), the selection of them (historical data is not the sum of historical documents), the acknowledgement of hermeneutics (documents need interpretation), the triangulation of sources (sources need to be verified and put in a hierarchy of credibility), the verification of memory gaps or over emphasis (one needs an awareness of the possibility that the past can be either deleted or invented), thick contextualization (events should only be understood in a context), critical analysis of documents (correspondences may be written with tacit objectives) engagement with the historiography (showing an awareness of critical approaches that have subsequently been applied to the data by other historians).

Empirical sources of audience responses, then, are essential for understanding the reception and significance of rhetorical utterances such as speeches. In this way, we understand history through rhetoric and reception, but we may also understand rhetoric and reception through history. In Chap. 9, Hertzberg demonstrates that an understanding of rhetoric in our time may depend on an understanding of specific historical trajectories. He shows how the significance and effect of the rhetoric in public meeting by Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka must be understood through the historical development of the political repertoires of Buddhist monks in relation to norms and exceptions.

In spite of the value of examining the effect and audience responses of speeches and other kinds of historical rhetoric, such reception studies are still rare in rhetorical criticism. Why? Ignoring the study of effects in rhetoric, Kiewe suggests, is not as much a matter of inaccessibility of sources but mostly a matter of an anachronistic theoretical framing. Most

historical acts do leave “some record of their reception and of reaction to them”, and many rhetorical works from the past two centuries have been “commented upon in official records as well in the popular press, pamphlets, or diaries” (Kiewe 2015, 189). Since such sources often are available, it would be foolish not to consult them.

Studying historical orators and speeches through the reception of actual audiences is also a way of discovering alternative readings, avoiding mistaken audience conjectures about the reception (cf. Condit 1990; Ceccarelli 1998) and preventing anachronistic readings. Instances of rhetoric and oratory will always be closely connected to specific circumstances and must be understood in relation to these circumstances. Quentin Skinner has made a similar point about philosophy and the history of ideas. There “are no perennial problems in philosophy”, he argues (Skinner 2002, 88). In order to understand philosophy and the history of ideas, he claims—and rhetoric we may add—one must see the intentions of the author in light of the specific audiences who was addressed.

FOCUS GROUPS AND QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

In the second chapter of this book, Stromer-Galley and Schiappa make a very straightforward statement: If you make claims or conjectures about audiences and their responses to rhetoric, then you ought to talk to these audiences. While it is generally impossible to interact with historical audiences, focus groups and individual interviewing allow the researcher to interact with actual and potential audiences.

While qualitative interviewing and focus group conversations have been common in decades in fields such as media studies, consumer research, cultural studies and political communication, these approaches are still rare in rhetorical studies. When rhetoricians actually use them, they are often considered as media or communication studies. Both qualitative interviews and focus groups involve asking informants questions and having them talk and elaborate about the issue in questions. Such methods are a valuable way of understanding how audiences react to communication, how they interpret, makes sense of, and mentally negotiate and argue with rhetoric.

The few rhetorical studies using interviews and focus groups illustrate the values of these methods for rhetorical reception. Kathleen Hall Jamieson, for instance, has used focus groups to examine the rhetorical use of television ads in the US presidential campaign between George Bush Sr.

(R) and Michael Dukakis (D) (Jamieson 1992). The campaign featured some highly inflammatory ads from Bush attacking Dukakis for being weak on crime. While rhetorical criticism of these ads can reveal their rhetorical potential, the focus group conversations conducted by Jamieson provided a more full and nuanced understanding of their rhetorical workings. Through research conversations, she discovered that the informants pieced the ads, or parts of them, together with fragments of news, speeches and other information. In doing this, they constructed their own coherent, but false, story saying that Dukakis had let 268 black murderers go free to kidnap and rape white people. We will never find such audience-constructed texts through traditional text analysis, because they only exist in the mind of the audience. The only way to access such texts is to talk to audiences.

Focus groups and interviews can also be used to establish the enthymematic reconstruction of argumentation by an audience. Most rhetorical argumentation omits parts and premises, leaving it to the audience to connect the rhetoric to their own experience and participate in the argumentative reconstruction by providing the left-out premises. In this way focus groups can “reveal underlying cognitive and ideological premises that structure arguments, the ways in which various discourse rooted in particular contexts and given experience are brought to bear on interpretations, the discursive construction of social identities, and so forth” (Lunt and Livingstone 1996, 96). Establishing the argumentative reconstructions of an audience is especially relevant in visual argumentation, since visuals do not explicitly express claims and premises in words. In the field of visual argumentation, focus groups have been used to establish that audiences readily understand visual rhetoric and argumentation, and demonstrated how visual tropes in pictorially dominated advertisements enthymematically cue audiences to reconstruct the intended arguments of the ads (Kjeldsen 2015a, b).

These examples illustrate the value of reception-oriented methods of interviews and focus groups. One of the biggest challenges for contemporary rhetorical criticism is that neither audience nor rhetorical utterances are discrete and clearly demarcated. This has made it increasingly difficult to determine what an audience has actually heard, seen, read, or in any way experienced, of a specific rhetorical utterance. We may examine the tropes, figures and arguments in a speech by the President or Prime Minister, but no ordinary person will experience the rhetoric in the same way. In the multimeditated society of today, few people watch whole speeches and debates. Most people experience only fragments of “whole

texts” as short messages on Facebook or Twitter, as Snapchats or short excerpts in the news; they see a brief soundbite, a clip on YouTube, or hear the retelling and explicit comments and evaluations by reporters, bloggers, friends or colleagues. When most people never experience the full rhetorical text that we thoroughly examine as rhetorical critics, when there is no single, discrete text and when we do not know who the empirical audience is, interviews and focus groups may help us understand how *a selected* audience actually reacts to specific rhetorical utterances. This can be rhetorical utterances experienced in previous actual situations, or it can be utterances displayed or demonstrated in the research situation.

These issues are especially relevant for internet communication and social media. Here one user’s movement through the online environment will be different from other users and thus expose her to a rhetorical “text” that is different from “texts” other users experience. Furthermore, in this movement, a user will often shift positions between being a consuming audience member and a producing rhetor. In Chap. 5, for instance, Eirik Vatnøy describes the ways focus group interviews can be useful methodological additions to rhetorical studies of social media. The fragmented, changeable and complex nature of an average Facebook feed challenges established understandings of what constitutes a rhetorical audience or a rhetorical situation. Vatnøy shows how focus groups can be used to study the vernacular rhetoric of social media platforms. He applies this method to demonstrate how Facebook users in different age groups offer very different readings of a political social media campaign. The problems of the media-saturated society are also addressed in Chap. 10. Here Kristian Bjørkdahl and Benedicte Carlsen use so-called spontaneous interviews to establish what citizens have remembered—and forgotten—of the communication about the 2009 Swine flu pandemic and the need for vaccine. They find that in spite of massive media coverage and extensive information efforts by authorities, the informants *misremember* many aspects of the pandemic rhetoric and that they do so in certain patterns.

Another rhetorical subject that lends itself well to qualitative interviewing is the workings of ethos, image and authenticity. Since ethos is not a fixed quality in a rhetor, but an attitude in the audience towards the rhetor (McCroskey 2016, 82), it can only really be examined by talking to or interacting with audiences. In Chap. 4, Magnus H. Iversen addresses this by examining how different groups of people make sense of and talk about their experiences with authenticity appeals presented through political advertising. While authenticity and ordinariness is a celebrated quality in

political leaders in Norway, Iversen's interviews reveal that leader authenticity also requires eminence. Authentic leadership is the combination of appearing as a true individual acting true to oneself, but with the right balance between closeness and distance, the right mix of proximity and eminence. The leader ought to be as us, but not completely.

Iversen's study also points to another advantage of reception studies such as focus groups: Doing interviews with rhetors (production interviews), performing rhetorical criticism of the "text" (television ads) and doing interviews with audiences (members of the electorate) allow the researcher to compare the intentions of the rhetor (the producer), the "encoding" of these intentions (the text) and the decoding by the audience (the reception). This serves as a good example of the ability of audience studies to connect intention, utterance and audience, without basing the rhetorical investigation on a deterministic transmission model of communication.

Qualitative interviews and focus groups are well-established forms of research, with an extensive literature on methodology (e.g. Kvale and Brinkman 2009; Schröder et al. 2003; Flick 2014; Leavy 2014). This is not the place to provide an account of these research procedures, but it is relevant to point out a few central research topoi when using interviews and focus groups in rhetorical research:

1. *Choose between interviews or focus groups.* Interviews provide the opportunity to go in depth with one informant's experiences, thoughts and feelings, without being influenced by other participants. On the other hand, even though they are moderated, focus groups resemble the kind of conversations and discussions that actually takes place in vernacular or professional conversations. This allows the researcher to not only study *a* response from *one* person but to study the rhetorical *interaction between people* and their internal negotiations of meaning, arguments, opinions and attitudes.
2. *Determine the type and number of informants.* When conducting research interviews the number of informants can differ from a single person in a biographical interview to thousand subjects in a study in need of a representative sample (Kvale and Brinkman 2009, 113). For a qualitative and interpretative rhetorical study, a suitable number will normally be around six to sixteen informants, depending on the aim. It is also important to decide which type of informants will be the best type in order to answer the research question.

3. *Determine the size and number of groups.* When doing focus groups, the researcher must determine both the size and number of the groups. Group sizes can vary from around four to sixteen, but the most common is four to eight people. The number of groups depends on the study, but in qualitative rhetorical studies, everything from one to six can be appropriate. Some studies use even more groups.
4. *Develop and follow an interview guide.* When conducting focus groups, and especially when doing individual interviews, the conversations will normally follow a thematic interview guide that separate the session in themes and provide possible questions. This secures that the researcher cover the most relevant issues and ask the questions that best address the aim of the research. Such *semi-structured* interviews are generally the most suitable for researching rhetorical reception, because they keep the interviewees on theme, while simultaneously providing enough freedom and openness to let them express their own thoughts and feelings.
5. *Transcribe, code and analyse.* In order to make sense of the interviews or conversations, they should first be transcribed. Then they should be *coded*: organized in categories and classifications. Depending on the aim of the research and the size of the material, this can be done roughly in longhand or more precisely with data analysis and coding programmes such as NVivo, ATLAS.ti or MaxQDA. Finally, the material must be analysed in relation to the research questions. The coding procedure is the first analytical step.

While interviews and group conversations can provide a thick understanding of the effect of rhetoric on the informants as well as the way they negotiate and oppose the rhetoric, these results can rarely be generalized. Interviewing six, sixteen or even sixty hairdressers about a speech does not tell us what hairdressers in general think about the speech or about speeches as a rhetorical genre. Still, both interviews and focus groups are advantageous in rhetorical research, because these methods provide us with opportunities to study how people experience their roles as audiences and how they respond to rhetorical utterances.

While interviews allow us to examine in depth the response and interpretation of one individual, focus groups allow us to construct different types of audience groups and create simulations of certain aspects of rhetorical situations. In both cases, the conversations can be preceded by

exposure to relevant instances of rhetoric. Interviews and focus groups, then, have the distinct advantage of tapping into the experiences, thoughts and feelings of an audience, and to have the audience elaborate and explain how they relate to the rhetoric in question. In contrast to textual analysis and traditional rhetorical criticism, the conversations with audiences provide understandings, readings and negotiations that are not limited to scholars' conjectures about the reception and effect of rhetorical artefacts. We may learn both what rhetoric does to people and what people do to the rhetoric they encounter. Such audience conversations, then, can both be used to prepare a rhetorical text analysis and to test or inform an analysis that has already been made.

Furthermore, as suggested: Audience analyses through interviews and group conversations are especially valuable in a fragmented and visually dominated multimedia society, because it may provide a sense of how people piece together many texts and fragments into a coherent rhetorical whole, creating narratives and "texts" that do not exist materially, but can be accessed through conversation.

PROTOCOL ANALYSIS

While qualitative interviewing and focus group conversations generally have informants talk about something they have experienced previously, *protocol analysis*, also known as think-aloud protocols, aims at registering mental activity and responses *while they occur*. In the so-called think-aloud reading, for instance, informants are asked to read a text aloud, pause and verbalize what comes into mind. The researcher makes audio or video recordings of the reading and the verbalizations, which are then transcribed and analysed. In principle, the process can be done with any temporal activity, for instance, having informants report what comes to mind when they are writing, browsing the internet or listening to music (Chap. 7).

The method was developed by the psychologists Anders Ericsson and Herbert Simon in the 1980s (Ericsson and Simon 1980, 1984 [1993]), where it was primarily used to register the mental processes of informants when dealing with problem-solving and decision making. They distinguish between *retrospective* and *concurrent* verbalization. In the first case, the researcher asks a subject about a cognitive process that occurred at an earlier point in time—as we know from qualitative interviewing. In the second case, the information is verbalized at the time the subject is attend-

ing to it (Ericsson and Simon 1980, 218). It is this registration of concurrent response that is the distinctive feature of protocol analysis.

While the classical think-aloud protocols generally engaged informants in an activity or task performance (e.g. playing chess or building something), rhetorical studies using protocol analysis may involve many kinds of rhetoric-related activity: reading, writing, attending speeches or debates, seeing documentaries or visiting homepages, or browsing the internet. In rhetoric, the approach has mostly been used to study writing processes. In the 1970s and 1980s Flower and Hayes (1981, 1977) used it to establish the underlying and goal-oriented processes that go into writing a text, and it was used to describe the differences in writing strategies between novice writers and expert writers (Flower 1986). In these cases the researchers had informants (i.e. writers) verbalize their thoughts and choices while composing and writing texts.

In the use of protocol research, we may use the term *thinking-aloud* to refer to the informants' verbal expressing of their thoughts. The *think-aloud protocol* is the recorded and transcribed text of the informants' verbalizations, and analysing these is performing *protocol analysis* (cf. Bengtsson, Chap. 6, in this volume). However, the term protocol analysis is also used to signify the approach as a whole.

Like participants in focus group conversations and qualitative interviews, informants in protocol settings are well aware that they are engaging in research activity occurring in an artificially created situation. The researcher, however, is normally less conspicuous in protocol analysis, and interview guides are normally not used. The aim is to have the informant engage with the material, with limited interference by the researcher, in order to see how the material affects the informant. In the procedure of protocol analysis in the psychological tradition of Ericsson and Simon, the researcher will not even ask informants questions or encourage them to elaborate, and the researcher will sometimes be placed out of sight in order not to interfere. In a humanistic rhetorical tradition, however, where the aim is often interpretative or critical, the researcher may gain better insight by asking questions and having the informant elaborate at certain points.

Protocol analysis can be used to study the goal-oriented thinking that goes into producing rhetorical communication (e.g. Flower's research on writing strategies). It can be used to test and evaluate rhetorical communication for practical purposes, much like usability testing in interaction design (Lewis 1982; Benbunan-Fich 2001). Examining how customers experi-

ence communication, letters or emails from companies, for instance, will help the companies improve the quality of their external communication (see Bengtsson in Chap. 6). Protocol analysis has also been used to investigate the construction of online ethos and credibility. Ethos is, as mentioned above in the part on interviews and focus groups, “an attitude toward a source of communication held at a given time by a receiver” (McCroskey 2016, 82). This is the reason empirical audience studies like protocol analysis are well suited to explore this rhetorical quality. Hoff-Clausen (2007, 2008), for instance, has let informants talk aloud while navigating political campaign sites, blogs and Wikipedia. She calls this kind of protocol research *user-oriented rhetorical criticism*, because she not only carries out user interviews and have members of the intended audience participate in protocol reading; as a rhetorical critic she also analyses and interprets the websites as rhetorical texts (e.g. Hoff-Clausen 2007, 102).

Mette Bengtsson has used protocol analysis to examine how readers of newspapers react to the implied audience in political commentaries (e.g. Chap. 6 in this volume and Bengtsson 2014). She first analyses the discursive audience construction in a corpus of 90 political commentaries, finding that the reader is constructed as a person “who is interested in the politicians as persons, their positions and strategies for gaining votes, not their arguments for political proposals” (Chap. 6). She then carries out eight read-aloud protocols, finding that readers do “oppositional readings” (Hall 1980) where they characterize the commentaries as “postulating” and experience them as having an “excluding” and esoteric language use. Bengtsson’s studies point to the value of rhetorical studies that combine textual analysis and rhetorical criticism with reception-oriented approaches.

These are a few of the sparse amount of rhetorical studies using protocol analysis. Based on these and the research tradition in general, we may establish some general research topoi for this method:

1. *Choosing appropriate themes and research questions.* Since protocol analysis examines concurrent reception and provides closeness to the rhetorical artefacts or processes, it is especially relevant for two main types of rhetorical research questions: first, examining research questions that are related to being an audience of the rhetoric of artefacts communicating in time (reading texts, attending to audio-visual media, listening to a speech), and second, examining questions that are related to rhetors engaging in productive rhetorical

activities proceeding in time (composing texts, engaging in social media, commenting on online comment sections or participating in Facebook discussions).

2. *Selecting texts or tasks.* The researcher must select the texts, understood in a broad sense, that the informants must read or attend to or the tasks that they must perform. Text-oriented protocol analysis is especially valuable for examining audience reactions and reception; task-oriented protocol analysis is especially valuable for examining a rhetor's strategic, goal-oriented thinking. In online media, protocol analysis can be especially insightful, because the informant can move freely between internet sites and thus select and create her own text.
3. *Selecting informants.* It must be determined who and how many should participate. While think-aloud reading can only be carried out individually, some forms for protocol analysis can be done in groups. In Chap. 7, for instance, Kock has a group of people listening to music while each participant concurrently registers their thoughts and feelings in writing.
4. *Determining stops for verbalization.* In think-aloud reading stops for verbalization are essential, because they provide the space for the reactions of the informants. These stops must be selected strategically, so that they provide the researcher with the most informative reactions. Places for stops can be marked in the text or be prompted by the researcher. In protocol analysis that does not require reading, such as task-oriented activities or attending to multimodal material, verbalizing stops can be used but are not always necessary. Here informants can be asked to talk continuously or to stop when they feel like it.
5. *Introductory interview or follow-up interview.* Some research using protocol analysis begins or ends the session with short interviews, where informants address the text and the issue more generally. In this way an introductory interview can be a starting point for the thinking aloud, or the protocol session can function as a starting point for a conversation, based on the direct encounter with the text that the informants have just had.

As pointed out by Bengtsson in Chap. 6, other methodological choices for the protocol analysis must be made: choosing the setting, deciding on the duration, considering placement of the interviewer (next to or in front of the respondent) and deciding on transcription guidelines.

A main advantage of protocol analysis for rhetorical research is that it provides close connection to the rhetorical artefacts examined and helps the informants be specific about the characteristics of the artefact *and* their own thoughts, experiences and emotions in relation to it. Anyone who has carried out qualitative interviewing or focus group conversations will have experienced informants talking in general terms and commonplaces, offering limited contact to the rhetoric one wishes to illuminate. Informants participating in protocol analysis, on the other hand, are directly interacting with and commenting on the rhetoric the researcher wishes to examine. Bengtsson, who in Chap. 6 in this volume examines newspaper readers' reaction to newspaper commentaries, puts it this way:

In my case study, when I initially asked people what they think of political commentators, they often talk about spin and strategy, which is a point made by elitist voices such as politicians and scholars, but when asking them to read and think-aloud, they go into details with part of the text and follow their own reactions. The respondents are interacting with the text, verbalising what it does to them as they read, analysing, interpreting, showing what they understand and do not understand, getting annoyed, amused etc. Hence, the readers are not experts on the genre, but rather they are experts of their own reactions to it.

Having informants comment while they experience a rhetorical text focuses their reaction upon the artefact and the specific properties and characteristics of it.

The second, and probably most important, advantage of protocol analysis is that it provides the researcher with a way to observe and register the experiences, thoughts and emotions of audiences *while* they are engaging with rhetorical artefacts, viewing reactions and responses *as* rhetoric is unfolding. This is what distinguishes protocol analysis from the traditional use of qualitative interviews and focus group research. As a way of doing rhetorical reception studies, protocol analysis has the value of providing immediate, concurrent response to communication and rhetorical activities.

In Chap. 7 Christian Kock argues that protocol analysis is also especially useful for researching rhetorical artefacts devised to affect people, especially aesthetic objects such as poems, music, pictures, plays, operas and films. He develops a method he calls *aesthetic protocol analysis*, which he uses to examine the reception of an aesthetic artefact. He focuses on a purely *receptive* activity: listening to a piece of classical music, which in

contrast to most protocol analysis is an activity where informants tend to sit still and are not engage in any deliberate actions or decisions. Where most traditional protocol analyses have been concerned with cognitive processes (what and how people *think*), Kock's aesthetic protocol analysis is meant to illuminate phenomenological processes and their causes (what and how people *experience*). The aim is to "understand more about meaning perceptions that happen in listeners' minds, and what bearing such an understanding might have for understanding aesthetic experience and value in music" (Chap. 7). Kock also varies the traditional method of letting informants report orally, talking aloud, instead having the informants register their impressions and thoughts in writing, creating *written* protocols.

Like any method, protocol analysis has both advantages and challenges. It may be argued, for instance, that it is not really possible to register people's mental processes, since verbalization is a conscious act that differs from the actual inner thoughts and feelings of informants. It may also be a practical and cognitive challenge for informants to read, act or observe and then think and speak aloud at the same time. Like much research in reception—qualitative interviewing, focus groups and even experiments—the research situation is artificial, and not an actual rhetorical situation. Still, using protocol analysis provides the researcher with access to reception in a way that other approaches do not—an access that is especially beneficial for providing audience responses that are concurrent and closely linked to specific genres, texts and their distinctive traits.

PARTICIPATORY RHETORIC AND RHETORICAL ETHNOGRAPHY

While interviews, focus groups and protocol analysis create artificial research situations in order to examine research questions and audience reactions, participatory rhetoric and rhetorical ethnography attempt to provide answers by entering in actual situations where rhetoric occurs. This could be attending the delivery of a speech, observing audiences watching television, participating in demonstrations or visiting rhetorical places such as memorials or theme parks (Blair and Michel 1999). Participatory and ethnographic approaches provide an opportunity to observe rhetoric in situ and to see how audiences react to rhetorical communication as it occurs in actual rhetorical situations.

When using ethnographic methods in rhetorical audience studies, the researcher enters the field and observes the audience. She may also par-

ticipate herself, in order to get a better sense of what the audience experiences. While the more traditional research position of *observing* emphasizes distance and objective documentation, the position of *participation* emphasizes involvement, immersion and a more subjective form of understanding. Often these positions are combined, and the distinction should not be overstated: In all its forms, ethnographic studies are a situationally close and involved way of gathering material. The aim is to get an actual and situational understanding of how audiences respond to and interact with the rhetoric they encounter. Actually being present provides the researcher to a whole range of sensate and phenomenological impressions—sights, sounds, smells, touch and so on—that can only be experienced in person. In ethnographic and participatory rhetoric the scholar makes herself an instrument that interprets and gauges not only with her words and thoughts but also with all her senses and feelings (Landau 2016). Performing participatory scholarship involves moving between a participating position of engagement and personal experience and a position of distanced observation and rational analysis and critique.

Obviously, ethnographic approaches are especially suitable for studying the rhetoric of places, people and spectacles. In Chap. 8, for instance, Aaron Hess examines the rhetoric of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin by being a visitor (an audience member) and by observing and interviewing other visitors. He uses his own sensate and emotional experiences and observes how other visitors interact with the memorial site. His observations revealed that visitors smiled, took selfies and performed playful acts such as playing hind-and-peek in the memorial. While such acts may appear disrespectful at first sight, Hess' interviews revealed a more complex human behaviour, connecting the acts to personal remembrance and a connection to the history of the Jewish people. It was only through the use of *both* these methods (observation and interview) that Hess was able to establish in full what it means to be a rhetorical audience member at the memorial.

In Chap. 9, Michael Hertzberg uses observation to gain first-hand experience of the roles taken within and outside a political meeting in Sri Lanka, organized by the Buddhist group Bodu Bala Sena. At first sight, not much appeared to happen at the meeting. Only a small audience of about 30 turned up, there were no real controversy and no media. Just telling about this incident, providing thick descriptions even, run the risk of “descending into anecdotalism” (cf. Morley 2006, 106). However, by

combining his ethnographic work with historical studies, Hertzberg makes the political and rhetorical significance of the rally and its reception clear. The rhetorical importance of the meeting cannot be found in the rally alone. Firstly, it requires a historical understanding of the role of the political Buddhist monk. The significance of the meeting lies in the audiences' immediate and unproblematic consent of the monks onstage performing their rhetorical repertoires as political agents. Thirty years ago, this would have been unthinkable. Secondly, the rhetorical significance of the meeting must be found in the fact that it was only one of many meetings and micro-spectacles at different localities. Through the many meetings groups such as Bodu Bala Sena disseminate their message through a spectrum of multiple audiences. By rhetorically putting different audience subgroups in opposition to each other, and "tapping into the markers of identity, their message carries different colouration, and reaches different audiences at the same time". In Hertzberg's case, then, fully understanding the rhetoric and reception of the Buddhist political rhetoric required ethnographic observation of several events *and* a historiographic understanding of the political monk.

In rhetorical, ethnographic audience research, place can also function as a site for examining issues not related to place. The spontaneous interviews used by Bjørkdahl and Carlsen in Chap. 10, for instance, are not used to get insight into the situation the interview occurs in, or another specific situation for that matter, but to get an understanding of how people remember and misremember important information about the Swine flu communicated to them in 2009. Bjørkdahl and Carlsen talked to people in their immediate surroundings without making prior arrangements or preparing the interviewees. The interviews could take place "at dinners or lunches, after meetings, at the office, or in other informal contexts" (Chap. 10). The reason for doing such short, spontaneous interviews is to avoid constructed and artificial research situations and make the situations and conversations as natural and ordinary as possible. This method of simply being present in an apparently natural way is an adaption of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz's approach of so-called deep hanging out or walkabout (Geertz 2000). The spontaneous interviews of Bjørkdahl and Carlsen try to "capture the spontaneity of the ethnographic tradition in a short, effective form, so that one with a moderate input of effort can collect a rather broad material" (Chap. 10). As in other forms of ethnographic research, the aim is to be present as "normal life unfolds" in order to take in what is already there.

Performing rhetorical fieldwork is a time consuming and difficult endeavour, with practical, ethical, theoretical and analytical challenges. Fieldwork can be carried out in many ways, and the gathered data can be analysed in equally many ways. It is thus impossible to create a simple toolbox for rhetorical ethnography. The literature in the field (e.g. Schröder et al. 2003, Chaps. 5 and 6; Middleton et al. 2015; McKinnon et al. 2016; Endres et al. 2016), however, provides some general research topoi for how to do rhetorical ethnography and participatory critical rhetoric:

1. *Before fieldwork: Planning research and designing study.* In all kinds of research it is important to determine the aim and research questions from the start. This is especially pertinent in ethnographic and participatory rhetoric, since fieldwork is demanding both practically and socially, and creates much and varied data. This also means that the study should be carefully thought through and designed from the beginning, and the researcher should make sure that the project will be ethically approved. The researcher must find a relevant scene, situation or group in which to conduct observation and participation. One must determine the duration of the fieldwork and decide which methods besides participating will be relevant. Should interviews or focus groups be conducted? Which types? Doing a pilot study is a good way to make sure that the intended plans and research design will work. This being said, it is worth remembering that, in contrast to other forms of research—such as interviews, focus groups and experiments—there are many aspects of ethnographic research that cannot be planned, since the main aim is to study people’s actions without interfering. An important quality of the rhetorical ethnographer, therefore, is to be open for changes and able to improvise. Already at the planning stage, the researcher should be conscious about how to make the experiences and results from the work public. While scholarly papers are the normal way of making research public, ethnographic work also has the potential to use other forms of communication. Ethnographers may use process mapping, photoessays or photo reportages to document or conserve their impressions, field results and field experiences (cf. Meyer et al. 2013, 518).
2. *During fieldwork: Observing, participating and gathering data.* Being in the field and doing participant observations is a “simulta-

neous process of immersion and distance” (Schröder et al. 2003, 91). The researcher is both participating in activities and observing the people in the field. Material can be gathered through a variety of ways, depending on what serves the purpose of the research best: observations, formal and spontaneous interviews, written notes and audio and video recordings. In fieldwork, the researcher should be especially attentive to the embodied, affective and sensate experiences, which can only be found by being present. These insights are an advantage of rhetorical observation and participation. Field experiences and headnotes should be registered and transcribed at the first opportunity, and everything should be gathered everything into larger, fuller field notes. A good way of doing this is journaling or writing daynotes at the end of the day or after an event or visit.

3. *After fieldwork.* After fieldwork, the amount of data and gathered material can be overwhelming even for experienced researchers. Organizing, systemizing, categorizing and coding the data are essential. It can be done with the help of data analysis software such as NVivo or other programmes. Reflexivity is essential in all research, but especially in ethnographic and participatory work. Since important parts of the results will depend on the researchers’ personal presence and interpretation, they should provide accounts of themselves, the decisions they did in the field and in their analysis of the material (cf. McKinnon et al. 2016, 19; Middleton et al. 2015, 174).

Since the time of the ancients, rhetoric as a scholarly tradition has been the study of situational communication. Rhetoric is emplaced, which is why ethnographic approaches are so suitable for rhetorical studies. Being present in rhetorical situations by observing or participating makes it possible for the researcher to experience directly how audiences are part of the situation. Instead of just asking audiences about their experiences, ethnographic research observes how people actually meet and react to rhetor and rhetoric.

Ethnographic approaches are especially useful in a fragmented and multimediated society. As I described above in the part on focus groups and interviews, it is a challenge for contemporary rhetorical criticism that neither audience nor rhetorical utterances are discrete and clearly demarcated. Michael McGee has even argued that texts in a traditional sense do not exist in our contemporary world and that “text construction is now something done more by the consumers than by the producers of dis-

course” (McGee 1990, 288). While it would be foolish to do away with textual criticism and close reading, it is a fact that closely studying a text does not tell us who—if anyone—has experienced the same rhetorical text in the same way. Media in general—and online media in particular—provides audience groups and individuals with different rhetorical texts. Understanding rhetoric, then, requires that we see with the eyes of the audience. Ethnographic participation and observation provide such opportunities to determine and examine the rhetoric that audiences actually experience and engage with, and it allows us to study how audiences respond to it. Ethnography gives us the opportunity to examine rhetorical texts constructed by consumers of discourse.

Ethnographic methods are also especially useful in the study of vernacular rhetoric since such rhetoric is rarely documented the way more official communication is. In order to experience vernacular rhetoric such as the “everyday speech, conversations in homes, restaurants, and ‘on the corner’” (Ono and Sloop 2013, 500; Hauser 2011), the scholar simply needs to be present. Furthermore, such vernacular rhetoric—as much rhetoric in general—is more than just words or verbal texts: “Rhetoric encompasses the visual, aural, affective, aesthetic, tactile, visceral dimensions of meaning making” (Middleton et al. 2015, 19). Participatory rhetoric provides a way to study such embodied and emplaced rhetoric.

While ethnographic participation and observation offer new ways of examining the rhetoric of our time, it also has certain limitations. It is impossible, for instance, to study events that have already passed, and participation cannot be used historically.

When conducting fieldwork, the immersion and involvement in the field and the close contact to informants have the risk of obstructing the scholarly distance and analytical work that normally distinguish good research.

Finally, in principle, participatory and observational ethnographic research only provides the researcher with an understanding of specific instances of rhetorical encounters as observational facts. We may see how audiences react to a speaker, how ordinary people discuss and argue or how a rhetorical spectacle is carried out and received. However, observation doesn’t provide historical understanding, thorough critiques of rhetorical texts or insight into the thoughts of rhetors and audiences. These challenges can be overcome by also using interviews, textual analysis, historical studies or other supplementary forms of research—as done in the chapters by Hess and Hertzberg. Doing this, though, adds to another challenge with ethnographic research: It is very time consuming.

Still, there is no doubt that ethnographic and participatory methods offer a unique way of studying audiences and rhetorical reception.

SECONDARY TEXTS, APPROPRIATION AND TRIANGULATION

Most of the material dealt with so far in relation to rhetorical audience studies has been scholar-generated tertiary texts. It has been transcripts from interviews, focus groups or protocol analyses, or it has been research material gathered through ethnographic studies. Another important kind of material in audience and reception studies is contemporary secondary texts. These are not scholar initiated or created though research but are naturally occurring responses that audiences have created themselves. It could be comments in comment sections, newspaper articles, responses from politicians or other audience-generated reactions to instances of rhetoric such as speeches (Kjeldsen 2013; Drury 2015), political ads (Kjeldsen 2007) or works of science (Ceccarelli 2001). This is similar to the historical approaches described above, since both the contemporary and historical analyses of secondary texts examine existing responses. Reception studies of such responses involve a systematic gathering of the material and a contextual analysis of it. Leah Ceccarelli (2001, 8) refers to secondary texts as “contemporary responses”, when urging rhetoricians to do so-called “close-textual-intertextual” analysis:

The rhetorician conducts a close reading of the text in its context to offer hypotheses about how readers might have been invited to respond to the text’s appeal. The rhetorician then tests these hypotheses through a close reading of contemporary responses, such as book reviews, speeches, editorials, articles, or letters that make direct reference to the primary work under examination.

This approach is valuable because it can connect text and context to the reception as it manifests itself in secondary material. In Chap. 12, Kjeldsen and Andersen use such an approach to study the power of images. They examine the responses to the photographs of the three-year-old Syrian refugee Alan Kurdi who drowned on a Turkish beach, during the European migrant crisis in September 2015. While the power of disturbing photographs necessarily resides in the rhetorical form and content of these visual utterances, the best way to determine, describe and understand such power is by correlating the rhetorical qualities and potentials of the images

with reactions and responses to them. In doing this, Kjeldsen and Andersen examine several forms of secondary material: the way newspapers and reporters covered and responded to the photographs, the responses in online comment sections and the visual appropriations of the images. In this study the analyses of comment sections were beneficial because they revealed critical and oppositional readings of the images and the news coverage. These results could not be discovered through textual analysis of the images and were not salient in other forms of research material. Despite much talk in media about the strong power of the images, such actual responses indicated a more nuanced, negotiating, even oppositional reception. Such oppositional readings have been found in other studies using secondary material. One study examined the reception of a US pro-gun control ad through comments on online threads (Kjeldsen 2016). It demonstrated that while gun-control advocates tended to accept the visual presentation of the ad, and base their comments and argumentation on this, the pro-gun advocates tended to reject the accuracy of the visually presented narrative. An important value of analysing secondary texts, then, is that they are natural occurring responses put forward by people acting in actual rhetorical situations.

Secondary texts that comment on rhetorical utterances can be of many different kinds. It does not have to be verbal texts manifested in speech or writing. Appropriations of imagery, for instance, is a form of audience response that provides possibilities for examining reception as it manifests itself in visual form. Because verbal response in comment sections and interviews rarely reveals the salient visual traits of images that works rhetorically, Kjeldsen and Andersen use appropriations as a way of understanding the power of the Kurdi images. When artists reproduce the images of Kurdi, they generally reproduce the most salient and rhetorical traits. They recreate the visual forms that are the most captivating and easily remembered. In the Kurdi photographs these are simplicity and contrast.

In the book *No Caption Needed*, Hariman and Lucaites (2007) have demonstrated how appropriations of iconic photographs work as a special form of audience response and reception. While they have been criticized for not accounting for the effect of the iconic photographs they study (Hasian 2008), they rightly claim that the method of *appropriation analysis* is a valuable way of understanding the reception and influence of imagery. Their book shows how people use “images to react to, think about, and judge political events and relationships” (Hariman and Lucaites

2008, 19). They describe this in more detail in Chap. 11 of the present volume. Here they outline “a method for studying reception through analysis of how iconic photographs are re-circulated, modified, quoted, sampled, or otherwise used beyond initial publication”. Creating appropriations of imagery is an active form of spectatorship and thus a form of reception, Hariman and Lucaites argue (Chap. 11), because it:

exemplifies how meaning is relayed and reworked, augmented, and thus co-created through reception. Through the appropriations, one can discern how features of the original image have been selected, ignored, rejected, amplified, inflected, and otherwise loaded with intentions, ideas, emotions, aspirations, strategies, and other elements of public discourse.

Appropriation is a clear example of the fact that reception is always active: Responding to rhetoric is in itself a form of rhetorical communication. To study image appropriations is to study what people *do* with images. It “gauges reception by observing how it is converted into production (Hariman and Lucaites, Chap. 11, in this volume)”.

Analysing appropriations of imagery is an interpretative business. It requires understanding of genre, aesthetics, semiotics and knowledge of the circumstances and situations of both the original image and its appropriated reuse. Like most interpretative arts, it is close to impossible to establish a specific method that can be used by all. Good interpretative work requires knowledge and discerning judgement. However, even this form of scholarly work follows some broad guidelines. Hariman and Lucaites describe what they call protocols for analysing the connections between the original images and their appropriations as a form of reception. In general, their approach involves an interpretative analysis of iconic images that are tested, qualified and extended by analysing appropriations of these images. The interpretations are supported by other evidence of audience response found in secondary texts such as news coverage or letters to the editor.

Several of the chapters in this book use more than one kind of research method. Such a combining of methods, triangulation, is the research approach of Chap. 12 on the power of the Alan Kurdi images. Kjeldsen and Andersen study the rhetorical power of images through several different methods: analysis of newspaper presentation, textual reception analysis of comment sections, individual interviews, focus groups and analysis of appropriations. This triangulation allows them to see which rhetorical

potentials and impacts surface in different uses and situations of reception, providing both more nuanced and more reliable answers to the kind of powers the images may hold. A similar approach has been used in a study examining the rhetoric of science (Paul et al. 2001). The authors argue that overattention to the moment “skews understanding of what makes scientific discourse successful”, and they call for “studies using a variety of qualitative and quantitative methodologies” (372). Combining rhetorical analyses, observation of readers and citation analysis helped them to judge the actual effect of a research article.

THE PAPERS IN THIS BOOK

As described, this book seeks to make some amendment to the lack of audience and reception studies in rhetoric. In doing so, it covers a variety of methods, theories and empirical material.

The second chapter by Stromer-Galley and Schiappa is a reprint with a new introduction of their classic 1998 text on claims about specific effects on audiences or claims describing the determinate meaning of a text for audiences. In the context of this book, it serves as a reminder for the necessity of supporting claims and conjectures about audience response and effect with audience and reception research. The following chapters illustrate a variety of methods for audience and reception research: historical approaches such as archival-historical methodology (Chap. 3) and historiography (Chap. 9), focus group research (Chaps. 3, 4 and 5), interviews (Chaps. 4 and 10), protocol analysis (Chaps. 6 and 7), participatory and ethnographic approaches (Chaps. 8, 9 and 10) and appropriation as reception (Chap. 11). Chapter 12 uses a method of triangulation, applying several of these methods in unison: analysis of news presentations and comment sections, interviews, focus group conversations and analysis of appropriations.

In the 1990s the dominant disciplinary practice in rhetoric was text-centric and oriented towards analysis and criticism of rhetoric viewed as textual artefacts, be it speeches or written texts by political elites or popular culture artefacts. In many ways, this is still the case. Besides a growing interest in ethnographic rhetorical studies in recent years (Middleton et al. 2015; McKinnon et al. 2016), rhetorical criticism and research are still text dominated. It was this tradition that Stromer-Galley and Schiappa reacted to in 1998. In Chap. 2, they note that such “audience conjectures” are being advanced by rhetorical critics of popular culture texts

without adequate evidence. The thesis is that if critics make claims concerning the determinate meanings of the text or the effects those texts have on audiences, then the critic should support such claims with audience research. The chapter applies *focus group studies* to illustrate this point. Stromer-Galley and Schiappa conclude with three theoretical notions: first, that wording in scholarly writing matters—if a study offers speculative or idiosyncratic readings, then it should not put forward claims on audience reactions; second, that the lines between social scientific and humanistic research should be blurred; and third, that audience research enhances the connections between rhetorical and cultural studies.

In Chap. 3, Richard L. Toye reflects on the *archival-historical methodology* that underlies his book *The Roar of The Lion: The Untold Story of Churchill's World War II Speeches* (2013). He reviews the sources available to assess contemporary reactions to Churchill's oratory. These sources include the British Ministry of Information's Home Intelligence Reports and the material gathered by the sociological research organization Mass Observation. The chapter offers guidance on how to apply the methodology to other periods or figures, and Toye reflects on the disciplinary divide between the humanities and the social sciences and the implication of this for rhetorical reception research.

Chapters 4 and 5 both use focus groups to examine political rhetoric. In Chap. 4 Magnus H. Iversen presents the findings of a *focus group reception study*, shedding light upon how people make sense of and evaluate authenticity appeals in political advertising. These appeals attempt to present a politician as “one of the people”, but also as a true individual, happily sharing their personality and inner emotions. The study concludes that the films function as a resource for citizens' thinking about what a good political leader should be like. Iversen identifies a distinct ideal for politicians present in Norwegian political culture, namely, the ideal of “authentic leadership”. The authentic leader is not only truly himself but also communicates the right balance of closeness and distance. He is as we are but also above us.

In Chap. 5, Eirik Vatnøy demonstrates how *focus group interviews* are a productive supplement to rhetorical studies of social media. Focusing on the use of group interviews in audience studies, political communication studies and studies of social media, Vatnøy draws attention to the unique benefits of the methodology when studying rhetorical practice in new media environments. The chapter exemplifies this through a case study of the “Hey Girl Audun Lysbakken” campaign, an anonymous campaign

that spread replicated memes for political use. In this case, the focus group interviews reveal how voters in different age groups understood the memes very differently, and how their perceptions of the interactive functions of Facebook affected their responses to the memes.

While focus group conversations are generally carried out after informants have been exposed to the rhetoric in case, protocol analysis examines reactions and responses given during exposure. Chapters 6 and 7 use different forms of such protocol analyses—also known as think-aloud protocol.

In Chap. 6, Mette Bengtsson investigates how selected audiences react to the implied audience in Danish political print newspaper commentary. When introducing the concept of second persona, Edwin Black only uses vague expressions like “vector of influence” and “the pull of an ideology” about the impact of the discursive audience construction, but instead of taking this for granted. Bengtsson uses *think-aloud protocol* as a way of studying an audience’s reaction, getting a better grasp of how people understand, interpret and negotiate commentator discourse. The study finds that while some people engage in the implied audience position offered, others have strong negative reactions refusing to take it upon them. The study shows how readers react to the commentators postulating manner and call for arguments to use in discussions with family and friend.

In Chap. 7, Christian Kock develops a form of protocol analysis he terms *aesthetic protocol analysis*. He uses this to investigate how listeners experience meanings in music. He discusses what bearing listeners’ experience of meanings may have for their aesthetic experience of music. As a rhetorical study the focus is on effect, and not on the semiotic meanings in themselves. The methodology of “aesthetic protocol analysis” uses a design where informants write about their responses and associations while they experience an aesthetic artefact—in this case the first movement of Edward Elgar’s cello concerto. Kock finds that listeners’ experienced meanings are fleeting and of multifarious types, showing both intersubjective overlap and divergence. The main claim is that finding meanings in music should not be seen as the purpose of listening; rather, engagement with musical meanings should be seen as a source of, and a means to, aesthetic experience.

While focus groups and protocol analysis examine audience responses through artificially constructed communication situations, ethnographic research generally perform research in situ. Ethnographic methods may

use interviews but are distinguished by observation and participation. This allows the researcher to see how rhetoric is performed and received in actual rhetorical situations. The chapters by Hess, Hertzberg and Bjørkdahl and Carlsen all use ethnographic approaches. In Chap. 8, Hess carries out *ethnographic fieldwork* at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin. Through observation, he witnessed playful acts including taking selfies or playing hide-and-seek in the memorial. Through interviews, however, he learned of more complex judgement about the memorial that connected such “play” with personal remembrance and a living history of the Jewish people. The chapter illustrates how audience interpretations and judgements can inform competing comprehensions of sites and statements, providing multiperspectival judgement about localized rhetorical performances. The chapter also underscores that rhetoric, with its commitment to advocacy, deliberation and identification, offers ethnographers a robust accounting discourse that is performed through language, body, media and text.

Rhetoric and ethnography share a focus on the situational; however situations must always be understood in context—this context may even be a historical. In Chap. 9, Michael Hertzberg argues for a combination of *historiography and ethnographic fieldwork*. Hertzberg studies the virulent nationalist Buddhist group Bodu Bala Sena in Sri Lanka. The group was able to create a political momentum in 2013–2015 through a series of rhetorical manoeuvres against the Muslim minorities in the country. By producing public spectacles out of controversies around sacred sites and religious practices, Bodu Bala Sena deliberately played out their political rhetoric on multiple audiences. Hence, the role of the spectacle is to incur a form of identity-based political momentum, where the notions of friend-enemy are broadcasted universally through particularized messages to multiple audiences. Through its combination of historiography and ethnographic fieldwork among Bodu Bala Sena, the chapter contributes to a deeper understanding of how rhetorical repertoires and religious authority engage in the interstices of religion, politics and public debate.

In Chap. 10, Bjørkdahl and Carlsen adapt a method from the ethnographic tradition that they term *spontaneous interviews*. They use it to explore how members of the Norwegian public experienced the Swine flu pandemic in 2009. Studying in particular what people remember about the pandemic rhetoric, they find that the informants misremember many aspects of the communication, ranging from a simple failure to remember, through factual errors, to creative assessments of the episode. Bjørkdahl

and Carlsen conclude that long-term responses to pandemic rhetoric depend not least on the rhetor's pre-established credibility. They suggest that health authorities should communicate outside the media in pandemic situations.

Most reception studies analyse responses that are verbal, put forward in either talk or writing. Some responses, however, are put forward in visual form. One of these forms are appropriations of iconic photographs. Iconic photographs identify important problems and features of audience reception. In Chap. 11, Hariman and Lucaites analyse how the meaning and effects of iconic photographs are produced through an afterlife of appropriation across a wide array of media. They identify three modalities of appropriation: establishing iconic status through design features, repetition and misrecognition; tracking circulation and patterns of interpretation; and analysis of public culture. They demonstrate basic *protocols for analysing appropriations* in a case study of the photograph of the US flag raising on Iwo Jima during World War II: These protocols include aesthetic conventions as they animate civic performance through the interplay of semiotic transcriptions and emotional scenarios that function to mediate constitutive contradictions in the public culture.

The different methods of investigation used in the mentioned chapters provide different forms of insight. Using several different forms of reception-oriented research will allow a researcher to establish what is arguably the most dominant and frequent types of response to the rhetorical utterance examined. Kjeldsen and Andersen use such a methodological triangulation in Chap. 12. This chapter examines the power of the news photographs of the dead Syrian toddler Alan Kurdi. Kurdi was found drowned on a Turkish beach during the migrant crisis in late 2015. Kjeldsen and Andersen combine an examination of media use, audience responses to and appropriations of the Alan Kurdi photographs. While the images were immediately described as powerful and iconic, the analyses by Kjeldsen and Andersen demonstrate that their visual power is more complicated and complex than often assumed. The chapter also suggests that the power of the images can be divided into three temporal phases: (1) *Evoking*, exercising a power of emotional presence and immediacy; (2) *Fading*, being challenged, moving out of public agenda and losing attention; and (3) *Iconic renaissance*, finally, because they are established and remembered as symbols for a specific event, people return to them when discussing this and similar events.

The chapters mentioned in this introduction all provide useful insights into the value and procedures of empirical audience studies and reception-oriented methods. The aim is that this book will encourage more rhetoricians to perform more empirical audience studies and rhetorical research into reception. I am confident that if we do, it will provide us with new insights and more nuanced and reliable answers to questions of rhetoric.

NOTES

1. I thank Richard Toye for this point.

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The Argumentative Burdens of Audience Conjectures: Audience Research in Popular Culture Criticism (Reprint)

Jennifer Stromer-Galley and Edward Schiappa

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER 2: AUDIENCE CONJECTURES AND RHETORICAL STUDIES—AN UPDATE

Until the 1960s, most discourse studied under the rubric of ‘rhetorical criticism’ in the USA focused on political oratory—typically public speeches by political elites and public figures. *Speech Criticism* (1948), by Lester Thonssen and A. Craig Baird, was the canonical textbook dedicated—as glossed in the book’s subtitle—to ‘The Development of Standards for Rhetorical Criticism’. That is, the focus was on developing a set of standards for analyzing and evaluating public speeches, most often based on norms derived from classical rhetoric. Beginning in the 1960s, however, rhetorical studies evolved in two important ways. First, the scope of rhetorical studies expanded to include a much wider range of

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objects judged suitable for rhetorical analysis, including social movement discourse, protest rhetoric, and music, for example. As the scope of rhetorical criticism broadened by theories (such as Kenneth Burke's) that advanced the notion that all symbol use is rhetorical, what counted as rhetorical practice was up for grabs (Schiappa 2001). Second, the methods considered academically acceptable (that is to say, publishable) multiplied. As an alternative to explaining why an instance of rhetoric was effective, scholars of rhetoric could bring to the analysis their own ideological, ethical, and aesthetic sensibilities to render judgments about such instances of rhetoric. Rhetorical scholars were drawn to theories advanced in the social sciences, such as Psychology, Anthropology, Economics, and Sociology, to inform their approach to understanding rhetorical acts. Thus, this generated the rise of what some have called 'Big Rhetoric' or 'the Rhetorical Turn' (Berlin 1987; Nelson et al. 1987; Simons 1990) and facilitated what has been described as rhetorical redescription, where anything could be described and analyzed as rhetorical (Schiappa et al. 2002, 113–114).

The socializing effect of these various factors was fairly profound on graduate students trained in rhetorical studies beginning in the late 1970s. To put it simply, it was difficult to find a widely accepted theoretical rationale that decisively and persuasively defines 'rhetoric' and 'rhetorical' from other categories of human activity and forms of communication.

Recognition of the usefulness of rhetorical analysis for the study of mass media in the United States arguably can be dated to 1972 when David M. Berg's article, 'Rhetoric, Reality, and Mass Media', was published in the leading US journal devoted to rhetoric, *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*. Noting that much of what we learn is via the mass media, Berg argued that rhetorical criticism, 'if it is to remain a viable instrument for social analysis, must take cognizance of the media's influence on human communication behavior' (263). Inspired by the grand scope of rhetorical studies and growing methodological pluralism, the rhetorical analysis of popular culture artifacts and practices soon followed.

By the mid-1990s, a rhetorical critic analyzing a popular culture 'text', such as a movie or television program, was no longer radical. Thus, Bonnie J. Dow's award winning book on leading female characters in *Prime-time Feminism* (1996) treated programs such as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *Murphy Brown* as socially significant texts that warrant expert rhetorical analysis. The dominant disciplinary practice in the United States was still text-centric, with prominent studies continuing to focus on written

discourse often by political elites, and studies of popular culture artifacts limited to text-oriented analysis and criticism.

It was in this text-centered disciplinary environment that we offered our intervention in ‘The Argumentative Burdens of Audience Conjectures: Audience Research in Popular Culture Criticism’ (1998), which we see as an important inclusion in the present collection. Our argument in the article was not to denigrate textual analysis but to suggest that certain sorts of scholarly claims about the meaning and possible effects of popular texts and practices would be strengthened if scholars supplemented textual analysis with methods of audience research, such as focus groups and interviews. We made our case both in theoretical terms and through what is known as argument by example; that is, we examined a series of examples of purely textual analysis about popular culture texts that we believed set forth ‘audience conjectures’ about meaning and effects without offering evidence for those conjectures. We then offered an extended analysis that we hoped illustrated the usefulness of audience research based on focus group research we conducted.

One bit of sign evidence of the resistance to our position is that the essay was rejected by the premiere journal of rhetorical studies to which we first submitted it, *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*. Instead, the more ecumenical journal, *Communication Theory*, published the essay with minimal revision. We mention this initial reception because we believe it was a sign of what was to come in the two decades since. That is, though the essay has been cited in a variety of venues over the years, it seems fair to say that its effect has been modest in our initial target audience. Among rhetorical scholars in the United States, at least, our position did not gain widespread acceptance.

The disciplinary investment in developing critical skills with which to analyze important textual discourse continues to have priority among rhetorical critics. Rhetorical analysis historically has adopted the methods and critical stance of humanistic (especially literary) scholarship, while our argument urges an expansion to include what some in the USA considered social science approaches as a way to better ground claims. Thus, while the scope of rhetorical studies remains virtually all-inclusive (with object-oriented ontology fueling the latest expansion of rhetorical studies), the use of qualitative or quantitative audience research remains, in the USA at least, as an exception rather than the rule. For many rhetoric scholars in the USA, a turn to audience research is viewed as ‘social science’ and thus not what they do.

This is not to say that US scholars do not engage in audience research! Far from it. But in a classic dialectical move, scholarship that engages in audience research is often not seen or classified as ‘rhetorical’ research but rather as media studies. Schiappa’s subsequent audience research, performed with colleagues at the University of Minnesota, has not appeared in journals considered ‘rhetoric’ journals nor has such work (to our knowledge) been cited by rhetoric scholars (Schiappa et al. 2004, 2005, 2006).

We are grateful, therefore, to see the current project on Rhetorical Audiences and Reception of Rhetoric. We hope that scholars across the world will recognize the value of such work and to come to understand that it is not intended to replace textual analysis but to advance, enhance, and in some cases test such analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Over two decades ago, Wayne Brockriede urged scholars to view rhetorical criticism as the production of arguments. Although not all rhetorical criticism must be thought of in such terms, Brockriede contended that criticism advancing ‘useful’ analysis and evaluation of rhetorical phenomena ought to ‘function as an argument’ (1974, 165). To the extent critics wish to encourage readers to view rhetorical phenomena in a particular way, critics’ discourse functions argumentatively if it involves ‘an inferential leap from existing beliefs to the adoption of a new belief’ and ‘a perceived rationale to justify that leap’ (1974, 166). Michael C. McGee echoed Brockriede’s point some years later when he noted that ‘professional criticism functions to persuade readers to make the same judgments of salience, attitude, belief, and action the critic made’ (1990, 283).

For both ethical and epistemological reasons, criticism-as-argument entails ‘a willingness to risk a confrontation of that claim with one’s peers’ (Brockriede 1974, 166). Ethically, ‘confrontation’ means that critics share their rationale so that criticism remains in the realm of persuasion or invitation rather than coercion; it also means that critics remain open to the possibility their claims will be modified or even abandoned by readers. Epistemologically, confrontation means that critics offer evidence and explain their rationale so the ‘reader-confronter’ has the opportunity to evaluate the soundness of an arguer’s claim: ‘By inviting confrontation, the critic-arguer tries to establish some degree of intersubjective reliability in his [or her] judgment and in his [or her] reasons for the judgment’ (1974, 167).

Different sorts of claims and judgments require different sorts of evidence. Our thesis is that criticism of popular culture that advances claims positing specific effects of popular culture texts on audiences or claims describing a determinate meaning of the text for audiences can be enhanced with evidence garnered through audience research. In such cases, the critic offers claims about what texts do to audiences or what audiences do with popular culture texts; we call both sorts of claims ‘audience conjectures’.

Several key terms should be clarified. To begin with, there are a variety of constructions of ‘audience’ at work in popular culture research, each guided by the particular cluster of theoretical beliefs that inform individual critics (Allor 1988; Seiter et al. 1989). Audience as a concept has a long history, and any particular use of it implicates a set of ideological, theoretical, and methodological assumptions. The simplest and oldest notion of audience denotes a group of people who gather in a particular place to experience such acts as poetry, oratory, or theater. The advent of mediated communication technology alters such a classical conception, because people no longer are required to congregate in the same physical location to hear a political address or watch a play. Radio and television brought the performance of political address and plays into the home. With the selling of audiences to advertisers to finance the operation of communication technology, the concept of a mass audience came to prominence (see Webster and Phalen 1997). However, in the past 30 years, new theories of the individual, methods of inquiry, philosophical frameworks, and new communication media, such as the Internet, increasingly have called into question the concept of a mass audience.

James A. Anderson (1996) offers a helpful overview of the ways in which scholars understand the concept of audience that notes the importance of assumptions about the individual audience member and the methodological tools used for data gathering and analysis. Conceptions of the individual are divided between audience-as-site and audience-as-actor. To a varying degree, cognitivists, culturalists, and social theorists view the individual as the site where values, beliefs, attitudes, and various cultural forces emerge and play themselves out. Just how much agency a given individual may have and how that agency functions vary from theory to theory. Similarly, structuralists are concerned with the structures that emerge in communicative interaction within discourse communities more than with the individual per se. A variety of social action theorists and critics favor the notion of audience-as-actor more than site, emphasizing individual agency while acknowledging such agency is situated and constrained within a context of social interaction.

Competing analytical methods and theories further complicate the concept of audience. Anderson (1996) divides the competing conceptualizations into two categories: formal and empirical. Audiences understood as created or constituted in and through discourse are described as formal, including ‘encoded’ and ‘analytic’ audiences: The discourse itself defines encoded audiences; scientific or critical claims define analytic audiences. Empirical conceptions of audience posit an audience that is ‘out there’ and consist of a set or sets of empirically verifiable members. Anderson identifies seven sorts of empirical audiences, ranging from the transcendent audience (categories of people rather than those specifically situated) to the engaged audience (people identified as an audience by their multiple layers of connection to a message).

Importantly, many rhetorical criticisms of popular culture texts do not stipulate a specific conceptualization of audience even though, as we illustrate below, explicit references to audiences are often made. Such scholarship often uses a relatively commonsense, empirical notion of audience as the specific viewers, listeners, and readers of the texts analyzed. Another benefit of audience research is that it may encourage scholars to clarify more precisely who the audience of the text analyzed is and how that audience is constructed both by the scholar and by the text. Additionally, some theorists, such as John Fiske (1989a), advocate dissolving the distinction between audience and text altogether. Fiske’s position, however, only amplifies our thesis, as he argues that audiences experience and thus constitute texts just as texts define, construct, and help constitute audiences—thus one cannot study one without the other. The debate over how to best theorize or define audience need not be settled for the purposes of this essay. No matter how audience is understood by any particular critic, our thesis is that if audience conjectures are set forth, then audience research is beneficial.

‘Popular culture’ is also a difficult term to define. John Fiske argues that popular culture is both the commodities mass produced for mass consumption and the interests that the people consuming those commodities have. Popular culture is a site of ‘power relations’ in that ‘it always bears traces of the constant struggle between domination and subordination, between power and various forms of resistance or evasions of it’ (1989b, 19). Barry Brummett reiterates the notion that culture, especially popular culture, influences members of society in many ways. He explains that when critics are concerned with popular culture, they are concerned with how ‘cultures symbolically nurture and engender their members’ (1991,

xxi). Thus, popular culture is an important phenomenon for study because popular culture ‘is not consumption, it is culture—the active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasures within a social system’ (Fiske 1989b, 23). By ‘text’ we mean whatever fragments or phenomena are constituted and contextualized by the critic as an object of critical inquiry apart from the audience, including what is treated as discrete artifacts or practices (McGee 1990).

Our review of the literature of rhetorical criticism suggests that audience conjectures are being advanced without adequate evidence. We begin by providing a theoretical and argumentative rationale for audience research. Next we note that audience research is an underutilized resource in rhetorical criticism that engages popular culture texts. We then provide a case study contrasting the audience conjectures in a recent text-centered rhetorical criticism of the movies–novels, *The Firm* and *Jurassic Park* (Goodnight 1995), with audience interpretations gathered through a series of focus group interviews. We conclude by noting three theoretical implications of our argument, namely, that wording in scholarly writing matters, that the lines between social scientific and humanistic research should be blurred, and that audience research enhances the connections between rhetorical and cultural studies.

THEORETICAL AND ARGUMENTATIVE RATIONALE FOR AUDIENCE RESEARCH

We want to be clear that it is not our contention that all rhetorical criticism of popular culture texts ought to engage in audience research. Our point is that if rhetorical critics make claims concerning the determinate meanings of the text or the effects those texts have on audiences, then the critic should turn to the audience to support those claims. In this section we provide an argumentative rationale for audience research.

Audience research is not necessary to support audience conjectures if one of two assumptions is true: First, that all mass-mediated messages have universal deterministic effects on audiences; second, that each popular culture text has one unequivocal meaning. If it were the case that all mass-mediated messages have an ascertainable and direct causal effect on most or all audiences, then critics merely would have to ascertain what that effect was on them and we would know what sort of effect the message would have on everybody else. Or, if it were the case that everyone experiencing a given popular culture text always agreed on what the text

means, then again audience research would be unnecessary. There would be only one possible reading of any and all texts, and thus critics could be confident that their reading of a text would be shared by all.

Common experience and empirical research challenge these two assumptions. All we need do is think of one case where two people were affected differently by a movie, song, novel, or television show, and we can safely assume that mass-mediated messages do not always have an universal effect. If we can imagine even one case of two people disagreeing about what a given movie, song, novel, or television show was about, or what lesson it offered, or what the text meant to them, then the notion that all popular culture texts are unequivocal is refuted. A good deal of empirical research also makes it clear that it is not safe to make audience conjectures without audience data.

David Morley's *The 'Nationwide' Audience* (1980) studies how different audiences decode the popular British news program, *Nationwide*. His audience research grew out of the close textual analysis he and Charlotte Brunson did of *Nationwide* in 1978. Morley tested a hypothesized relationship between socioeconomic status of audience members and their specific interpretation of the television show. He created audiences who were students and who were grouped by occupation, socioeconomic status, race, and gender. Although Morley's methods have been criticized, he found that interpretations did vary by socioeconomic status at least on some topics. Janice Radway's influential *Reading the Romance* (1984) found that female fans of romance novels, far from being passive or uncritical dupes of false consciousness, put their reading efforts to a variety of educational, therapeutic, and leisure purposes that Radway interprets as partially resistant to, rather than wholly coopted by, patriarchy.

Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz conducted audience research to test the critical reaction of audiences of different nationalities and cultures to an episode of *Dallas*. They found that Arabs were more likely to criticize *Dallas* because of its associations with the western 'colonial administration under which they suffered' but that Japanese and Russian audiences associated *Dallas* with the end of the 'era of the American rich' (1989, 209–210). Liebes and Katz also found that western audiences surpassed the other groups in critical explanations of the television text and that, within the various nationalities, those with a higher education made most of the critical statements. Thus, national culture and education played a role in the various viewing practices and meaning constructions of audiences.

Research on soap operas indicates that women viewers easily alternate between a detached and critical mode of viewing and a more involved and uncritical mode (Katz and Liebes 1990). According to Dorothy Hobson (1989, 1990), each mode of viewing facilitates different social tasks, including providing a topic of common discussion and critique (not unlike sports viewing for men) to enabling discussion of personal problems and feelings that might have been too painful to discuss directly (see also Seiter et al. 1989, 223–247). Also, in an audience-centered study of *Dynasty*, Andrea L. Press found that women viewers with varied class backgrounds respond differently to the ‘hegemonic images that *Dynasty* presents to them’ (1990, 179). Much of this research has been motivated by the belief that text-centered analyses cannot go very far in explaining how and why popular culture texts become popular. Despite content considered problematic by feminist critics, for example, various texts and genres remain popular even among feminists themselves (Dow 1996, 21–22; van Zoonen 1994, 106; Winship 1987). We agree with Liesbet van Zoonen that ‘such developments seem impossible to explain by textual analysis only’ (1994, 106).

Despite the provocative results of audience studies so far, the theoretical significance of audience research is a matter of some dispute. As Bonnie J. Dow puts it, there is an ongoing theoretical debate that pits the ‘powerful text’ versus the ‘active audience’ (1996, 9). Critics of audience research believe that the polysemy of popular culture texts has been exaggerated and that some audience research underestimates the mass media’s ability to maintain and reproduce the beliefs and desires of the ‘dominant culture’ (see, e.g., Condit 1989; Dow 1996). In Celeste Condit’s study (1989) of two viewers’ responses to an episode of *Cagney and Lacey*, for example, she found evidence that there was a ‘dominant reading’ that was easily and pleasurably engaged by the viewer who agreed with the show’s putative message but required notable effort and ability to resist by the viewer who disagreed. Accordingly, Condit suggests that many texts may be polyvalent rather than polysemous; that is, texts have a dominant message that most or all viewers ‘get’ even if they value such messages differently.

Condit’s study is important because it has reassured some text-centered critics that texts do, indeed, have a dominant, or preferred, reading, thus making audience research less urgent (see, e.g., Cloud 1992, 313; Dow 1996, 12–13). As long as the critic can confidently access the dominant or preferred reading of a text, the reasoning goes that critic can

assume that she or he is analyzing the message that most audience members receive. Of course, Condit would be the first to admit that one cannot generalize from one example, particularly when there were only two subjects and the stimuli arguably atypical.¹ From the standpoint of theory development, Condit's study illustrates the need for more audience research, not less: Whereas it may be that many or most mainstream popular culture texts have preferred readings that function hegemonically to perpetuate the dominant culture, strictly textcentered studies preach mostly to the choir and are unlikely to prove this to be the case to skeptics of hegemony theory. We believe the best way to explore such theories is through audience research, since only through further audience research will the limits of polysemy be confidently and persuasively articulated. As Justin Lewis put it, 'The question that should be put to textual analysis that purports to tell us how a cultural product "works" in contemporary culture is almost embarrassingly simple: Where's the evidence? Without evidence, everything is pure speculation' (1991, 49). Although we would not go so far as to describe all such textual analysis as pure speculation, we do believe that audience research would virtually always enhance a critic's argument.

There is now a range of intriguing theoretical questions facing the rhetorical critic of popular culture texts: What textual and audience factors influence how polysemous a popular culture text is? Just how influential are popular culture texts in changing or reinforcing beliefs and behaviors? What methods of data gathering about audience responses are most reliable? Why are some members of subordinated groups more productive or more resistant viewers than others? How do meanings stabilize within a given discourse community, or do they? How influential are critics and opinion leaders for shaping the reception of popular culture texts? How much persuasion happens at an unconscious level? To what extent might a text affect audience members without their knowing it? These are just a few of the important theoretical questions that concern all popular culture critics, and such questions will receive richer and more persuasive answers if critics are assisted by audience research. Of course, audience research should not be pursued to the exclusion of textual analysis—arguably the most interesting and persuasive studies combine both (see, e.g., Rarick et al. 1977; Cohen 1991; Press 1991). Indeed, Sonia Livingstone argues that both may be seen as 'complementary and mutually challenging, each provoking the other to face neglected problems' (1991, 288). She argues that 'text and audience can no longer be seen as independent or studied

separately' (1993, 7). Instead, she proposes that the text, audience, and context should be considered in any research project.

We have deliberately chosen not to base our rationale on any particular body of literature critical of the notion of media determinism or on recent theories concerning the polysemic character of popular culture texts. This allows us to advance our claim that audience research is needed to support claims about audience responses regardless of one's specific theoretical pieties regarding media effects and meaning formation. Our readers need only agree that the initial assumptions identified above are dubious in their absolute form to understand that audience research is beneficial if and when audience conjectures are advanced.

We recognize that we are not the first scholars to call for augmenting textual analysis of popular culture texts with audience research. A number of scholars—mostly in cultural and media studies—have begun to recognize the need to combine textual and audience research to understand how and why audiences react very differently to the same text. However, much rhetorical criticism concerned with popular culture still does not include audience research even when claims are made about how and why audiences respond to a text. We reviewed the 1991–1995 issues of the national journals published by the Speech Communication Association (now the National Communication Association)—*Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, *Communication Monographs*, and *Text and Performance Quarterly*—to identify articles concerned with popular culture texts that include audience conjectures. Of the dozens of such articles, only a handful provided evidence for such claims based on audience research. It is not our contention that essays containing audience conjectures without audience-generated data are 'wrong' or somehow deeply flawed. Rather, our point simply is that audience conjectures would be more interesting as arguments, important for theory development, and more sound as scholarship if they were supported with evidence generated through audience research. Indeed, we believe that all rhetorical criticism concerned with the effects of texts, or that seeks to offer readings of texts as they are presumed to be understood by general audiences, would be enhanced if augmented by audience research (cf. Edwards 1996).² To restate our claim: We are not asking critics to compare or confirm their textual analysis with an audience when that analysis does not include claims about how audiences read texts or the effects texts have on audiences. Critics simply need to be aware of the argumentative burdens of specific types of critical claims. If critics make audience

conjectures, then they should support such conjectures with audience research.

Many rhetorical critics see themselves as expert readers of rhetorical texts. As professional critics, they assume that they see and understand texts in a more sophisticated manner than the general public that, after all, would be the point of an advanced education and training in theories of rhetoric and culture. It is neither expected nor especially desired that expert readings of popular culture texts be limited by how lay audiences interpret or react to them. Nonetheless, we believe that along the way to offering expert critical insights about popular culture texts, critics often make assumptions or explicit claims about audiences that deserve further investigation.³ Just how obliged critics ought to be to the practice of supplementing textual analysis with audience research depends on the specific modes of analysis they engage.

A TAXONOMY OF AUDIENCE CONJECTURES

Though any taxonomy of criticism is bound to fail to capture the complexity of critical projects, the following categories can serve as a starting place to describe the modes of rhetorical analysis of popular culture texts: illustrative, descriptive-explanatory, corrective, audience-interpretive, and creative-mediational. A common mode of analysis is illustrative, that is, a particular popular culture text is engaged primarily to illustrate a contribution to rhetorical theory. If such analysis is purely formal and the claims text oriented, such as Bruno Giuliana's postmodern reading of the film, *Blade Runner* (1993), then audience research is not necessary. If, on the other hand, the critic makes claims about probable effects of certain rhetorical choices and techniques, then audience research would be beneficial. Criticism that seeks to describe and explain a popular culture text also may or may not require audience research, depending on the sort of claims advanced. Dick Hebdige's (1979) study of the subculture of punk rock in the late 1970s in Great Britain, for example, is an effort primarily to describe and explain the roots and cultural significance of the punk style. It is only when Hebdige seeks to advance claims about what punk meant or what the social effects of punk were to different segments of British society in the 1970s that he advances what we would call audience conjectures.

Our remaining three modes of analysis are adapted from an essay by G. Thomas Goodnight in which he describes three 'modes of argument'

commonly advanced in criticism: corrective, audience-interpretive, and creative-mediational: ‘arguments may be adduced to reform audience reception, to identify responses and make audiences more self-aware, or to prepare an audience for alternative responses’ (1987, 62). The corrective argument ‘adjusts the work to its public by questioning the appropriateness of audience response’, whereas the interpretive argument ‘expands understanding of the relationships between a work and its reception. So critics offer reasons why acceptance of a work is suggestive of an audience’s predispositions or even definitive of its identity’ (1987, 61). We note that for both of these modes of argument, audience conjectures inform the critic’s position, and audience research would be beneficial. A critic cannot correct or reform an audience reception without knowing what that response is, and a critic cannot make audiences more self-aware without first identifying their responses and giving them meaning.

The last mode we want to describe as creative-mediational. Goodnight explains that such analysis mediates between a work and ‘its possible audiences. Here argument functions as a way of explaining new contexts of meaning. Focused discussion on unexamined or routinely overlooked aspects of a work or its production process may create opportunities for novel appreciation’ (1987, 61–62). In this mode of argument, audience research is largely superfluous as it is the critic’s goal to open up new interpretive possibilities rather than to identify and assess how audiences have made texts meaningful or to determine what effects those texts may have had. A good deal of popular culture criticism offers analysis in such a creative mode that does not depend on explicit or implicit audience conjectures. Although some such criticism may be offered as speculation or even entertainment, most theorists agree that all criticism functions persuasively and argumentatively: ‘The critic says implicitly, “See as I see, know as I know, value as I value”’ (Brock et al. 1990, 16). McGee puts the point more forcefully when he declares that scholarly critics ‘differ from everyday critics in that they are always trying to make the world conform to their will’ (1990, 282). Annette Kolodny defends feminist criticism, in part, for its ability to provide new and different meaning from texts and to ask ‘new and different questions of it’ to enhance the range of critical possibilities (1985, 160; see also Dow 1996, 5–6). Accordingly, an audience reception is implicated in creative-mediational criticism in the sense that the critic implies audiences ought to understand or react to a text in particular ways. Audience research may be useful, then, depending on what

assumptions the creative-mediational critic makes about audience beliefs and reactions.

THE BURDENS OF AUDIENCE CONJECTURES: FOUR EXAMPLES

A series of examples of essays containing audience conjectures without audience research can further clarify our argument. We begin with an example of what we have described as illustrative analysis.

In Sonja J. Foss and Karen A. Foss's, 'The Construction of Feminine Spectatorship in Garrison Keillor's Radio Monologues', the authors indicate, 'We are interested in discovering how a feminine reader or spectator is constructed rhetorically in a text and how that construction can be used to subvert dominant meanings about women in popular culture' (1994, 411). Based on their listening experience of Keillor's popular radio program, Foss and Foss argue that Keillor's monologues illustrate a 'feminine spectator stance' through 'refusal to privilege sight, dismantling of the male gaze, creation of Lake Wobegon as a feminine setting, and feminine speaking style' (1994, 412). Most of their analysis in the essay provides textual evidence to support their claims, but in the conclusion Foss and Foss make specific claims about the effects Keillor's radio monologues have on listeners. Foss and Foss are interested in the social or cultural consequences of Keillor's monologues, thus the question of whether his monologues do, in fact, 'constitute an emancipatory rhetoric' is very important. Their claims are not framed as hoped-for effects, nor are they offered solely as self-reports of the authors' own experience of Keillor's monologues. Rather, they are specific conjectures about the possible linear effects of Keillor's construction of 'the feminist spectator stance':

As audience members position themselves in the feminine spectator stance suggested by the texts, they actually experience the concomitant feminist epistemology. They come to know through or from within a feminist perspective they are able to try it on and to discover how it works and feels in their lives. Moreover, because their experience of the perspective is associated with pleasure, interest, and humor, listeners are likely to view the experience as a positive one; they are less likely to evaluate it as negative or to remain detached from and thus unaffected by it. (1994, 424)

As fascinating and important as the claims are about Keillor's monologues, they would be much stronger as arguments if they had been supported

through some form of audience research. The specific causal claim made—‘because their experience of the perspective is associated with pleasure, interest, and humor, listeners are likely to view the experience as a positive one...’ (1994, 424) potentially could be investigated through any one of a variety of audience research methods, including the use of focus groups, personal interviews, surveys, ethnographies, or a host of experimental methodologies.

Martin J. Medhurst’s ‘The Rhetorical Structure of Oliver Stone’s *JFK*’ describes and explains how the film *JFK* affects its audiences. Medhurst contends that the mythic structure of *JFK* functions rhetorically such that ‘the narrative on the screen is an artistic and poetic exemplification of the rhetorical action demanded of the viewer’ (1993, 129). The actions by the protagonist, Jim Garrison, are ‘models for action that viewers are invited to emulate’ (129). Throughout the essay, Medhurst describes how the artistic choices made by Oliver Stone induce the audience to become ‘instruments of sociopolitical change’ (128). Describing the effects of Stone’s portrayal of Garrison’s investigations of the assassination, Medhurst proposes that ‘Like Garrison, the viewer is becoming increasingly skeptical of the official version of events’ (132). Medhurst is convinced that audiences are persuaded that John F. Kennedy’s assassination was part of a high-level government conspiracy: ‘It is the conclusion that Garrison and the viewing audience necessarily reach after having “thought”-through visual imagery and memories-about the possibilities’ (135). Medhurst conjectures a fairly direct cause-and-effect relationship between the film’s rhetorical structure and audiences’ responses. Consider the following claims: (1) As Garrison awakens from his slumber, so too does the audience (133); (2) Shot composition, framing, editing, lighting, and sound all conspire to compel the viewer to consider a government-led conspiracy as the answer to Kennedy’s killer (135–136); and (3) Slowly but inexorably the viewer is led to the conclusion that no external source can be trusted (136).

Medhurst admits not all audience members will be persuaded, but, by invoking the very biblical language with which he prefaces his essay, he implies (to us, at least) it is not the film’s fault, but the fault of those who remain unpersuaded: ‘Stone’s film is an artistic wake up call to those having ears to hear and eyes to see. Clearly not everyone will understand, and even among those who do, not all will believe. But this is the nature of any rhetorical situation’ (1993, 139).⁴

As was the case with the essay by Foss and Foss, our position is not that Medhurst is wrong but that he offers claims that can and should be sup-

ported by audience research. Though he offers theoretical rationale for why the artistic choices made by Stone should have certain consequences for viewers, he offers no evidence that a majority (or even a large segment) of *JFK*'s viewers was influenced in the manner Medhurst conjectures. For example, he suggests that when the film depicts light reflecting off Garrison's and Earl Warren's glasses, 'The Platonic overtones are unmistakable' (1993, 135). Perhaps for Medhurst the allusion is 'unmistakable', but a counter assertion that 'most audience members do not catch the Platonic overtones' is equally plausible, absent audience research.

Perhaps the most forceful claim of the film's effects concerns its direct political consequences. Medhurst argues that elected 'leaders have felt the force of an outraged citizenry', a citizenry provoked in part by *JFK*, and hence 'the film has had a discernible effect on the willingness of governmental leaders to declassify documents pertaining to the Kennedy assassination' (1993, 140). Whereas the timing of the passage of the Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act supports the claim that *JFK* had a 'discernable effect', just what sort of effect is not as clear. None of the sources cited by Medhurst on this point offer any evidence that public opinion was significantly affected by *JFK*; rather the bill was passed to dispel rumors or suspicion of a conspiracy, especially among people too young to remember the event themselves (Cope 1992; Clymer 1992).

Stone's *JFK* may very well have influenced public opinion. In a poll conducted in October of 1988, 66 percent of those surveyed said they believed 'there was a conspiracy to kill President Kennedy', and 61 percent believed there was an official cover-up (Shenon 1988). *JFK* was released in late 1991, and by February 1992, '77 percent said they believed that people besides Lee Harvey Oswald were involved in the killing. And 75 percent said there was an official cover-up in the case' (Carter 1992). In a Gallup poll taken in December 1993, 75 percent still professed belief in a conspiracy (Gallup 1995, 193). What factors increased the number of people who doubt that Oswald acted alone? Was it the publicity surrounding the film, *JFK*, or the government's reaction to the film? Or was it the film itself? And if so, what made the film so effective? We suspect the most thorough and persuasive answers to such questions can be had only by combining audience research with the sort of careful rhetorical analysis Medhurst performs.

In addition to audience conjectures concerning the effects caused by certain texts, rhetorical critics also offer conjectures about the meaning audiences derive from popular culture texts. In Dana L. Cloud's, 'The

Limits of Interpretation: Ambivalence and the Stereotype in *Spenser: For Hire* (1992), the argument is set forth that the character, Hawk, is constructed in such a way as to be ambivalent, that is, the meanings associated with Hawk are both positive and negative, supportive of the status quo and subversive. According to Cloud, 'Hawk is simultaneously allied with white power and culture via Spenser, and resistant to it in his associations with Boston's criminal elements and antagonism toward the police and other institutionalized authorities' (313). Cloud suggests that the text has a dominant meaning for audiences and that meaning is ambivalence, though she admits how that ambivalence in evaluated can vary as a result 'of viewer interpretation. Either side of Hawk (the side allied with white power or the side that resists it) can be evaluated in either a positive or negative way' (313). Cloud contends that 'it could be argued that the pleasure of watching Hawk is found in between Hawk's role as ally and his role as enemy of white culture, or in the dialectic interplay between these poles, the glimpses of irony and possible critique that the play of opposite positions entails' (316).

Cloud's analysis is corrective in the sense that she believes the praise Hawk's portrayal has received is misguided because the net effect of Hawk's portrayal is to perpetuate stereotypical racist images and beliefs. For example, 'Hawk does not decapitate heroines, but his violence is often extreme. He exhibits none of Spenser's reluctance to kill, nor does he wait to attack until attacked himself. This association with the deep-seated type of the native savage might be compelling evidence confirming the racism of an uncritical viewer' (1992, 318). Furthermore, because the television show focuses on individual action rather than institutional critique, the naive ideological stance of the show props up modern racism:

When issues of difference, power, and politics are reduced in discourse to matters of individual morality, as they are in *Spenser: For Hire*, the result is not only the silencing of a vision of collective action but also the legitimization of social and institutional discipline of groups whose political crises become reinterpreted as moral crises, the failure of individuals to meet their individual responsibilities. (1992, 321)

In short, Cloud contends that there are limits to interpretations of popular culture texts such that the show functions hegemonically: 'Hawk's oppositional stance and persona, though subject to contradictory critical evaluations, serve the needs of the dominant culture to depict blacks in

stereotypical ways' (1992, 311). Despite actor Avery Brooks's popularity, and the praise the show's depiction of Hawk received from some Black critics, Cloud believes that her close analysis of the show reveals how the depictions 'participate in a conservative, multistructured, yet hegemonic social totality' (1992, 314). Cloud implies that those who attribute positive meaning to Hawk simply may be wrong: 'Images and articulations that on the surface seem positive and empowering can actually tap into deeply embedded racist types and can function in racist ways in the dominant culture' (1992, 314).

Although Cloud's reading of *Spenser: For Hire* is provocative and important, it would be far more compelling if aided by audience research because her central thesis rests on unproven assumptions about the meanings typical television viewers attribute to the show. Most evidence offered concerning audience reactions in her essay—reviews and fan reactions—indicate that audiences did not read Hawk in a racist manner. Indeed, after *Spenser: For Hire* was canceled, there was sufficient enthusiasm for Hawk's character that a short-lived series was launched that focused on him: *A Man Called Hawk*. Cloud conjectures that *Spenser: For Hire*'s 'overt positive messages about race issues and articulation of empowered difference cannot outweigh the [negative] associations with which that difference is continually articulated in the text'; she concludes that 'the dominant or preferred reading of this program is one that allows the racial stereotype to work' (1992, 317). How can we know what the dominant or preferred reading is without checking our conjectures with audiences other than ourselves? Especially with a text acknowledged to be ambivalent, how can we know what meanings outweigh others without asking audiences how they interpret the text? Cloud does an excellent job of providing evidence, both textual and intertextual, that certain aspects of Hawk's characterization could be read in a racist manner. The key question, of course, is how did different audiences read or interpretively 'use' Hawk? *Spenser: For Hire* would seem an ideal vehicle for audience research to investigate how class, race, and gender factors correlate with various interpretations.

There are similarities between Cloud's analysis of *Spenser: For Hire* and audience conjectures made about *The Cosby Show* (Jhally and Lewis 1992, 3–8). Some critics praised the show's depiction of successful African Americans and claimed the show provided a positive role model for minorities and promoted tolerance among White people. Other critics claimed that the main characters' economic success could foster the belief that racism was no longer a significant problem in America by perpetuating the

myth that social mobility is determined solely by personal ambition and effort. Critics on each side of the issue offered arguments informed by their own readings of the show, but there was little hope of resolving the interpretive stalemate without turning to audience research. In an audience-centered research project published in 1992, Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis were motivated by the interpretive disagreements ‘to go beyond conjecture and seek the answer from the show’s viewers, about whom both arguments make assumptions’ (1992, 8). They found a much more complex reading of the show by audience members than previous critics had suggested. In a sense, both sides were proven right. The show did provide positive images that not only influenced *The Cosby Show*’s immediate audiences but is credited for a dramatic improvement and increase in television programming featuring African Americans (Gray 1995). On the other hand, some (though by no means all) viewers did find in the show a reaffirmation of the myth of the American Dream such that the problems of racism were minimized. Obviously, Jhally and Lewis need not have the final word on the subject, but their audience research advances and refines the debate on *The Cosby Show* in a way that critics wanting to make audience conjectures without audience research could not. The debate has been taken to a new level of sophistication and persuasiveness through their effort to determine how audiences interpreted and comprehended the television show and why the show resonated with such a large viewing public. Similarly, how the character Hawk is used by different audiences could be explored empirically rather than assuming that audiences will attribute meaning in a stereotypical fashion. As Jodi R. Cohen’s research on competing readings by audiences of Harvey Fierstein’s *Tidy Endings* suggests, we cannot safely assume that the meaning audiences construe from a text will always neatly fit into the dichotomous categories of ‘dominant’ and ‘resistant’ (1991).

Though not a perfect fit, Nick Trujillo’s ‘Hegemonic Masculinity on the Mound: Media Representations of Nolan Ryan and American Sports Culture’ can be described as an example of the audience-interpretive mode of analysis. As Goodnight notes, critics can argue that ‘acceptance of a work is suggestive of an audience’s predispositions or even definitive of its identity’ (1987, 61). Trujillo contends that ‘hegemonic masculinity’ is definitive of dominant American culture and that media representation of the famed baseball pitcher Nolan Ryan reflects and reproduces masculinist predispositions. Specifically, Ryan has been represented in a sufficiently consistent and dominant manner in popular culture that ‘the media have

functioned hegemonically by personifying Ryan as an archetypal male athletic hero' (1991, 290). Reviewing print and television representations of Ryan, Trujillo provides an artful combination of metaphor analysis, critical theory, gender theory, semiotics, and psychoanalysis (our labels, not his). Trujillo implies the media have portrayed Ryan in a sufficiently monolithic manner that what Ryan means to the American public as a symbol is stable and predictable:

In the final analysis, Nolan Ryan represents a white, middle-aged, upper-class, banker-athlete, with working-class cowboy values, who was raised by a middleclass family in a small rural town, and who is a strong father and devoted heterosexual husband. (303)

Such representations function hegemonically by resisting the challenges posed to 'the dominant image of masculinity' by women's sports, increased visibility of homosexual athletes, charges of racism, and an increasingly heterogeneous sports-viewing public. Furthermore, hegemonic masculinity in sports coverage 'has negative consequences for men' such as encouraging excessive competition, sexist attitudes, and lack of trust and feeling (303).

Trujillo may very well be correct, but two key conjectures he offers would gain significant support with the assistance of audience research. First, it would be relatively simple to investigate whether Trujillo's reading of sports coverage of Nolan Ryan is consistent with that of the general public. How consistently and monolithically has Ryan been represented? To what extent have various audiences accepted and adopted those representations? Such questions would be answered fairly easily with audience research. Indeed, in his subsequent book on Nolan Ryan, Trujillo (1994) includes a chapter that details his ethnographic research of fans and ballpark workers to determine what Ryan means to them. Although he does not survey a general audience, he does examine an important audience—fans and ballpark workers. Second, though sometimes the conclusions of media effects research are controversial because of the difficulty of isolating causal influences, certainly theories and methods are available that would allow a critic to seek confirmation of the conjectured relationship between types and amounts of sports coverage and various attitudes and emotional characteristics.

So far we hope that we have made a case for the benefits of audience research if and when critics wish to make what we have described as audi-

ence conjectures. In the parlance of debaters, it would be ‘comparatively advantageous’ for scholars to support audience conjectures with audience research. We further illustrate our thesis with the following case study.

THE BENEFITS OF AUDIENCE RESEARCH: A CASE STUDY

Goodnight’s essay, ‘The Firm, the Park, and the University: Fear and Trembling on the Postmodern Trail’ (1995), makes a series of claims about the meanings of two recent popular culture texts, *The Firm* and *Jurassic Park*, and offers inferences concerning the effects these popular culture texts have had on audiences. Because Goodnight’s essay is lengthy, complex, and difficult to categorize, a few words are in order about how we interpret his criticism. Obviously, a rhetorical criticism, like any text, is open to multiple readings. We fully recognize that our interpretation of the essay may have nothing to do with Goodnight’s intentions.⁵ To be consistent with our commitment to audience research, we formulated our summary of Goodnight’s essay after discussions with over 20 graduate students and faculty at three universities who were asked what they felt the ‘basic point’ of Goodnight’s article was. The reading represents the most common responses, and none of our participants offered an interpretation significantly at odds with it. Even if it is the case that we (and our respondents) have seriously misunderstood Goodnight’s project, we believe that our misreading has heuristic value for our discussion of the benefits of audience research.

Accordingly, for the purposes of this discussion, we focus on Goodnight’s claim that the mass media are preying on the fears and already-present skepticism of post-baby boomers, specifically, Goodnight’s exploration of the ‘play of mass-mediated, postmodern performances in which skeptical audiences are induced to entertain the collapse of the social worlds’ (1995, 269). Two bestselling novels turned into movies, *Jurassic Park* and *The Firm*, exemplify such ‘fused and fueled’ postmodern themes at work (281).

Goodnight is concerned that postmodernism, a ‘skepticism sweeping into and out of the academy for well over two decades’ (269), is now influencing the so-called Generation X. He contends that postmodernism has taken up the cultural space in much the same way that Greek skepticism took up the Hellenic cultural space, creating relativism, nonessentialism, undecidability, and in general calling notions of what constitutes knowledge into question. For Goodnight, Generation X is being silenced by institutions such as the media that absorb and then further compound

and elaborate a code of cultural skepticism. He explains that Generation X has been celebrated and reviled as a label fixed by ‘boomer’ marketing strategists trying to target a crucial market of new consumers who have been elusive to traditional marketing strategies. Gen Xers are typically described as post-baby boomers who are skeptical, angry, and unhappy about the state of the world and of American society (Coupland 1991). Goodnight describes them as sharing one key characteristic: ‘This generation without a consensual identity seems to display the shattering cohesion of postmodernity itself’ (272).

Goodnight charges the authors and directors of *Jurassic Park* and *The Firm* with ‘exploiting’ the fears of Generation X because the texts absorb and reinforce ‘chaotic’ postmodern themes and aesthetics (273, 281). Goodnight identifies *The Firm’s* political messages in both novel and film as encouraging a ‘disdain for all institutions’ and offering a ‘cynical vision of the human condition’ while tossing out the political messages of an ‘earlier generation’ (273, cf. Wall 1993, 731). Both novel and movie, he claims, invert the American dream ‘with a profusion of postmodern themes that appear to well up from a Baudrillian fun house’ (1995, 273). As evidence for this claim, he identifies the corrupt and ‘faux reality’ of the firm even though it appears respectful and proper, and the law firm affirms a ‘traditional code of propriety’ of wife and children-designed, not to ensure a healthy community but instead to create a liability for a partner who needs to be controlled (274). Mitch McDeere has intermittent contacts with government agents, who, like the partners of the law firm, play the young attorney and his wife as pawns in clandestine games of institutional power. As a result, ‘skepticism [of institutions] is fed continually in novel and film alike’ (274).

In *Jurassic Park*, Goodnight also finds a variety of postmodern themes and aesthetics in both novel and film; however, the postmodern skepticism at work is downplayed in the movie because of Spielberg’s inability to represent visually the terrors of institutional power. Nonetheless, Goodnight identifies ‘gestures of institutional disrespect’ that ‘pepper the film’ through characterizations that serve as symbolic representations of the ills of institutions. The ‘technocrats’ who create this great dinosaur amusement park range from Nedry, the computer genius who is ‘whiny, corrupt and slovenly’, to the lawyer who is overly eager in his rush to get the cash flowing ‘but who, in a Freudian spinout, runs to a portable toilet for sanctuary only to get munched on the commode by a tyrannosaur—a subtle sign perhaps that in the face of raw nature rationalists retreat to the primal and perish’,

to Hammond the ‘capitalist ogre’ and mastermind of *Jurassic Park*, who is too greedy and egotistical to see the dangers in his theme park (278–279).

As well as making claims about the supposed meaning or reception of *Jurassic Park* and *The Firm*, Goodnight makes claims about the effects these texts have on audiences. Goodnight posits a causal relationship between text and specific audience attitudes and behaviors: ‘Audiences are induced neither to investigate the limits of current situations nor to evaluate common choices, but only to enjoy tastes of “terror” and “panic” that linger on the mind less than the popcorn on the palate’ (270). The impact the plot of *The Firm* has on audiences is clearly stated: *The Firm* ‘exploits suspicion of the law and animosity toward lawyers’ (273). Even the differences in endings of the novels and movies ‘exploit aesthetic spaces of post-modernity so as to converge epistemic differences among media’ (269). For viewers and readers, *Jurassic Park* and *The Firm* ‘exploit generational anxieties, celebrate public absence, suppress a space for reflection, and promote some dreadful institutional dependencies’ (273). In sum, Goodnight believes that *Jurassic Park* and *The Firm* reinforce an attitude of institutional skepticism that is deplorable because it leads to inactivity in the public sphere: ‘The net result is the playful reductions of public life for an emergent generation’ (269).

We believe Goodnight’s description of *The Firm* and *Jurassic Park* yields the following audience conjectures, the first of which concerns the meaning or reception of the texts, whereas the second is a conjecture about the effects the texts have had on audiences. Although other conjectures could also be teased out of Goodnight’s essays, these are the two felt most central to his interpretation.

- Conjecture 1: For members of Generation X, the plots portray ‘post-modern’ heroes grappling with the corrupt and failing institutions of law and science. The movies offer cynical views of ‘the human condition’ that suggest the only ‘outs’ are to escape or to ‘play’ the game better than one’s opponents.
- Conjecture 2: Audience members, especially Gen Xers, are encouraged by *Jurassic Park* and *The Firm* to be skeptical toward institutions in general (especially the law and science). By discouraging faith in such institutions, interest in seeking societal improvement through participating in the public sphere is diminished.

In order to demonstrate the usefulness and importance of audience research, we conducted research in an effort to determine how a set of audience members read the movies and novels of *Jurassic Park* and *The Firm* in order to test Goodnight's conjectures. Following Richard A. Krueger's work on focus group methodology (1994), we conducted four focus groups with a total of 23 volunteer college students ranging in age from 18 to 22. Participants in this age range were solicited specifically because they fit Goodnight's description of Generation X—the empirical audience conjectured to be the most defined or influenced by these texts. Furthermore, in the beginning of the essay, Goodnight notes that *The Firm* and *Jurassic Park* were very popular on college campuses, an observation that becomes particularly meaningful to his reading as he notes ominously in his conclusion that 'the next spectacle, after *Firm* and *Park*, will be undoubtedly THE UNIVERSITY' (1995, 286). Focus group participants were volunteers from eight different speech communication classes who were required to have seen either *Jurassic Park*, *The Firm*, or both, and it was deemed helpful, but not necessary, that they had read the books. Twenty-two of the 23 participants had seen both *Jurassic Park* and *The Firm* (one respondent had only seen *Jurassic Park*). Of 23 participants, only two had read the novel, *Jurassic Park*, and four had read *The Firm*. A funnel sequence was used beginning with open-ended questions about plot, moving to more specific questions involving interpretation of the texts' meaning. The interview schedule (see Appendix) was followed closely, and additional questions concerning the positive and negative messages of the movies were asked of two focus groups to flesh out their interpretations. Each group was tape-recorded by the focus group moderator (Gen X) to allow for accurate recording of participants' answers; notes were made during the focus group interview by the assistant moderator (baby boomer), and partial transcripts were made of each focus group. Because this is a small sample, we make no claims as to the generalizability of the findings; instead, our purpose is to supplement and compare Goodnight's audience conjectures and text-centered analysis of *Jurassic Park* and *The Firm* with preliminary audience research.

DISCUSSION OF AUDIENCE CONJECTURE 1

When asked to describe the plot and meaning of the texts, we believe it is fair to say that our focus groups did not experience the same films Goodnight describes. When focus group participants explained the plots

of *The Firm* and *Jurassic Park*, traditional tales of good versus evil emerged even if the tales were set in innovative settings. None of the 23 participants understood the stories as primarily ‘about’ the institutions of science and law, and only 1 saw evidence of institutional critique. The most consistent descriptions focused on characters or plot details that have no apparent political or epistemological dimension. Of *The Firm*, one respondent explained the movie in this way:

A hotshot lawyer graduates from Harvard, then he gets all these different proposals and he picks one from down South and he goes there and they give him an offer he can’t refuse, and he goes there and finds out it is like a mafia-based law firm. People are trying to get out of there and when they leave the firm they get killed. And he finds out about all of this. And he’s got the FBI against him and the mafia is against him.... Then he finds out a way to get the firm in trouble with the IRS and then blackmail the mob so they can’t do anything about him either. (R01)

Concerning *Jurassic Park*, another participant echoed similar plot and character-driven themes:

An inventor created a way to bring back the dinosaur, on an island where he thinks it can be contained, then trouble arises when he starts bringing in people, he brings in his family members, and the whole park kinda goes into chaos; people are dying, and there is lots of trouble. (R02)

Often participants painted the stories in very traditional good-versus-evil terms that are hard to distinguish from very common modernist fare:

The whole idea of the movie is that good overcomes evil. The evil law firm actually lost out in the end. And the good lawyer, Tom Cruise, won out because he knew how to use his legal skills to get himself out of the bind he was in. His whole reason for doing what he did was to keep practicing law so he would not lose his honor. (R03)

I think like in the middle of the movie when they bring in the two kids and the two scientists or whatever, like at first they’re like “this is really great” and then all of a sudden they’re like “but you guys need to think about this” and then at the end, after like everything happens and everything’s so bad, like, like, the good over comes the evil, and like, like “hey, this is wrong: you need to destroy this.” (R04)

When participants offered plot descriptions that included a political or ethical dimension, those descriptions most often involved individual greed threatening the lives of innocent and well-meaning people. The implicit notions of autonomous individuals having sufficient agency to make ethical choices are hardly postmodern and indeed represent the most traditional of modernist assumptions. Unless one associates a critique of capitalist greed with postmodernism—a link hard to reconcile with the history of Marxism—such interpretations are most easily read as reflective of modernism. Another respondent described the individual instances of greed as follows:

[*The Firm* is] about how when lawyers come out of law school they are desperate to find a job, that they'll get sucked into whatever, you know, seems good to them, and about how much they have to work right at the beginning, like the movie shows that if they got paid off well enough, then they would do it, regard-less of what they were asked to do.... [It's about] how your ethics get compromised when money is involved.... (R05)

[Concerning *Jurassic Park*] once again the ethical question coming into play with all the competition and what gets compromised. (R02)

Creating dinosaurs sounds like a really good idea, but look what happens when greed and other human emotions get involved; it like, all goes hay-wire. (R05)

The closest statements that support Goodnight's interpretation came from one of the only two participants who were openly skeptical about the institutions of law or science:

I think the institution corrupted the lawyers. Especially the part that Gene Hackman played. You get the feeling that he was kind of a good guy, but he was just corrupted by the system. And he couldn't really escape from it, just like any of the other guys couldn't. (R06)

The same respondent commented on *Jurassic Park*: 'I identified with [Ian Malcolm], too. Because he was more cynical and disbelieving than any of those people in that park at first. And the archaeologists were all gung ho to build it, even with reservations'. But even this statement, in context, tended to be more about the evils of greed and capitalism than of post-modern skepticism about institutional reason.

DISCUSSION OF AUDIENCE CONJECTURE 2

Before discussing Goodnight's second conjecture, an additional issue should be addressed. Concepts such as 'postmodernism' and 'skepticism' are used in Goodnight's essay at a sufficiently high level of abstraction that their translation across scholars and respondents is not secure. As a result of these complications, we make no claim about definitively proving or refuting Goodnight's second conjecture. It could be that these texts affected audiences in ways in which they are unaware. No questions were asked regarding participants' beliefs about how *Jurassic Park* and *The Firm* affected them directly. We did, however, elicit participants' general feelings about the institutions of science and law with such questions as, 'What would you say is your attitude towards the institution of science?' and 'What would you say your attitude is towards legal institutions?' Answers to such questions provide one form of test of Goodnight's assumptions about those preexisting audience attitudes he believes are reinforced by the texts. They also provide some insight into different ways audience members use the texts.

We found that all but two participants were generally positive rather than skeptical about the institutions of the law and science, a finding that appears to challenge Goodnight's assumptions about the skepticism of Generation X. Further, when pressed about the meaning of the texts, the participants' discussion suggests they did not 'get' the skeptical message that Goodnight conjectures dominates *The Firm* and *Jurassic Park*. A typical response about the institution of law highlighted the corruption of individuals, but the sanctity of the institution:

I've always had the impression that we live in the best nation on earth. And I've always had a respect for the law and I always will. And, yeah, there is a lot of corruption out there, but I think if you look at the overall picture there is a lot of good people. (R07)

One participant mentioned being arrested 'a couple of times' and having to go to court: 'I was treated pretty fairly, so I guess I would say that I don't really think it [the legal institution] is bad' (R03).

About the law itself, I feel that it is good. I have more problem with some of the people in law.... I feel that they give the society a feeling that they are corruptmore so than in the law itself. (R08)

Overall I think the legal institution is good, I mean, I don't know, I have no experience with it, or whatever, but I think it is scary too because everything you hear about is, you hear the bad cases, usually, you know, and like, O.J. was so widely publicized.... But I think, on the whole, it can't be infallible and everything has its faults and I think its the best system, um, I think its working, it's doing its job, but I don't know. (R02)

There are two sides to it.... I think there is a lot of corruption involved ... but at the same time I think that the legal profession is good, because our legal system is probably the best in the world. (R05).

Comments regarding science as an institution were also positive, even when participants noted the corruption of individuals. One participant's answer specifically debunks the portrayal of science in *Jurassic Park*:

I think the science institution is great. I think that it's, the way it's portrayed in *Jurassic Park* is pretty false. I don't think that that would ever happen in real life. I think it's totally fake, and I don't think that is how the science profession is. I see the science profession as the two doctors and how their life's work was with dinosaurs and they weren't out to make a buck, and I think that most scientists aren't out to make a buck. I think that they're in it for the advancement of science and not to make money. (R03)

Participants who expressed mixed feelings about science typically believed that the good outweighs the bad:

I think it [science] can go both ways; obviously there is a lot of bad, but I think that there is more good to offset it with all the cures and medicine that they've come up with and other things. I'd say that its more positive than negative but there's a lot on both sides. (R09)

Even those who expressed concerns about the institutions did so very much within a modernist framework. That is, they described the relevant institution as value neutral, even if what certain individuals do with it represent good or bad values (cf. Bronowski 1956).

As far as *Jurassic Park* is concerned it is not the science that made it bad, it was the publicity-making it into a park that made it bad.... It is not the science that blew up the project, it was the making it into a park. (R08)

R06's statement about *The Firm* quoted above was the only interpretation we heard that resonated with Goodnight's own description of the plot. We

believe that her description was shaped by a similar interpretative frame that Goodnight brought to the same movie. That is, for those audience members already cynical about the legal institution, *The Firm* provides grist for the mill:

I think I tend to be really cynical and I would believe something more easily like *The Firm* than I would believe something that was promoting the good things about our “wonderful” judicial system.... There is no room for individuality and there is a status quo that has to be maintained. And you know no one can break away from that because the consequences would be too bad for it.

Similarly, R10 stated ‘I don’t trust the legal system’ and described it as a ‘game’ with ‘no rules’. Such sentiments strike us as very much in line with Goodnight’s reading of *The Firm*. Given that these participants were the only 2 of the 23 participants who proffered such a reading, the question is, how typical are such readings?

There is reason to doubt just how rampant postmodern skepticism is among Generation Xers. Public opinion experts have recently criticized the media hype that describes Generation X as unusually disillusioned (Ladd 1993). A Gallup poll that sought to assess public sentiments of dissatisfaction found that ‘The youngest generation of voting-age Americans (18–31 years) have the most optimistic view of the country’, showing the highest level of satisfaction of all age groups overall and on such issues as ‘the way the political process is working’, ‘the honesty and ethical standards of people in this country’, ‘the state of the American family’, ‘the sense of community in this country today’ (Hugick and McAneny 1992, 2–4) as well as ‘the way things are going in your own personal life’ (Hugick 1992). When asked about trusting institutions, including the government, news media, and corporations, the same group were at least as trustful as baby boomers, silent generation members, and the GI generation and sometimes more so (Hugick and McAneny 1992, 7).⁶ Even the two ‘skeptics’ in our focus groups can be described as more modernist than postmodern, because their interpretations identified the cause of problems within science and the law as personal greed and free-market capitalism. In R06’s case, her skepticism extended to the institution of science: ‘I think progress and advancement is an inherent part of our nature, but we don’t think about the consequences and that is what I thought about the whole time when I saw that movie [*Jurassic Park*]’. In some respects such a sentiment is consistent with those participants who

saw science as basically good even though some scientists go wrong through haste or lack of caution. However, R06 seems less than optimistic about the future:

That is what I think is the difference between real scientists, like Einstein, who want to know just for the knowledge, and a whole different branch of scientists now who want to find out something to exploit it, to make money off of it. Every scientist's invention is just another profit-making thing.

Though skeptical about the law, R10 expressed confidence in the institution of science. The problems in the movie, *Jurassic Park*, resulted from the pursuit of profit leading to 'moving so fast'. Her solution is thoroughly modernist: Claiming that science is a 'benefit to society', she believed that the moral of *Jurassic Park* is 'the more you know the better'.

We concluded the focus groups by summarizing the main themes and messages the participants identified about the texts and asking group members if we had understood their comments correctly. In the debriefing process, we asked the participants directly if they felt the texts were about the institutions of the law and science and whether they felt the texts encouraged skepticism toward such institutions. None of the 23 participants agreed with such a characterization. The following comment by R11 was met with a round of nods from other focus group participants: 'I think [the movies were] more about the people, the way the people use the institutions not exactly a portrayal of the institutions themselves'. Another respondent summed up her interpretation of both movies this way:

They showed that it's individuals who are manipulating things and not the institutions acting on them, they are acting within the institutions. So it's not like their course is predetermined by what the institution says. I think they show that their own motives get in the way and influence what they do.
(R05)

Of course, the comments produced by our participants are open to more than one reading. One could argue that their comments prove that they have been successfully duped by the texts in question. By extension, it could be argued that our critique does not apply to rhetorical criticism informed and guided by certain critical neo-Marxist or psychoanalytic theories because such theories assume that audiences are influenced on

levels of which they are not consciously aware. To make such arguments, however, would require a specific theory of reading that explains how the critic is immune to the texts' hegemonic effects and yet can still know what is really happening to average audience members. Goodnight, at least, offers no such theory of reading. Additionally, some audience studies have been guided by psychoanalytic or critical theory and demonstrate that audience research is compatible with such theories (see Radway 1984; Hall 1978; Walkerdine 1986). In our study, it is fair to say that focus group participants generally did not comprehend or interpret the meanings of *Jurassic Park* and *The Firm* in the manner that Goodnight conjectures. It may be the case that the sort of negative aesthetics that combines postmodern style with a cynical attitude toward institutions can be found far more readily in such movies as *Brazil* or *Natural Born Killers*, rather than in those discussed by Goodnight. Although we cannot prove or deny Goodnight's claims about the effects these texts may have had on audiences, his assumptions about the pervasiveness of postmodern skepticism are at least called into question. At this point, Goodnight's second conjecture about the persuasive effects of the texts must be viewed as an unsupported assertion, absent audience research procedures informed by a specific theory of persuasion.

CONCLUSION: WORDING MATTERS, METHODOLOGICAL PLURALISM, AND CULTURAL STUDIES

If our thesis that 'essays containing audience conjectures can be enhanced through the use of audience research' is accepted, rhetorical critics have two choices: avoid audience conjectures or consider incorporating some sort of audience research. Either way, we believe our scholarship will be enhanced. We conclude this essay by identifying three theoretical implications, two of which are in response to some of the feedback we have received as we shared and discussed this essay as a work in progress.

The first implication we note is that word choices matter. A common reaction to our argument has been that 'critics need only change the wording of their claims' either to avoid audience conjectures or to frame their conjectures as speculative. We agree completely. However, such wording changes are far from trivial. As Condit puts it, changing one's phraseology to admit the 'partiality' of one's interpretations has 'weighty consequences' (1990, 336). There is considerable difference between the

act of offering a speculative or admittedly idiosyncratic reading of a popular culture text and the act of making definitive claims about the text's meaning or positing a causal claim about what that text is doing to audiences. Condit critiques Michael Leff's 'close reading' of Lincoln's Second Inaugural on the basis that it was 'accurate only for those socialized to the dominant culture (which was northern and White)' (1990, 336). To the extent that we see ourselves in academia as advancing knowledge claims, the clarity and specificity of those claims is important so that we avoid turning a particularized reading into an 'implied universal' reading (Condit 1990, 336).

For example, Goodnight's reading of *The Firm* and *Jurassic Park* could be categorized as a speculative or mediational argument proffered as a creative interpretation and not at all about audience reactions. After all, Goodnight admits the two examples are not enough to prove a general case about the 'trajectory of the code of cultural skepticism' in public discourse (1995, 285). However, Goodnight's other two categories seem to be better fits: Goodnight is out to correct an overly positive public reception or to interpret these texts as definitive of our current social identity and to make us aware of that identity. In either case, his essay rests on assumptions about the meanings audiences took from the texts and how they may have been affected by them. Specifically, there is sufficient causal language in the essay to invite the inference by readers that *Jurassic Park* and *The Firm* contribute to the demise of public discourse that Goodnight laments in a well-known series of essays (1982). Indeed, editor Robert L. Ivie's introduction to the issue in which Goodnight's essay appears is titled, 'What's at stake for public discourse'. Ivie suggests that Goodnight's essay is important because 'the negative aesthetics of a postmodern condition' presumably enacted by *The Firm* and *Jurassic Park* 'undermines the recovery of an authentic public sphere' (1995, 266). Proving such a hypothesis would be no easy matter. Even if Goodnight can interpret books or movies as he has, there is no evidence offered either that audiences comprehended the specific messages Goodnight found coded into the texts or were affected in the way he and Ivie imply they are (Bordwell 1989, 1–18).

Alternatively, if the contrary position were admitted (viz., that *The Firm* and *Jurassic Park* do not contribute to the demise of public discourse), what would the point of Goodnight's essay be? Simply to illustrate that the texts could be interpreted or read as illustrations of 'the negative aesthetics of a postmodern condition'? Certainly there is room for rhetorical

criticism that is creative, provocative, and highly speculative. Let us be clear, however, about the different sorts of claims made (and thus the evidence required) in criticism that aims to edify and entertain fellow scholars compared to criticism that attempts to explain or evaluate socially significant popular culture texts. Whereas many critics may not intend to make empirical statements about effects, they sometimes write as if they do. The result is conceptual and argumentative fuzziness. Claims about individual texts, and the cause of rhetorical criticism generally, could be advanced if we were clearer about what we were doing.⁷ Audience research is irrelevant to criticism aimed at illustrating interpretive possibilities but potentially very valuable to criticism aimed at assessing the social and political significance of popular culture texts.

The second theoretical implication our interlocutors have drawn to our attention is that our discussion blurs the line between humanistic and social scientific research (cf. Edwards 1996, 262). Again, we agree completely and think that such a blurring is all to the good. After all, it has been over 25 years since the Committee on Rhetorical Criticism of the National Developmental Project's report on 'the prospect of rhetoric' noted that 'it is both possible and desirable to join the roles of the "critic-scientist" and "critic artist"' (Sloan 1971, 224). Efforts by philosophers to draw a sharp distinction between science and nonscience—including the humanities—on epistemological or ontological grounds have been unsuccessful (Rorty 1991, 21–110). As much of the rhetoric-of-inquiry scholarship has noted, what humanists and social scientists have in common is that they advance arguments (Brockriede 1971, 131–132). Arguments concerning popular culture texts can be enhanced by the critic who draws from multiple research traditions without regard to the labels of humanities or social science: 'Just as a debater makes a convincing case by using varied evidence, so the research scholar can argue a theoretical position more convincingly by blending the powerful evidence of experimental research with the vivid evidence of criticism' (Brockriede 1971, 137–138). Such a position does not return us to John Waite Bowers's notion of rhetorical criticism as 'pre-scientific' (1968) but instead to a view of all scholarly writing as thoroughly rhetorical and argumentative—discourse drawing from the available means of persuasion to influence specific communities of readers (Gross 1990; Prelli 1989).

Our third and final point is that audience research in support of audience conjectures enhances the interconnections between rhetorical and cultural studies. Particularly when engaging popular culture texts, rhetori-

cal critics often align themselves with the aims of the relatively recent cultural studies ‘movement’ (Rosteck 1995). The common denominator among the essays we have engaged by a number of our colleagues is that popular culture texts *matter* to the critics. As we read them, Foss and Foss put forward Keiller as exemplary in part because they oppose the patriarchal biases of contemporary society and hope to see it change. Medhurst believes that Oliver Stone’s *JFK* matters not only because of the historical importance of its subject matter but also because considering the impact of competing historical narratives reminds us that we are ‘symbol-created’ as well as symbol-creators and with such insight, ‘we can begin to know ourselves’ (1993, 141). Cloud explicitly opposes the racism she believes is advanced in *Spenser: For Hire*, just as Trujillo implies that the stereotypical notions of masculinity he believes is hegemonic ought to be replaced. Further, Goodnight’s impressive body of work for nearly 20 years makes clear his desire for a reinvigorated public sphere of discourse. Cumulatively these works contribute to what Steven Mailloux describes as rhetorical cultural studies that ‘attempt to describe and explain past and present configurations of rhetorical practices as they affect each other and as they extend and manipulate the social practices, political structures, and material circumstances in which they are embedded at particular historical moments’ (1991, 234; see also 1994, 82–88).

We share a commitment to the belief that rhetorical scholars ought to engage socially significant texts and that the end or telos of our engagement ought to be social change itself. As McGee puts it, the discourse of professional critics ‘is on its face that sort of action which intervenes in the world’ (1990, 282). Jhally and Lewis’s study of *The Cosby Show* illustrates that our understanding of which texts are socially significant and how they harm or benefit our culture is enhanced through audience research. As Justin Lewis declares, ‘if we are concerned with the meaning and significance of popular culture in contemporary society, with how cultural forms work ideologically or politically, then we need to understand cultural products (or “texts”) as they are understood by audiences’ (1991, 47). Thus, part of our motivation in writing this essay is the conviction that the stronger and more thorough our scholarly arguments are, the better the chance to influence a broader audience—in our own discipline, in other disciplines, and even outside academia. Even if we define our collective interests more narrowly and confine them to the disciplinary advancement of rhetorical studies, we hope that by engaging our colleagues’ work, we have demonstrated Brockriede’s claim that ‘The product of the process of

confrontation by argument and counterargument is a more dependable understanding of rhetorical experiences and of rhetoric' (1974, 174).

APPENDIX: SCHEDULE OF QUESTIONS

1. (Go around the room) Say your name and tell us which movies (or both) have you seen and which one did you like better?
2. Could you describe the plot of *Jurassic Park*?
3. I have heard some interesting points. What do you think *Jurassic Park* is saying about the institution of science/scientists?
4. What are your attitudes toward the institution of science/scientists?
5. What do you think is the attitude Malcolm (the chaos theorist) has toward the institution of science/scientists?
6. How many of you read the book and saw the movie *Jurassic Park*?
7. What do you think the moral of the story is in *Jurassic Park*?
8. Could you describe the plot of *The Firm*?
9. A number of things have been mentioned. What do you think the Firm is saying about the legal profession/lawyers?
10. What are your attitudes toward the legal institution?
11. What do you think is McDeere's (the main character) attitude toward the legal institution/lawyers in the book?
12. How many of you read the book and saw the movie *The Firm*?
13. Is McDeere's attitude toward the legal institution and lawyers different in the book than in the movie?
14. What do you think the moral of the story in *The Firm* is?
15. In either *Jurassic Park* or *The Firm*, whom did you identify with, if anyone?
16. What do you think about McDeere?
17. What do you think about Ian Malcolm, the chaos theorist?
18. What positive messages do you see, if any, portrayed in *Jurassic Park*?
19. What negative messages do you see, if any, portrayed in *Jurassic Park*?
20. What negative messages do you see, if any, portrayed in *The Firm*?
21. What positive messages do you see, if any, portrayed in *The Firm*?
22. Have we missed anything? Or is there anything you would like to add about *Jurassic Park* and *The Firm*?
23. Summarize participants' interpretations of and reactions to the texts and ask if they agree with our summary. Ask participants to compare their interpretation(s) with audience conjectures.

NOTES

1. Note also that the text encountered was far from randomly selected. *Cagney and Lacey* was a show with a self-conscious ideological perspective (van Zoonen 1994, 43–46), and the episode Condit (1989) studied concerned the volatile issue of abortion. How meanings are contested with such texts could be quite different than with the many programs that try to avoid being ‘political’. Only with further audience research can we learn how typical or generalizable Condit’s findings are.
2. We limit ourselves to rhetorical criticism of popular culture texts in order to offer a more precise and example-driven case for audience research to support audience conjectures; clearly the scope of our rationale could be expanded to apply to rhetorical criticism involving audience conjectures in general.
3. Among the assumptions that require investigation is whether or not so-called expert critics are as immune to the ideological workings of popular culture criticism as some textual analysis implies. Van Zoonen describes this as the ‘unsatisfactory politics hidden in the textual politics’, namely, the assumption that critics can ‘recognize the hegemonic thrust of media output and are able to resist its devastating effects, while the audience is still lured by its attractions and temptations’ (1994, 106).
4. Matthew 13:13: ‘That is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand’.
5. As a result of our conversations with Goodnight concerning an earlier draft of this essay, we are convinced that he reads his essay both as opening up interpretive possibilities (creative-mediational) and as a critical commentary on the texts’ complicity with postmodern skepticism (corrective). Accordingly, we discuss both ways of reading the essay.
6. The notion that attitudes and behavior differ among generations because of different formative experiences originates with Karl Mannheim’s essay, ‘The Problem of Generations’ (1952/1928, 276–322) and is still a point of disagreement among sociologists. Some studies clearly document age-related differences in opinion on some issues (Moore 1995b; Newport 1995), but Ladd and others have argued that such differences may simply reflect the different needs and interests of people going through various stages of their life, rather than on a particularly distinctive generational identity: ‘Neither the boomers nor the thirteeners are “profoundly different” generations’ (Ladd 1993, 15). Other studies suggest that on many specific issues, age or generational affiliation, are not particularly relevant to political outlook (see, e.g., Moore 1995a, 5) or suggest that class, race, and gender are at least as important (Astrom 1993). A study on attitudes toward US involvement in the Persian Gulf War found that one’s genera-

tion correlated with which historical analogies one tended to see (Vietnam versus World War II) but did not have significant bearing on whether one supported or opposed the war (Schuman and Rieger 1992). Noting that hypothesized general differences are ‘weak in most areas of social and political outlook’, Ladd concludes ‘there just aren’t any large patterned differences involving mood, confidence, and satisfaction among the various age strata’ (1993, 16). At most the concerns of Generation Xers are the same as any generation in their twenties: ‘The twentysomethings are just young men and women, not a generation in any substantial social and political sense’ (Ladd 1993, 18).

7. We owe this observation to David Zarefsky.

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Assessing Audience Reactions to Winston Churchill's Speeches

Richard Toye

INTRODUCTION

Winston Churchill (1874–1965) holds a unique place in the British historical imagination. Globally famous from his 20s, he was perceived by many of his contemporaries as both brilliant and untrustworthy. His mercurial, egotistical behaviour, his taste for adventure and his predilection for flawed schemes, such as the disastrous 1915 Dardanelles campaign, were such that his political career up to 1939 has been labelled ‘a study in failure’ (Rhodes James 1970). At the outbreak of World War II, after spending a decade out of office, he returned to the Cabinet as First Lord of the Admiralty (minister responsible for the navy) in the government of Neville Chamberlain. When Chamberlain fell during the crisis of May 1940, Churchill emerged as his replacement and led the nation to victory. Defeated, nonetheless, at the general election of 1945, he spent 6 years in Opposition before coming back to power for a final spell as Prime Minister. He is rightly seen as an orator of world-historical significance, and he was undeniably successful in that field. However, audience reactions were much more complicated than mythology suggests.

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My book *The Roar of the Lion* (Toye 2013b) documented how Churchill's World War II speeches generated considerably more criticism and controversy than popular memory suggests. This, clearly, is not the same thing as saying that the speeches were not good: although in practice the suggestion is often understood as criticism of Churchill's ability as a speaker. The actual point was that the nature of Churchill's rhetorical success needed to be rethought. The speeches that are most famous today, snippets of which are endlessly replayed on TV and radio, are not necessarily the ones that were most successful in their own time. His plain, unadorned, factual addresses—such as his 4 July 1940 Commons speech explaining the reasons for the British destruction of the French fleet—were at least as effective as many of his more quotable ones. Moreover, Churchill's oratory continues to be received and argued over by new audiences decades after his death.

This chapter explains the use of historical, archivally based methodology for the study of the reception of rhetoric and shows how such research can be located within the fields of rhetorical studies, historical research into the science of public opinion, and accounts of cultures of public speaking. It describes how to apply the archival method and discusses its strengths and limitations. It reflects on the potential benefits that it has for rhetorical studies but also acknowledges the difficulty of analysing the impact of specific rhetorical constructions. It then provides a case study, by assessing reactions to some of Churchill's post-war speeches. Alongside all this, the chapter considers how the method itself can be historicised—that is to say, what was it about the specific historical moment of the 1940s that led to the creation of the sources that made this methodology possible? Furthermore, the chapter is a response to Leah Ceccarelli's call for efforts to bridge disciplinary gaps, in this case by explaining how humanities methods may be of benefit to those in the social sciences (Ceccarelli 2001). Although there is nothing inherently revolutionary about using a combination of diaries, newspapers and opinion research to measure audience responses to rhetoric (see, e.g. Bostdorff 2008), the precise technique and its benefits may not be well understood outside the historical profession. This may in part be due to historians often failing to explain their methods sufficiently.

CHURCHILL'S RHETORIC IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Churchill has long fascinated biographers and historians. He has received plenty of adulation; the massive official biography begun by his son Randolph and completed by Martin Gilbert is invaluable in documentary

terms but essentially uncritical (Churchill and Gilbert 1966–1988). He has also been condemned by many scholars on various grounds, ranging from his doubtful judgement on military affairs (e.g. Roskill 1977) to his alleged geo-political hubris (Charmley 1993). However, the impact of Churchill's wartime oratory long went essentially unquestioned. Even in the Marxist interpretation of his sole Soviet biographer, 'Churchill's speeches impressed the masses, who had, at long last, found a dynamic wartime leader who gave voice to their own feelings' (Trukhanovsky 1978: 257).

Trukhanovsky was far from the only writer to make such an assertion without citing any proof. And yet, prolific evidence exists that allow an assessment to be made. In fact, it is hard to think of any series of speeches where the documents that facilitate the analysis of audience reactions are so abundant. Historians have been well aware of the existence of these sources, which have been widely used for other purposes. Indeed, there has been some cursory use of them to analyse reactions to Churchill's speeches, albeit in a selective way which ignores or downplays critical comments (Mackay 2002: 177–178). The fact that, until recently, they had been not used *systematically* to assess the effects of Churchill's speeches is testament to the power of myth. It was taken as axiomatic that the speeches were received rapturously by all but a tiny number of people: therefore there was no need to investigate further. As a consequence, although many insightful things have been written about Churchill's rhetoric (notably Cannadine 2002; Charteris-Black 2005; Lukacs 2008), they tend to share a flaw. Because it is assumed that the speeches were 'inspiring', then the problem to be solved becomes to show how this was achieved through the use of metaphor, proverbs and so on. But what if, for at least some speeches or some groups, this was not the impact at all? Surely, before we start to ask how a speaker achieved his or her effects, we should try to find out what those effects actually were.

This last point reflects a more general problem with the Churchill historiography. There has been a tendency to treat Churchill too much in his own terms, rather than to place him truly in his social and cultural context, although some scholars have recently begun to attempt this (Alkon 2006; Toye 2010a; Clarke 2012; Rose 2014). The task is not merely to judge the merits of Churchill (or any other speaker) as an individual and to assess whether he was farsighted or reactionary with respect to any given episode or policy area. Although we should not ignore those questions, to answer them requires a sensitive appreciation of the societal norms and political

culture under which he was operating. As such, the historical study of the reception of rhetoric could be seen as a contribution to the ‘New Political History’, which attempts to ‘to reconcile the long-established concerns of “traditional” political historians—leadership and institutions—with a more innovative interest in the culture of representative politics and how this related to the people’ (Fielding 2007: 515). Indeed, rhetoric cannot be viewed only in terms of text and language, separated from the physical means by which it is transmitted to those who receive it. It is not possible to derive the ‘meaning’ of a given set of words purely by analysing the text, in isolation from the conditions in which that text was generated, mediated and received. Language and ideas have to be understood in the context of technology, space, gesture, vocal technique and acoustics, even if it is hard to recapture many of these elements through the historical sources that are available to us (Toye 2013a: 4).

Clearly, an emphasis on rhetoric as a social phenomenon is not novel in and of itself. This is present, for example, in Kenneth Burke’s concept of ‘identification’ (Hochmuth 1952) and in the work of many others. Arguably, though, many scholars pay insufficient attention to the radical instability of speaker-audience interactions. The promise of rhetorical handbooks is that, if you follow the rules they lay down, ‘You’ll mold the minds of men and women to your will, and make any group yield to your voice’ (Heinrichs 2010: 18). Yet there is in reality no guarantee that even a beautifully constructed speech will be well received, especially where there are multiple audiences; it is not possible to know how a message will travel. These unstable audience reactions are crucial beyond their consequences for the reception of a given speech, because they drive future iterations of rhetoric, which are crafted in response to expectations (constantly evolving but very possibly false) of how listeners, viewers and readers will respond. In this way, rhetoric does not simply express existing ideas but is part of the process by which new ideas are generated.

Therefore, audience reactions are crucial to understanding rhetoric. However, it is often extremely hard to know for certain what those reactions actually were. This is obviously the case in respect of the great speeches of antiquity. The problem lessens in respect of the modern period. For example, Jon Lawrence’s work on British electoral culture describes the codes and conventions surrounding public meetings, with a focus on heckling, ‘rowdiness’ and violence. Using press and other contemporary accounts, he illustrates, for example, how the disruption of opponents became less acceptable after 1918, partly in response to fears of

the breakdown of the social hierarchy (Lawrence 2009). Applied at the macro level—how, in general, audiences and speakers were expected to behave—this methodology is revealing. At the micro level—that of the responses aroused by particular speeches—it can be more problematic. This is particularly the case where the press is the source of information, because, although reports convey attitudes to particular kinds of behaviour, it is hard to know whether the precise behaviour described actually took place on any given occasion. The journalist concerned may have exaggerated or downplayed what happened for partisan reasons. Nor, in fact, is there any guarantee that a journalist actually observed the meeting being reported, at least where minor occasions are concerned. For example, we know that, as a rising politician, Churchill used to send newspapers the texts of his speeches ‘properly punctuated with “Cheers”’, thus saving the trouble and expense of journalists having to write the reports themselves.¹ And even where press and politicians did not collude in this way, the journalists themselves may often have spiced up their accounts to make events seem more interesting than they really were. Churchill was certainly of the opinion that this was the case in respect of reports of parliamentary proceedings (Select Committee on Procedure on Public Business 1931: 146).

CHANGING CONCEPTS OF PUBLIC OPINION

For the 1940s, however, there is a wealth of material which, whilst presenting difficulties, does offer unparalleled opportunities for assessing public opinion, including the ‘vernacular discussion’ (or popular commentary) element, the importance of which has been highlighted by Gerard Hauser (Hauser 1998). The very term ‘public opinion’ requires analysis. In a recent book, James Thompson has explored the concept in the pre-1914 period, showing how it was intertwined with ideas about the platform, parliament and the press. The Edwardians and Victorians did not see public opinion as simply the sum of the citizenry’s private opinions; rather, what concerned them was opinion expressed in public, and how sincerely and persistently a given view was expressed was at least as important as the number of people that happened to hold it. Opinions were to be ‘*weighed* rather than *counted*’ (Thompson 2013: 23, emphasis in original). By the time of World War II, by which time modern-style opinion polling was in its infancy, there had been a significant change in how public opinion was regarded. Tom Harrison, one of the main pioneers

of sociological opinion research, described it as ‘this great conglomeration of private opinions’ and took as his operating assumption the idea that ‘Public opinion only comes from the minds and the tongues of the people’ (Harrisson 1940: 369). There is some evidence, though, that Churchill himself continued to cleave to older assumptions and saw modern opinion research as otiose at best; that is to say, although he could have taken such research on his previous speeches into account when drafting new ones, he likely did not do so to any significant degree. (McLaine 1979: 258). As an inveterate reader of the press, he seems to have held to the belief, prevalent at least up until 1914, that newspapers mirrored their readers’ opinions—as if they did not, sales would dry up (Thompson 2013: 95–99). He appears to have been blithely unaware at the time of the Gallup polls that predicted his heavy electoral defeat in 1945 (Moran 1968: 335), nor was he the only politician to fail to take them seriously.

SOURCES FOR INVESTIGATING THE RECEPTION OF CHURCHILL’S SPEECHES

We need to be aware, then, that the sources for understanding the reception of Churchill’s speeches were to a substantial degree the product of (contested) beliefs about what ‘public opinion’ was, why it was important and how it should be measured. The major sources are as follows. The sociological research organisation Mass-Observation (MO) was founded in 1937 by Tom Harrisson and the poet Charles Madge who recruited a network of volunteers. It used three main techniques. First, ordinary people submitted diaries of their everyday lives and their observations on the views and activities of those around them. Second, they responded to MO ‘directives’ which asked their views on specific topics. Third, MO produced ‘file reports’ based on the reports of its own field observers, sometimes drawing on diary evidence and responses to directives as well. Some file reports included primitive opinion polls of dubious reliability (which is not to say that other polling organisations’ supposedly more scientific methods were unproblematic [Roodhouse 2013]). In addition to MO evidence, there are the Home Intelligence Reports of the Ministry of Information (MoI) produced (first on a daily and then a weekly basis) from May 1940 to the end of 1944. Like MO, the ministry made some use of face-to-face interviews, but it also had plenty of other sources of information. It drew on a network of informants, as well as on questionnaires

filled in by bodies ranging from W.H. Smith and Sons to the Brewers' Society. Postal censorship and police Special Branch reports were also used (Addison and Crang 2010: xiv). As with MO, the reports generated were heavily qualitative rather than quantitative.

MO cooperated with the MoI during the war, and thus the reports that both generated cannot be considered as wholly independent sources. However, the two organisations—between which there was a degree of mutual suspicion—had different agendas and different biases. MO was a self-consciously 'progressive' organisation and many of its self-selecting (and disproportionately middle class) signed up because they shared those values (Summerfield 1985). Conceivably, this led to over-reporting of dissent. On the other hand, MoI may well have fallen prey to official caution, and downplayed or toned-down criticisms of ministers, who were amongst the audience for the reports. Thus, although MO evidence suggests that many people thought Churchill was drunk when broadcasting his 18 June 1940 'finest hour' speech, the ministry reported only 'widespread comment on his delivery', and did not say what the nature of this comment was (Toye 2013b: 58). Similarly, an MO file report criticised a Home Intelligence Report which had found 'universal approval' of Churchill's broadcast of 14 July 1940. Arguing that in fact 'no broadcast receives universal approval', it suggested that genuinely high levels of approbation of the speech masked more complex reactions that were evoked by it, including depression and anxiety.² Yet although none of this documentation (which can be supplemented with other forms of archival and published evidence) can be taken purely at face value, it still has great utility. Indeed, reading the materials with an appreciation of the circumstances of their creation can only enhance their value.

But what should the scholar of rhetoric actually do with such evidence? Historians are often reluctant to describe their methods—taking for granted, perhaps, the utility of archives and other primary sources—with the result that their colleagues in the social sciences fail to see the value of their work, or at least find it woefully under-theorised and methodologically under-specified. Anna Greenwood and Andrea Bernardi's explanation is worth reproducing at length:

Key is the investigation of primary sources (archive work), the selection of them (historical data is not the sum of historical documents), the acknowledgement of hermeneutics (documents need interpretation), the triangulation of sources (sources need to be verified and put in a hierarchy of

credibility), the verification of memory gaps or over emphasis (one needs an awareness of the possibility that the past can be either deleted or invented), thick contextualization (events should only be understood in a context), critical analysis of documents (correspondences may be written with tacit objectives) engagement with the historiography (showing an awareness of critical approaches that have subsequently been applied to the data by other historians). (Greenwood and Bernardi 2014: 917)

Before we examine how this can be applied in the case of Churchill's rhetoric, it is necessary to elucidate the different types of oratory in which he engaged as wartime Prime Minister—because how and where he spoke had an influence on the ways in which his speeches were received and therefore has an impact on how the archive is interpreted. As he himself noted at the time: 'It has been aptly remarked that Ministers, and indeed all other public men, when they make speeches at the present time have always to bear in mind three audiences: one our own fellow countrymen, secondly, our friends abroad, and thirdly, the enemy. This naturally makes the task of public speaking very difficult' (Speech of 12 Nov. 1941).³ Except for the five speeches which he delivered in Secret Session of the House of Commons, this applied to everything he said. Yet his *immediate* audiences were quite widely variegated, and this affected the ways in which his words resonated around the world. Here are the major categories:

1. Set-piece parliamentary speeches and answers to MPs' questions.
2. Broadcasts chiefly or ostensibly directed to the British people but also relayed around the world and accessible to some listeners in enemy or enemy-occupied territory. Occasionally these broadcasts (notably 18 June 1940) reprised speeches that Churchill had made earlier in the Commons.
3. Broadcasts chiefly or ostensibly directed towards the people of enemy or enemy-occupied countries (to France, 21 October 1940; to Italy, 23 December 1940) but also heard within the UK and probably elsewhere.
4. Speeches made on public occasions within the UK and—often—recorded and/or filmed by newsreel crews.
5. Speeches made on public occasions outside the UK, notably Churchill's addresses to the US Congress (26 December 1941 and 19 May 1943) and to the Canadian parliament (30 Dec. 1941). These too were broadcast globally and filmed.

In spite of paper shortages, British listeners were always able to read very full newspaper accounts of Churchill's speeches, and sometimes did so in addition to having listened to them. (Many of the speeches were published in book form during the war as well.) The speeches also received global media coverage, including in enemy nations; although the media there naturally presented them in a selective and biased way, the authorities could not suppress news of them entirely and perhaps did not want to.

APPLYING THE ARCHIVAL-HISTORICAL METHOD

In the light of the above, it will be clear that the question of how to assess audience reactions to Churchill varies significantly on a case by case basis. It is possible, though, to give a broad outline of the archival-historical technique that can be modified according to circumstance. It is worth emphasising that what types of evidence are available to assess any particular historical case of rhetorical reception is dependent on the conditions and context under which the speech(es) in question were created. So, it would be impossible to gauge popular reactions to the oratory of Pitt the Younger in the same way as can be done for Churchill, because the requisite survey techniques had not yet been invented. But this does not mean that more recent audiences are necessarily easier to assess. When Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister, the available methods were arguably more sophisticated, yet in practice nobody found it necessary to track the population's detailed reactions to everything she said. In other words, the task of the researcher is not only to locate such evidence of reception as may exist in the relevant case, but to understand why such evidence was (or was not) created (and in due course preserved), which in turn may illustrate a particular attitude to the rhetoric itself. In other words, there can be no hard and fast rules about what sources should be used, or about what their specific strengths and limitations may be.

Therefore, I will use the case of Churchill as an exemplar, but it cannot be used as a model that can be replicated mechanically for all other orators. The method is as follows. First, assess any evidence that casts light on the drafting process of the speech in question. This may include, if available, the speech file in the Churchill Papers and/or the UK National Archives. Any handwritten amendments or deletions by Churchill himself will of course be of interest, but so too will be suggestions or reactions by ministers, officials and others. This helps us understand the 'context of anticipation' (Toye 2013a: 69)—that is to say, the objections that Churchill

and his advisers believed he might meet from his various audiences and how they tried to deal with them in advance. Second, the text of the speech itself must be read carefully and its reliability established insofar as possible, preferably by checking against the original audio or film where it exists. Evidence of interruptions, laughter or applause can be very useful, as can journalists' descriptions. Third, memoir and diary accounts by those physically present should be considered. So should newspaper and radio editorials and commentaries: the BBC's *Digest of Foreign Broadcasts* and the records of the US Foreign Broadcast Information Service (from 1941) are an invaluable source in this respect, as they provide English summaries of global radio coverage. Finally, it is necessary to turn to MoI and MO records, and to MO diaries, as well as to any other letters and diaries by members of the public that can be traced. In the case of broadcasts, the BBC Listener Research Department's audience figures should be consulted (Toye 2013b: 231–232). The statistics may not be perfect, and they apply only to the adult civilian population, but they do at least give a sense of the relative popularity of a given speech.⁴

Of course the process is not in practice as linear as this suggests. Each historian will assemble and write up evidence in a different way, and the research process inevitably throws up new lines of enquiry as one goes along. Exactly how much weight is to be attributed to each piece of evidence is, of course, the most complex problem. In terms of the political diarists who recorded Churchill's wartime speeches, there is a fairly short list of 'usual suspects' who commented vividly and repeatedly—in particular, Leo Amery, 'Chips' Channon, Hugh Dalton, Cuthbert Headlam and Harold Nicolson. Each of these was insightful in his own way, but all had their own idiosyncrasies and biases; and some of their more colourful phrases are potentially misleading. When should one quote a diary entry, as opposed to paraphrasing it or merely citing it in a footnote? These dilemmas are obviously lessened if one writes about a particular speech at article length (Toye 2010b); they become much more acute if one is trying to treat a series of speeches more briefly in order to draw comparisons between them.

The problem of weighting naturally also applies to Home Intelligence and Mass-Observation sources and to diary material. My technique was to outline the findings of the MoI and MO (where both are available) and to draw attention to any significant conflicts between them. I used the diaries to adumbrate or illustrate views reported in the surveys, for indeed there is much overlap between them. What the diaries can do, which, in general, the surveys do not, is to illuminate the detail of how the speeches were consumed, not

least the crucial question of how far people gave them concentrated attention. Consider this account, by a 26-year-old housewife and part-time civil servant, A.A. Crouch. It contains her response to the July 1942 'no confidence' debate, which had been called by Churchill's parliamentary opponents in the face of the deteriorating military situation in North Africa:

Listened to the report of the Commons debate. I thought that [Aneurin] Bevan and [Leslie] Hore Belisha made some good points, and I agree that Churchill ought not to have spoken last. His remarks of 'news of grave importance from Egypt' was sobering. I have been talking about our not being able to hold Egypt, but somehow it seems to drive it home when Churchill implies the same thing. Jack said, 'The Commons debate will make people who have been clamouring for a second front, stop and think'.⁵

This is a rich source, which reveals the complexity of reactions to Churchill's speeches, even when they were essentially positive. Crouch approved of what Churchill said, but found it 'sobering' rather than inspiring, and she gave some credence to his critics, Bevan and Hore-Belisha. She appears to have taken the view that by closing the debate rather than opening it, Churchill had dodged full scrutiny of his position. The reference to the clamour for a second front draws attention to popular criticism of the government, albeit by no means all of this was directed at Churchill personally. In addition, we learn that she reached her conclusions on the basis of a BBC report (rather than a newspaper one) and that she discussed it afterwards with her husband. It seems that they had listened to it together, although this is not absolutely clear. Nevertheless, we do know from many other diaries that Churchill's radio speeches were often consumed communally, with some listeners paying more attention than others; sometimes people offered comments and humorous interjections. Frequently, speeches were discussed later with others, leading some to modify their initial views. In other words, with respect to the modern age, assessing reactions to rhetoric must also involve the history of news and news consumption.

LIMITATIONS OF THE ARCHIVAL-HISTORICAL METHOD

It must be conceded, moreover, that there are limits to what the archival-historical method can achieve. In particular, although it is fully possible to analyse how the general message of a speech went down, it is much harder

to track the role that specific language formulations played in getting that message across. Some diarists, like A.A. Crouch (mentioned above), drew attention to particular phrases. Others, like the novelist Naomi Royde Smith (who was writing for publication) provided detailed and compelling analysis of Churchill's technique (Royde Smith 1941: 42–43). Such comments can be illuminating, but they only take us so far, although they do indeed take us further than official sources. In the Commons on 20 August 1940 Churchill declared: 'Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few'. According to the next day's Home Intelligence Report, 'Churchill's speech yesterday, particularly his reference to the RAF, thought to be completely right—epitomises the feeling of the country' (Addison and Crang 2010: 352). But although linguistic scholars can identify the quotation as an example of *antithesis* and explain how it 'works' (Lanham 2003: 126), this concrete evidence of its reception, though important, does little to illuminate *why* it was liked.

There is also the question of how far the methodology can be applied to speakers other than Churchill. Clearly, it would be exceedingly difficult to apply it to Churchill or anybody else during World War I, when there was no equivalent of MO or of the MoI's Home Intelligence division, although a remorseless examination of private letters and diaries might yield some fruit. However, the technique could definitely be useful for other major speakers in World War II Britain, because the same evidence base can be used, even if they attract less comment in the sources than Churchill did. Equally, there is some scope for assessing the impact of Nazi rhetoric on ordinary Germans through the reports of the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD), which was the Nazi Party and SS intelligence service. As it happens, these reports also provide a small amount of insight into how Churchill's speeches went down in Germany.

However, we have to remember that it is only possible to analyse Churchill's wartime speeches because of the intersection of a very particular set of circumstances. The prevalence of certain set of beliefs about the nature of public opinion and the ways in which it should be studied combined with the obvious and compelling need to investigate civilian morale and the question how rhetoric affected it. When, towards the end of the war, morale ceased to be a concern, the Ministry of Information ceased to report on it. MO continued its activities, but after 1945 it paid less attention to Churchill's speeches *per se*, even though he himself remained an object of interest to the organisation. It is safe to say that the reactions to subsequent Prime Ministers' speeches have never been recorded on the

same scale as was the case during World War II. It may in due course turn out that, for the more recent period, the results of focus groups have been archived at that they can cast light on the reception of prime ministerial speech. Overall, though, it is clear that intense surveillance of the population's views *in the form that it was carried out in 1940–1944* means that Churchill's speeches at that time will remain somewhat unique in terms of our capacity to assess audience reactions. Therefore, scholars wishing to study other figures are obliged to be creative in their approaches. Franklin D. Roosevelt's postbag has been used to assess reactions to his first inaugural address (Houck and Nocasian 2002). Similarly, the right-wing British Conservative Enoch Powell's notorious 1968 'Rivers of Blood' speech, which attacked immigration, brought him over 100,000 letters in response, which have been preserved and analysed (Whipple 2009). Other politicians also received (smaller) postbags in response to speeches and broadcasts on a range of issues, and although this evidence presents its own problems, here is an area where there is scope for further research.

CASE STUDY: CHURCHILL'S SPEECH OF 21 JANUARY 1950

Having delineated the archival-historical method, I will illustrate it using one of Churchill's post-war speeches as a case study. In a valuable recent contribution, Kevin Theakston has examined Churchill's relatively neglected 1945–1955 speeches. Theakston suggests that 'whereas as Leader of the Opposition his preferred approach was to mount thunderous, slashing and strongly worded attacks on the mistakes and failings of the Labour government, his tone on return to office was more restrained and consensual'. Once back in Downing Street, Churchill presented himself almost as a Baldwinian-style societal healer, promising 'several years of quiet, steady administration' rather than controversy and adventure (Theakston 2015: 31, 39). Theakston also notes how, as Churchill's health declined, speechmaking became an important way for him to demonstrate to his colleagues and the public that he was still up to the job. Surprisingly, though, Theakston makes no attempt to assess the popular impact of the speeches. Whereas the sources available to do so are, as I have mentioned, more limited than for the war years, there are still a number of possibilities. They are unusually rich for the speech that I have chosen: a radio broadcast that Churchill made during the 1950 general election, on 21 January that year.

The broader context for that broadcast was as follows. After his electoral defeat 5 years previously, Churchill, to the regret of a number of his colleagues, had decided to persevere in his leadership of the Conservative Party. As Leader of the Opposition, he took a very hands-off approach, delegating many of his responsibilities in the House of Commons to his heir apparent, former Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden. He spent much time working on his war memoirs (Reynolds 2004) and rebuilding his reputation as a farsighted international statesman. During 1946, as part of this latter process, he delivered his ‘iron curtain’ speech in Fulton, Missouri, and his ‘United States of Europe’ speech in Zürich. We know a considerable amount about the (initially divided) reception of the Fulton speech in the USA, on account of the large number of Americans who wrote to or telegraphed Churchill about it (Ramsden 2002: 163–165). Much less is known about the reaction of the UK population, although half-a-dozen MO diaries do indicate that there was both broad interest and a wide range of opinions. People divided between applauding Churchill’s political comeback and denouncing him as a warmonger. According to one diarist, ‘this speech of his has been more discussed than any speech for a long time’.⁶ By contrast, it is only possible to identify two diarists who wrote about the ‘United States of Europe’ address, which rather confirms the view of one of them that ‘Churchill’s speech of Zurich has not made nearly such an impression as his American speeches’.⁷ Churchill made conscious efforts to ensure that his speeches received wide coverage, but, as during the war, although he could shape the conditions for their reception, he could not fully control them (Christiansen 1961: 220–221).

In 1947, the Labour government of Clement Attlee came to the end of its political honeymoon. The fuel and convertibility crises of that year led to further consumer restrictions, at a time when the population had long been suffering from shortages and queues. The Conservative Party, alleging ideologically induced incompetence, used austerity to appeal, in particular, to female consumers and to voters who identified as Liberal (Zweiniger-Bargielowska 2000). The Conservatives were allied with the ‘National Liberal’ Party, which was a product of the Liberal splits of the 1930s and which was resented intensely by the independent Liberal Party led by Clement Davies. Churchill, who himself had spent nearly 20 years as a Liberal after 1904, was well placed to emphasise the need for Liberalism and Conservatism to unite in the face of the socialist threat, and frequently did so. By contrast, he made few explicit efforts to make gendered appeals

to women voters. He himself, having suffered a stroke in 1949, was in poor health, and he certainly had to struggle against perceptions that he was past his best. However, he had grounds for optimism. By the turn of 1950, polling evidence suggested a likely narrow Conservative election victory.

Moreover, the Conservatives were now much better informed about voters' opinions than they had been just a few years earlier. Paralleling developments in opinion research on the other side of the Atlantic (Simonson 2006), the party founded a new Public Opinion Research Department (PORD) in 1948 (Taylor 2003; Beers 2006). 1949–1950 witnessed some fascinating efforts to get to grips with what the voters were thinking. (For our purposes, these help compensate for the relative lack of useful MO material in this period. Whilst there are a large number of Directive responses on Churchill, and although these sometimes comment on his rhetorical style as well as giving general opinions, they are not of much use when it comes to assessing the effect of individual speeches.) According to one of PORD's early reports:

Samples of opinion from the constituencies show that Socialist "fear propaganda" is continuing to have effect, particularly when it points to the high unemployment figures between the wars and insists that the same state of affairs will recur if the Tories return to power. The alleged intention of the Conservatives to make cuts in wages and Social Services is also being used effectively. There have been further reports of the 'warmonger' taunt being leveled at Mr. Churchill.⁸

The Tories had in fact reviewed their policies in the wake of their crushing defeat. The July 1949 document *The Right Road for Britain* committed them to the maintenance of full employment and the welfare state, and even the temporary retention of controls on prices and consumption. Churchill's task during the 1950 election, then, was to counteract these charges, whilst simultaneously to ensure that Conservative plans did not appear merely as 'Tory Socialism' (Nicholas 1951: 68). In his 21 January broadcast, his opening one of the campaign, he focused on these domestic issues. (Subsequently he addressed the 'warmonger' charge by calling for high-level talks with the Soviet Union (Speech of 14 Feb. 1950).) Churchill's aims for the speech seem quite clear. He appears to have wanted to repeat the essential charge of his first broadcast of the 1945 campaign, that socialism would lead to the progressive diminution of freedom. On

the other hand, he also seems to have wanted to avoid the controversy he had evoked then by his claim that a Labour government would be obliged to introduce ‘some form of *Gestapo*’ (broadcast of 4 June 1945).

Churchill wrote the speech with the assistance of the young Reginald Maudling, a Conservative rising star and parliamentary candidate, who worked in the party’s Research Department, and who had a consensus-based approach to politics (Gilbert 1988, 503 n.1). The Shadow Cabinet also seems to have been consulted (Hull *Daily Mail*, 20 Jan. 1950). Amendments to the various drafts of the speech illustrate the nature of Churchill’s rhetorical dilemma. He wanted to show that the Conservatives really were committed to full employment and social security. At the same time, he did not want to put too much stress on cross party agreement. Amongst his deletions was the acknowledgement that, as yet, only 20% of British industry had been nationalised and that thus ‘the main bulk of our life is as yet unaltered’. He replaced this with the statement that ‘The process of establishing the Socialist State has only begun’. Similarly, although he retained the observation that ‘on the question of unemployment there is no real difference between the two political parties’, he removed the following sentence, that ‘We are agreed on how it should be dealt with should it appear’. When we look at these changes, we can see his preference for ‘slashing’ attacks battling with his more consensual instincts and largely triumphing, albeit there were no extreme comments of the ‘Gestapo’ type. His remark that ‘Communism is complete Socialism imposed without regard to political liberty by force, and if need be by terror’ did not make the final cut.⁹

As delivered from Chartwell (Churchill’s home in Kent), the broadcast presented the election as a choice between taking ‘another plunge into Socialist regimentation’ or making a powerful effort to ‘regain the freedom, initiative and opportunity of British life’. Churchill lambasted the government for ‘glorying in controls for controls’ sake’ and at the same time assured voters that the Conservatives and National Liberals believed in ‘the establishment and maintenance of a basic standard of life’ below which no one should be allowed to fall. The broadcast was short on policy specifics, but Churchill did try to take some credit for the Attlee government’s achievements: ‘As head of the wartime Government I proclaimed [in 1943] the Four Years’ Plan of social reform—Education, Family Allowances and the National Health Scheme. Although mauled and twisted by ministerial ineptitude, this programme has now largely been carried through’. He ended with a characteristically Churchillian perora-

tion about 'the struggle for right and freedom [...] for which our forbears had nerved our hearts down the long aisles of time' (Broadcast of 21 Jan. 1950). The speech cannot, however, be considered a classic. Conservative MP Cuthbert Headlam listened to it with his wife: 'It was a different affair to the opening performance at the last election—I suppose that [Lord] Woolton [Conservative Party Chairman] & Co. had begged him to be less truculent—the result was to my mind very dull—indeed, I fell asleep before it ended—so did Beatrice' (S. Ball 1999: 615).

The press reactions ran on predictable lines. Churchill's words won support from the *Times*, *Financial Times*, and *Daily Mail* (all 23 Jan. 1950), the latter of which hailed him 'The Voice of Britain'. The Liberal *Manchester Guardian* (23 Jan. 1950) found the broadcast 'woolly in its treatment of the facts' and suggested that in his attack on controls he had repudiated the analysis presented in *The Right Road for Britain*. The left-wing *Daily Mirror* (23 Jan. 1950) ran a front page leader about the broadcast under the headline 'The Insult'. It argued:

The British people must apparently accept a picture of themselves as a miserable and spineless horde, the helpless slaves of a system of deadly 'controls.' They must accept a picture of the world in which every country outside the Iron Curtain except Britain is 'free,' happy and going at full speed on the road of progress, and that in Britain we are sinking under frustration and laziness. This is an insulting picture of the British people.

What of the public's response? The speech had been heard by 40% of the adult population; the fact that it was given on a Saturday night may have lowered the figure. (By contrast, his second and final broadcast—which, unlike the first, was repeated—was heard by 51%, and Attlee's sole broadcast was heard by 44% [Nicholas 1951: 127].) Conservative Central Office had provided the party's local agents with forms and instructions to be distributed to investigators who were to ascertain the public's views.¹⁰ Over a thousand people who had heard the broadcast were asked their opinion. PORD was aware that its sample was imperfect; Conservatives were over-represented at the expense of 'Doubtfuls'. The results were as found in Fig. 3.1.

There was some regional variation; for example, Liberals were in favour of the broadcast in the West Midlands but divided elsewhere. Given that there is a doubtful element to the statistics, it is perhaps more useful to focus on the summary of which points were well received well and which

Voting intention	Cons.	Lib.	Lab.	Other	Doubtful/ not voting	all
Favourable	519	39	54*	4	126	742
Unfavourable	23	29	215	10	55	332
Totals	542	68	269	14	181	1074

*includes two voters who switched to the Conservatives.

Fig. 3.1 Listener reactions to Churchill's broadcast of 21 January 1950

badly. In the former category, Churchill's comments on housing, food and the cost of living were approved by many, as were his remarks on full employment, opposition to regimentation, and his hope and faith in the future of the country. Additionally, his restraint was praised: "Fair criticism"—"no vituperation"—"clean"—"fair without bitterness"—"country above Party"—"No rash promises". This aspect of the broadcast 'appealed to all types of listener'. Criticisms focused on Churchill's failure to give any credit to the Labour government, his reliance on 'Mere Propaganda' and 'False Promises' and his advocacy of the removals of controls ('Conservatives [are] only for Capitalists', it was suggested). Churchill was also attacked for his lack of a constructive policy and for his suggestion that the National Health Service was in need of improvement. Labour supporters and a few Liberals noted that house-building would have to come at the expense of something else—but what?—and suggested that the government was doing the best it could on this score. According to PORD's report: 'Most of the remaining reasons offered for dislike of the broadcast were stock socialist slogans, e.g. "Unemployment under Conservatives", "Churchill warmonger", etc. Eleven Socialists and two Doubtfuls wave the Daily Mirror's answer of Monday 23rd January'.¹¹

Diary evidence, however, is very limited. It has only been possible to locate two MO diaries that deal with this particular broadcast. Happily, however, they took opposing points of view, so if they are of little help in gauging opinion in quantitative terms, they do at least give an indication of the spectrum of views. B. Hartley, a male bank clerk from North London, gave his approval.

Got in home to hear the first few sentences of Churchill's broadcast which sounded good. The theme was the same as the last 'Gestapo' broadcast in

1945 but so much more reasonably put. The years in the wilderness have done him good, no man is safe with power and after the war he felt like a God, the cold douche of defeat has matured him.¹²

This makes it clear that although Hartley viewed the Attlee government as corrupt and was determined to get rid of it, he was not an unqualified admirer of Churchill. The passage also shows that—in common with many other MO diarists—Hartley had a reasonably long political memory, as evidenced by his reference to the ‘Gestapo’ speech. In her comments, N.E. Underwood, a housewife and clerk from Sheffield, also drew comparisons with Churchill’s previous rhetoric, as well as making reference to the interwar period:

Churchill has lost much of his fire, no wonder, he is old. His teeth don’t seem to fit too well, or was it whiskey impeding him? He wasted the first few mins. by mentioning things well known. As for the rest of what he said, much is old stuff, but some of it shows a change. Imagine the Tories caring about [the] unemployed. And I’d like to tell them what I think of the so-called homes built between the wars, about which they boast. So would a few thousand other women.¹³

In all, it seems that Churchill had achieved a modest success and had learned some of the lessons of 1945. On the one hand, he modified the aggression that had damaged him with the public then, without sacrificing his essential philosophical point, albeit at the risk of appearing to have lost his vigour. On the other hand, by emphasising that ‘the prevention of unemployment ranks next to food in the duties of any government’, he was able to appeal to the many voters who favoured Labour’s pursuit of full employment and the creation of a welfare state yet who were sceptical about more full-blooded socialism (Broadcast of 21 Jan. 1950). Churchill did have a genuine track record of interest in social reform dating back to his post-1904 phase as a member of the Liberal Party, and his relatively consensual approach in this speech seems to have resonated with those listeners who perceived him as putting ‘country above party’. But although he may have won over some waverers, his campaign efforts were not sufficient for him to win back power. However, Labour triumphed so narrowly that Attlee called a further election the following year. Churchill did then return to Downing Street, albeit without having secured a plurality of the popular vote.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has illustrated the archival-historical method and demonstrated that there is some scope for applying it to Churchill's post-1945 speeches as well as his wartime ones. It has also illuminated the potential to apply it to other orators, with the caveat that for most of them the evidence base is not as full, showing some ways in which Jens E. Kjeldsen's call for qualitative audience research can be met (Kjeldsen 2016). Furthermore, the chapter has sought to address the fault line between humanities and social science approaches to the study of rhetoric. Humanities scholars often revolt at what they see as the phony precision and simplistic generalisations offered by social science scholarship. Classically, the historian present at an interdisciplinary discussion will be the person insisting 'It's more complicated than that'. By contrast, social scientists often see humanities scholarship as pedantic, under-theorised and unsystematic. Certainly, it is incumbent upon historians of rhetoric to explain their techniques more clearly if they want to be taken seriously by other branches of academia. At the same time, they should be prepared to learn from their social scientist colleagues, without abandoning the quest for a nuanced understanding of the contingent and complex nature of rhetorical interactions.

NOTES

1. Lucy Masterman diary, 7 Oct. 1908, Masterman Papers, CFGM 29/2/2/1, University of Birmingham Special Collections; Letter from the *Manchester Courier* to Winston Churchill, 12 Nov. 1903, Churchill Papers, CHAR 2/9/15, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge.
2. 'Prediction, Restriction & Jurisdiction', File Report 286, 18 July 1940. The Mass-Observation Archive is located at the University of Sussex; I have consulted the online, subscription version.
3. Unless otherwise stated, all Churchill's speeches cited are to be found in Robert Rhodes James (ed.), *Winston S. Churchill: His Complete Speeches, 1897-1963*, 8 vols., Chelsea House, New York, 1974.
4. My book provides the figures for Churchill. In order to check those for other speakers, the easiest way is to consult Listener Research Department's records at britishonlinearchives.co.uk. It is possible to purchase an individual subscription. The originals are held at the BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham, Reading. Other countries have equivalent audience research organisations, for example, Médiamétrie in France.
5. A.A. Crouch diary (diarist 5239), 1 July 1942, Mass-Observation Archive.

6. Arthur Hopkins diary (diarist 5110), 8 March 1946, Mass-Observation Archive.
7. A.P. Raley diary (diarist 5403), 20 Sept. 1946, Mass-Observation Archive.
8. Public Opinion Research Department, 'Confidential Supplement to Public Opinion Summary No. 5', May 1949, Conservative Party Archive, CCO 4/3/249, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
9. Draft of broadcast of 21 Jan. 1950, Churchill Papers, CHUR 5/30 A/69, 70, 75.
10. Chief Organising Officer to Agents, 19 Jan. 1950, Conservative Party Archive, CCO/4/3/114.
11. Public Opinion Research Department, 'Public Reaction Report No. 4', 24 Jan. 1950, Conservative Party Archive, CCO/4/3/250.
12. B. Hartley diary (diarist 5103), 21 Jan. 1950, Mass-Observation Archive.
13. N.E. Underwood diary (diarist 5447), 22 Jan. 1950, Mass-Observation Archive.

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Audience Response to Mediated Authenticity Appeals

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INTRODUCTION

Who should lead us? What type of person should that leader be? These are questions facing the electorate in most modern western elections. There are other considerations citizens face. Some deem them more important: concrete policy matters, sound argumentation, the best proposal for a state budget. The technical details of statesmanship, or Weber's (2009) "strong and slow boring of hard boards". These are not the concerns of this chapter. Rather, I am interested in the other side of the professional politician—not the statecraft, but the public persona—enacted and presented through symbolic communication. I am interested in the legitimacy of leadership. Weber (2009) would call it charisma, or charismatic authority. Aristotle would call it part of ethos; others call it authenticity. These dimensions are highly at work in democracy and democratic elections. They are important for the political elite and their advisors, summed up in Karl Rove's famous assumption of voters' three questions for their candidate: Is he a strong leader? Can I trust him? Does he care about

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people like me? (Klein 2006, 144). The last question might be reformulated into: is he somewhat like me? Like us? It points to the age-old tension between political elite and political citizenry, between those who broker power and those who choose the brokers: the tension of distance and proximity between leader and led.

Using the media to convey an *image*, to manage impressions and to influence public perceptions of a candidate is essential for any leading politician in the present age. Following the personalization of politics in western societies (Hjarvard 2013; Karvonen 2010), such strategic impression management revolving around individual politicians and leaders has become increasingly important. Political advertising is an often preferred way to communicate an image or an impression with the considerable benefit of leaving all control of the presentation in the hands of the politicians and political parties themselves (McNair 2011, 85). Although political advertising takes many forms, and is employed in many situations with a plethora of different strategic goals, the image-oriented ad as a genre is well established (Kaid and Holtz-Bacha 2006). In the following I am not concerned with messages arguing for the credibility of a candidate by showing their previous record, that is, what they have done or achieved in the past. Rather, I am concerned with a form of advertisement that attempts to strengthen a politician's ethos by showing *who they are and what they are like*: a leader, but also "one of us", a human and a person that is true to oneself, or in other words, *authentic*. Considered as a form of simulated egalitarianism, presenting the leader as one of the people, the ideal rhetoric is that of the ordinary person. In Scandinavia, the ideal has been described as an individual "(...) who happily shares himself and his inner emotions" (Kjeldsen and Johansen 2011, 167; cf. Johansen 1999).

Though we know quite a bit about the effects of political advertising through political communication research (for an overview, see Kaid 2012; Holtz-Bacha and Kaid 2006), and quite a bit about how advertising appeals manifest through the fields of rhetorical criticism, argumentation studies and visual studies (for an overview, see Kjeldsen 2015)—we know less about how voters actually meet such appeals—conceptualize them and talk about them, at least from a rhetorical perspective. That is the topic for the present text—it is a study of how citizens evaluate and talk about mediated rhetoric in form of authenticity appeals in political advertising. My research question is:

How do different groups of people make sense of and talk about their experiences with authenticity-appeals presented through political advertising?

To answer this, I selected and identified two advertisements that attempt to bring the politician closer to the people. I performed a textual reading, guiding interview guides for production interviews. These initial stages were done as part of a holistic approach to reception research (Schröder 2007), seeking to avoid the reduction of a media message to only its readings (Morley 1993). I then recruited, hosted, transcribed and analyzed eight focus groups to shed light on how people made sense of and talked about the authenticity appeals present in the ads. In the following, I present theories relevant to the research question, before going into detail on method, findings and a discussion on what my study may mean for our understanding of mediated authenticity.

AUTHENTICITY IN SCANDINAVIA

The idea of forming personal bonds between politicians and voters is not new. The credibility of the speaker, originally an emotional dimension, has been a core trait in studies of rhetoric ever since Aristotle presented ethos as one of the three forms of evidence in political speeches. Outside of antiquity, Weber's work on authority is often identified as an important starting point for theories of charisma and credibility, particularly in the literature on the personalization of political communication (Karvonen 2010, in example). Along with legal and traditional authority, Weber (1958) presents *charismatic leadership* as one of the three sources of pure authority. This form of charisma is mystic and heroic. More important in today's media society, however, are dimensions of the politician's private and personal life. Fueled by both technological affordances of audiovisual media (Meyrowitz 1985), and media logic favouring a focus on the individual person (Altheide and Snow 1991), there are expectations of politicians to be "one of the people", and to be sociable, particularly towards ordinary citizens. Hjarvard (2013) identifies a politician's ability to mime interpersonal communication, the conversation, as key for success. Politicians are expected to be folksy and to be able to display these characteristics among ordinary people. They should be at ease in a form of confessional mode, as well as able to be reflexive on their own emotions (Langer 2010, 68). Individual personal traits have become an important part of politicians performing their political personas. Modern political authority is thus partly constructed through politicians' personal identities (Hjarvard 2013, 67). Understood through Meyrowitz's reconceptualization of Goffman's theatre model of social interaction (Meyrowitz 1985),

the media shows a preference for social interaction in the middle region (Hjarvard 2013, 67). In other words, mastering and displaying middle region behavior is central to leading politicians.

In an attempt to nuance the literature on ethos and credibility, Kock and Hansen differentiate between credibility, telegenic qualities and the “one-of-us emotional appeal” (Kock and Hansen 2002). Their treatment of telegenic qualities corresponds to the middle region behavior described above. The one-of-us appeal is similar to the literature on *proximity*. Political sociologist Jean-Pascal Daloz is concerned with how political leaders work symbolically (precisely through the performance of their political personas) in attempts to earn legitimacy. Central to this is the ambivalence of closeness and distance between democratically elected leaders and the people in contemporary democracies. Whilst politicians have a dominant position when in power, they are themselves being dominated by voters through the electoral process: “Citizens grant representatives power to shape the laws, but they have the last word at the ballot box” (Daloz 2009, 287). In such a setting, Daloz argues that leaders build legitimacy by both bridging and maintaining the perceived gap between politicians and the people, resulting in a tension between proximity and eminence. Daloz presents some general dimensions in which eminence and proximity can be enacted (see Table 4.1 below), but stresses how intercountry as well as interculture differences are key to understanding the different configurations of various ideals of closeness and distance (Daloz 2009, 291).

In this respect, Scandinavia is a distinct region. Here, Daloz claims that emphasis is put on the so-called conspicuous modesty (as opposed to conspicuous consumption). Important in this regard is a style of simplicity: one should not stand out as a politician but appear to be one of the people. Proximity is in other words, perhaps, the most relevant dimension in

Table 4.1 Relevant dimensions of proximity (from Daloz 2009, 286)

Types of proximity	Top-down rhetoric of legitimation
Social proximity	I am like you
Geographical proximity	I am among you; I live here; I am present
Concrete proximity	I am available; I am listening to you
Modest proximity	I do not pretend to stand out above you

Please note that Daloz’s original article also includes the two dimensions of “sharing a crucial identity” and “patronizing proximity” as well as types of eminence and their manifestations (Daloz 2009, 288)

Scandinavian countries. Building on this concept, Krogstad and Storvik (2007) point to what they call the “ordinary human charisma”. Understood in the concepts of Weber, this is a form of anti-authoritative charisma, particularly located within the frameworks of the Norwegian cultural repertoire: “It is as an ordinary man or woman a politician gains appeal and status as a political hero in the Norwegian society” (Krogstad and Storvik 2007, 214). Kjeldsen and Johansen (2011) argue that the more general trend of “ordinary guy” rhetoric has been taken a step further in Scandinavia. Here, the politician should not only be an ordinary person but a “true and authentic individual who happily shares himself and his inner emotions” (Kjeldsen and Johansen 2011, 168; cf. Johansen 1999). Demonstrating a form of egalitarianism seems as an important part of Scandinavian ideals. Kjeldsen (2008) found Danish political print ads to display recurring themes of presenting the politician as an insignificant figure—not as a leader above people in general, but as a rather ordinary person on the same level as everybody else (Kjeldsen 2008, 146–147).

In the following, I treat authenticity not as a character trait—but as a performance. Mediated authenticity is a construct, but one that is highly at work among people when they evaluate their politicians. For Johansen, a core concern is the politicians’ ability to be perceived as herself, as her true self (Johansen 1999). For political leaders, it is also essential not to be too distant—not to be high and mighty, but rather appear as “one of us”.

This chapter attempts to map audience reactions to the presentations in the middle of the nexus of charisma, authenticity and leadership. I explore and show how people respond to the how would-be leaders attempt to legitimize their claim to power by performing a desired persona: one of *authentic leadership*. The leader that is “not just one’s true self, but as we are”.

POLITICAL SPOTS IN NORWAY

Made to influence opinions and shape action, political advertising is inherently argumentative (Kjeldsen 2015, 121). An often used type is the *talking head* format (McNair 2011, 105), featuring a politician talking to the camera. Other types include documentary formats. Here, we are often presented with a candidate’s accomplishments, or perhaps the candidate’s family and background. Alternatively, an opponent’s record or character is smeared. Dramatizations are common, and political advertising frequently

borrowes modes of presentation from other genres in popular culture such as satire, melodrama, dystopia and horror (Richardson Jr 2008).

Political advertising on TV is banned in Norway. Prior to Internet advertising, moving image ads have not been a regular feature of elections, except for some ads broadcast in spite of the ban (Iversen 2016). One examination of Norwegian political ads revealed that they mostly consisted of talking head and dramatization formats, were mostly presenting a political party's own issues and were very rarely negative (Iversen 2013).

The Norwegian political ad is both similar and different from the US case. Norwegian campaigners and strategists look to America for inspiration. There are several similarities of formats and ways of presenting a candidate. However, it is distinct through being "digitally born" and shaped in its local political culture. They tend to be longer, less negative and more inclined to use a pull strategy: employing humour, surprise or novelty to attract audiences.

METHOD

This study employed focus group interviews to explore audience response. Focus groups hold the benefits of representing a greater collective relevance because the results gathered from them can be more representative of collective experiences and attitudes than individual case studies are. This strengthens the study's sociocultural relevance (Gentikow 2005, 86). I do not claim that my informants' answers demonstrate broad dispositions for audience response that can be generalized. I am interested in producing qualitative insights that can be examined later through qualitative or quantitative methods.

Focus group allows the researcher to appear less authoritarian and strengthens the participant's ability for articulation (Gentikow 2005, 86). This is relevant in this case, because of the visual and emotional nature of the stimuli. Visual and emotional experiences do not always come with a ready vocabulary. Employing focus groups can alleviate some of this concern, as they make, for instance, emotional reactions easier to verbalize. Focus groups are advantageous for topics that are "not thought out in detail" (Morgan 1997, 11). As far as limitations are concerned, focus groups are limited to "self-reported data" (Morgan 1997, 8). What one is getting at are informants' own explications and verbalizations of how they experience and evaluate these appeals, with all its benefits and drawbacks.

I recruited informants from existing social networks or groups. On the positive side, this means less time was spent on formalities, warming up and getting to know the other participants. On the less positive side, such a selection could suffer from certain aspects of natural group dynamics. There is the question of having everyone contributing equally, which is rarely the case in a natural group as there is often a more outspoken person and a more introverted person and so on. However, this type of imbalance is existent in most natural groups and is therefore impossible to rid oneself of fully. Furthermore, one should keep in the researcher's responsibility towards ensuring all informants get to have their say and have equal amounts of time to do so (Gentikow 2005, 87).

The groups were gathered by reaching out to a key contact person that I spent time on informing and briefing, which then assembled the group, organized the meeting and kept in contact with the informants. This has the advantage of minimizing workload and time spent on contacting individuals, and was done on the assumption that people would be more prone to show up at an event part organized and endorsed by someone they personally know and trust, rather than an arbitrary person from a university. Thus, I hoped to address some of the issues concerning low turnout and that are frequently connected to the use of focus groups as a method (Bloor et al. 2001, 33).

The focus groups were selected to be externally heterogeneous and internally homogenous. Having people with very opposing views debate something related to politics can be counterproductive as this can lead to "(...) high levels of conflict which will crush discussion and inhibit debate (...)" (Bloor et al. 2001, 20). Details on the focus groups are found in Table 4.2. They were not meant to be representative for an electorate or a population, but nonetheless aimed to present some diversity along set lines of demographic factors such as age, political interest, education and types of work. The goal was to produce a wide range of readings, not too guided by initial concepts.

The interviews were conducted as part of a larger project, in which 16 focus groups were conducted. Informants were shown films from several political parties, in sessions that lasted between 50 and 70 minutes. For this paper, I have isolated the responses to the first (The Labour Party's Taxi Stoltenberg) and the last (Christian Democrat) films that were shown, making up 128 pages of transcribed material that I proceeded to analyze.

A funnel approach was employed in the interview guide, a compromise between a very loose and a very structured interview design (Morgan 1997, 41). Concretely, this means that informants were asked very open questions as "What did you see?" or "What was this?" with follow-up

Table 4.2 Composition of focus groups

<i>Group</i>	<i>Amount— gender</i>	<i>Age—highest level of started education</i>	<i>Group attributes</i>
1. Left voters	4 (2f, 2m)	17–22: upper secondary school—bachelor’s degrees: social sciences, humanities	Young, high interest, left
2. Right voters	5 (2f, 3m)	19–28: upper secondary school—bachelor’s degrees: business, social sciences	Young, high interest, right
3. Pupils in upper secondary school	8 (f)	16–17: upper secondary school	Young, low education
4. Teachers in upper secondary school	5 (2f, 3m)	26–34: master’s degrees—social sciences, natural sciences, humanities	Adult, high education
5. Seniors	7 (2f, 5m)	75–89: upper secondary school to master’s degrees	Seniors
6. Ship mechanics	8 (m)	22–34: mostly upper secondary school, some bachelor’s degrees	Manual-technical work type
7. Dancers	7 (5f, 2m)	17–34: upper secondary school—bachelor’s degrees	Manual-creative work type
8. Hairdressers	5 (f)	18–25: upper secondary school	Manual-creative work type

questions such as “What makes you say that” prior to more closed off questions such as “What do you think about...”. The study was done postelection. The election of 2013 resulted in a change of government—meaning that the politicians the informants were shown were, respectively, both in power and out of power. To compensate for this, all the interviews started off with some initial storytelling from the researcher: “I want you to think back a year, to the summer of 2013...” followed by a listing of some major events that happened prior to and during the election. Informants were then asked about their most vivid memory from the election of 2013 in an attempt to put them in a retrospective mood.

THE TWO ADVERTISEMENTS

The first ad¹ got a lot of attention during the 2013 election. It shows the prime minister at the time, Jens Stoltenberg, as a covert taxi driver in a series of scenes inspired by direct cinema and the candid camera style.

The film first shows Stoltenberg in formal attire in front of the prime minister’s residence, where he explains that he has just met with the King

(as the prime minister does every Friday in Norway), but that the rest of the day will be different from most Fridays. We then see Stoltenberg putting on a taxi driver uniform and getting into a cab. The film then presents a rapid selection of cuts that show us how various people and groups of people enter the car. We follow their behavior shifting from unsuspecting, to suspicion, to bewilderment, surprise and subsequent reactions (Fig. 4.1). We are then presented with a selection of the various conversations Stoltenberg had with his passengers in the car. It is cross-cut with scenes in which Stoltenberg is alone, humming to himself—or tapping the steering wheel to a song he appears to be enjoying, or taking a break in the street. Finally, a senior passenger exits the car whilst telling Stoltenberg he will vote for him. A cheerful tune starts playing in the background, increasing in volume until the end of the ad, which displays a text plaque encouraging viewers to continue the discussion in social media.

Production interviews² revealed that a central intention of the film was to establish Jens Stoltenberg as a man of the people and showcase his ability to talk to people, be funny, and how well he interacts with other people as a person. That he is more than a stiff and serious politician. That he cares about what you have to say. The person in charge of cutting and editing the raw tape mentions the necessity of showcasing Stoltenberg in conversation with people:



Fig. 4.1 A scene of joy from Stoltenberg's taxi cab

It was important not to show only clips where Jens Stoltenberg made the best impression, because the whole point of the stunt was to show that he cares for normal people, and what normal people have to say, and that he talks well to these people—and then it is important to convey his human side.

The second advertisement received moderate attention in the 2013 election. It features a series of scenes presenting different aspects of the Christian Democratic Party's policies, with leader Knut Arild Hareide placed in the center of all situations.

Hareide starts off talking to the camera whilst walking on a gravel path in nature. We then see him in various degrees of immersion in a series of situations. He both interacts with the people he is present with, but more saliently faces and talks to the camera, presenting policy related to the environment he is in. We see him having breakfast with a young couple and an infant (Fig. 4.2), at a preschool, in front of a school, walking his bike on the street, playing soccer with children and visiting a senior lady in her home. Finally, we see Hareide in front of the Norwegian parliament. The screen fades to white, and the party logo. The joyful music that has been playing throughout the ad increases in volume.

A central intention, mentioned both by political party and production agency, was to present the party's political programme, or at least some



Fig. 4.2 Hareide interacting with a family having breakfast

core issues for the 2013 national election. All informants placed emphasis on a shared wish to create an emotional bond between the party leader and the voter. In their own words to “say something more than just state the individual policy cases”. Throughout, there was a wish to create a good feeling about the Christian Democrats. The reason for appealing to such warm emotions was part of a deliberate communications strategy, according to the informants. They desired the film to be “informative, but in a light way”, and to be very understandable. Thus, they attempted to strip the manuscript that Hareide performed in front of the camera for any signs of “politician’s language”—to keep the language in an everyday tone.

The presence of the leader was not random. As two of the informants put it, Hareide is their most prominent and popular politician. They also mention the fact that there are more people who are positive to Knut Arild Hareide than to the Christian Democrats in total. Playing on their strong side, which is the likeable party leader, seems to be a continuing thought throughout the planning of their campaign in general and the advertisement in particular:

If you like a person, then the message that person brings has a much greater credibility to you (...) [Hareide] is to be a likeable fellow, and (...) it is very conscious on our behalf so that people can get to know him as a person. And people you know about a little more personally—you might be more open to thinking that the political message that person is bringing forward actually has real substance.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW DATA

After the focus group material was transcribed, I proceeded to analyze it through a “thematic analysis”. This method of qualitative content analysis allows for the elucidation and categorization of themes in various human experiences (Butcher et al. 2001). It is a method for “identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clarke 2006, 79). A *theme* in this context is defined as a form of patterned response or meaning within the data material (Braun and Clarke 2006, 82). Consequently, what I aim to do in the following is to identify some key patterns of response, and to describe some core traits regarding how my informants perceive and respond to authenticity appeals in political advertising. I proceeded by familiarizing myself with my data by transcribing,

and rereading my transcripts, making tentative notes for possible codes and themes before beginning the more formal coding process. I performed the generation of initial codes manually. This first initial coding was unselective and highly inclusive. This process resulted in a high number of codes, many of which were redundant, similar or overlapping. After several rounds of coding, recoding, the clustering of similar codes and moving up the ladder of abstraction towards concepts, I ended up with an operative codebook. I then proceeded to code the entirety of my data material for this project in NVivo 11, which ultimately led to the final distribution of codes and frequencies shown in Table 4.3. In the process described above, I mainly followed Braun and Clarke's guidelines for thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006, 87).

I identified four themes: (a) ambivalences of image/issue balance, (b) experiences of distance and closeness, (c) experiences of realness and stagedness and (d) experiencing an authenticity breach. The first theme relates to how informants perceive the genre of the authenticity appeal itself. The second relates to Daloz's dimension of proximity: the

Table 4.3 Summary of themes, subthemes and codes

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>	<i>No. of references</i>	<i>No. of occurrence in groups (n = 8)</i>
Experiencing closeness and distance		95	8
	Feeling distance	56	8
	Feeling closeness	21	8
	Contrasting	12	6
	Talking about closeness and distance	6	4
Experiences of realness and stagedness		90	8
	Scripted/fake	55	6
	Unscripted/natural	20	7
	Self-presentation	15	7
Experiencing authenticity and breach		22	8
	External world	11	5
	Politicians' promise	8	4
	Strong dislike of politicians	3	2
		35	8
Image/issue ambivalence		35	8
Total		<u>261</u>	

as-us-appeal. The third relates to the construction of authenticity: the perception of a true individual. The fourth theme is not a topic, but rather a shift between two different modes of reception.

Table 4.3 provides a summary and an overview of themes and sub-themes. The number of references and percentages is indicative only of how dominant or present the various themes were in relation to each other. The quantification is not to be considered representative of the whole data set. There were other themes discussed during the often hour-long focus groups, but they are left out of this study to produce answers relevant to the research question.

Theme 1: Ambivalences of Image/Issue Balance

All informant groups commented on the balance between image appeal and issue information. A typical comment was to note that the Stoltenberg film was mostly about something else than political information, and some groups even mentioned that it was about something else than politics entirely. The majority of groups were positive or neutral to this fact. The senior group was negative, finding it wanting in political information. The teachers were slightly critical, but ambiguous as a group. The mechanics were split, some accepted the balance and found it entertaining, whilst others displayed a strategic or cynical attitude towards such films, used words such as “stunt”, “show” and “popularity-stunt” and found it to be a blatant attempt to better the image of the candidate, lacking in substance. The majority of informants, however, found the film to be enjoyable, either noting that this is “mostly for fun”, noting that there was not much issue information, or explicitly stating that some more information would not hurt:

W4: It’s like a way to showcase politics ... and we did ... we did not get so much of that really, like political ... positions, information ... it was very...

(longer pause)

W4: It was very nice. Like a feel-good video.

I: Feel-good-video. Did you think it contained little politics, in ... then

W4: Mhm

W1: I think I would ... that is, I would be open, but I would have liked to hear more ... of the political, before I would say that I would vote for him. (Dancers, 2)

All informant groups remarked that the Christian Democrats' film contained a large degree of political information and argumentation. The evaluation of these observations varied, both across and within groups. The senior group was unanimously positive to the amount of issues, using words such as "concrete", "illuminating" and "informative". Other groups were either to a large degree negative—either because it was "too much" in terms of too many issues, found to be boring and repetitive, or simply not to their taste—"not for them", or not speaking to them. Interestingly, in some instances, the perceived sheer amount of issues in the ad would prompt informants to become sceptical, turning to phrases such as "politicians always promise us a lot of things, but they never deliver"—or simply noting, as one woman did: "He promised a lot". In some cases, informants would proceed along this line of thinking, into a more cynical stance—in which they displayed disbelief and disillusionment of politics and politicians. All focus groups, except the elderly, were quite negative to the ad. As such, a lot of informants mentioned the high amount of issue information as a positive factor, *after* being highly critical, stating that it was boring. As one man put it: "(...) But in contrary to the other [films] it is ... it actually presents politics ... [other informants say "yep" and "mhm"]. The most negative group was the young soon-to-be voters. They were not amused:

W4: I felt that he tried to squeeze in a lot of information ... just to say it all, like...

W1: Crap-boring commercial. (Pupils, 23)

A recurring notion across groups seemed to be puzzlement as to what would be the "optimal" balance between issue and image, or between entertainment and information. Commenting on the Stoltenberg image/issue balance, one participant explicitly wanted more issue information but was met with an interesting counterargument:

M5: Even though he attempts to show that he is a nice guy, this is not very relevant ... I think there could be a little more focus on the politics itself, like, not just that he is nice. I think it is better that they come out with what they stand for, and what they want to do.

M3: Well, most people won't bother. We are too lazy. To see a film where he starts with a political agenda and tells everything he wants to do. We won't bother! When you show a film with the prime minister

driving and laughing—then we bother watching him! That is precisely what this plays on—it catches the attention of people who actually don’t care normally. (Ship mechanics, 5)

As such, a high level of image orientation and entertainment was deemed two-sided. Informants wanted more issue information when there is little, and often less when there is much—but at the same time they emphasized the positive and negative virtues of both issue information and entertainment. Information was recognized as important, but at the same time dismissed as boring. Entertainment was brushed off as shallow, but at the same time deemed important for engagement. Informants displayed ambivalence to both issue and image/entertainment—and seemed unsure of how much emphasis to put on each aspect.

Theme 2: Experiencing Distance and Closeness

Broadly speaking, the Stoltenberg commercial created the most talk about closeness, and the Christian Democrats’ commercial created the most talk about distance. There are, however, some key nuances that I will elucidate below. All informant groups except for the mechanics talked about the politicians as “one of the people” in some manner. Various verbalizations around the politician as “on our level” also occurred. Informants across all groups shared a notion of Norway as a distinct country in terms of a “short” or “small” distance between politicians and voters. Several groups made contrasts to other politicians (not close to the people) or other countries and cultures where they perceived the distance between politician and voter to be greater to emphasize something they felt was central to the Norwegian situation. All groups except for the mechanics and the teachers talked about Stoltenberg as human. Most groups, except for the senior group and the mechanics, appreciated the type of closeness that the Stoltenberg ad attempts to establish. When talking about why closeness as this could be a good thing, many informants emphasized that closeness signifies that one is not “too far up”. Several informants talked about how people in general, or celebrities in particular, become “high and mighty” when reaching a certain status, and thereby not in connection with, or caring about ordinary people. The closeness in the Stoltenberg ad seemed to reassure them that this had not happened to the politician in question.

The elderly did not react positively to the appeal of closeness in the Stoltenberg ad. On the contrary, they seemed to react in a binary opposite

way of what the producers intended, or more precisely: they verbalized a notion that Stoltenberg was too close for comfort:

- W1 Perhaps we lose our desire. To vote for him.
 [Longer thinking-pause]
 ...Because after all there is supposed to be a certain distance. Between, for instance at a school, between the principal and the pupils. Or perhaps they would lose ... the respect". (Seniors, 8)

Whilst most informants talked about closeness as a positive aspect, there seemed to be an underlying tension: one did not want too much closeness. There was a wish for a balance—or, in Daloz's (2009) terms, a level of eminence is required. One informant, talking about the difference between bosses and leaders, can help illustrate this:

- M2: I feel like he, in a way, does not appear as a boss for society, but more as a leader for society.
 [other informants nod their heads; some say "yes"]
 M2: Puts himself as a part of society itself. (Dancers, 5)

The informant's conception of a leader in this context was a positive one. In other words, leaders and leadership are seen as attractive and wanted—but *only if the leader is perceived as legitimate*, as the informant's boss/leader distinction seems to suggest. At the same time, a leader is conceptually someone with more power and status than the rest of the populace. A boss is not necessarily chosen through election—a leader is.

In terms of experiencing the opposite, a reduced distance, or an explicit sensation of distance, the main amount of such responses are prompted by the Christian Democrat advertisement. The Stoltenberg advertisement prompted explicit feelings of distance in two groups. The right-leaning voters noted that Stoltenberg at one point mentions in passing that he has not driven a car for 8 years. This shocked some informants. One stated that this seemed as far out of touch as it is possible to get. Another example occurred in the group of teachers. One informant reacted negatively to the way the advertisement positions Stoltenberg as a leader, in a suit, in front of the state residence, having just visited the King of Norway (as he says in the movie). The informant perceived this narrative device, along with Stoltenberg's tone of voice, as condescending. He felt talked down

to, which resonates with negative connotations of eminence, rather than a sense of closeness, and reduced distance.

When the Christian Democrat advertisement prompted responses that indicate a sense of distance, informants referred both to clothing and manners/body language, using words such as “adorned” and “high up” and utterances like “his neck is very high up”. Further reasons for not feeling close to Hareide were his tone of voice and his personality. Some informants also felt talked down to, because they perceived the advertisement to be so repetitive that they felt underestimated as an audience member. Throughout, there was a sensation that Hareide did not fit in—as one informant worded it: “he is just placed there”. Hareide was viewed as an anomaly in some situations, which is both opposite to what the producers intended, but also a sign that he was not perceived to be close to people. When the attempt at bringing him physically close to “ordinary people” failed, it only served to illuminate that he was not part of them—not close.

Theme 3: Experiencing “Realness” and “Stagedness”

The most common reaction of the groups was not a sense of a true and authentic individual, true to himself—acting in a conversational style, but rather the opposite: perceptions of a scripted, unreal and constructed situation. Most of these reactions were prompted by the Christian Democrat advertisement. Many informants talked about Hareide trying too hard to be among people and trying too hard to be liked by viewers. Interestingly, however, the group of senior citizens saw the Stoltenberg and Christian Democrat ad completely differently from the other groups. Whilst all other groups generally perceived Stoltenberg to appear more real, and Hareide to appear staged and scripted, the senior citizens evaluated Hareide to be completely believable. One informant immediately stated that “This was no stunt. This was reality (...)”.

The third most predominant subtheme in this theme, however, was indeed comments on a politician being unscripted, conversational and natural. One informant stated that she perceived Stoltenberg as a down to earth person, one that listens to the people. When asked about what made her say this, she stated that “he is not just talking about politics, he is also talking about ... the big beach, oh—where have you been—he is like, talking about everything else in addition, right—so. Like you talk to your friends” (Dancers, 3).

Informants were also keen on talking about how the politicians presented themselves, and speculated in why they chose to do it in this particular manner, as well as what might have been left out in the cutting room. This type of meta-reflection shows that the informants were very aware of the fact that they are watching a selection, a construction—an image.

Overall, it would appear as if Stoltenberg is closer to displaying “middle region behavior”. He was seen as conversational, relaxed—not perceived to be pushing politics. Specifically, he disagrees mildly with passengers, telling one young man which political party would agree with him, and is also seen telling some people that they should vote for what they want. Many of my informants noticed and made a remark of this moment. Hareide on the other hand is presenting a high amount of issue politics in his ad—whilst at the same time attempting to blend naturally into the scenarios in which he is visiting. These attempts frequently failed, with some exceptions. The word “awkward” was used frequently when informants commented on the Christian Democrat advertisement. His presence was not perceived as natural. The scene in which Hareide is feeding a baby in the home of a small family is often mentioned:

W1: He stands out. In that situation. Instead of being part of the situation, there suddenly is a man there in a suit with a spoon

W4: And feeding a baby he does not know

M1: It is awkward. It is very awkward.

W1: Very awkward. (Dancers, 25)

Such comments are indicative of a sense of a misplaced person—and a feeling of something artificial—in some cases leading to my fourth and final pattern: the authenticity breach.

Theme 4: Authenticity Breaches—When Immersion Is Lost

Rather than a specific theme that informants talked about, authenticity breaches are rather a *pattern of response* that seemed salient in the data material as I proceeded with analysis. As such, what constitutes an authenticity breach has similarities to both the theme of closeness/distance and realness/stagedness. An authenticity breach occurs when the spectator, for some reason, is seemingly completely thrown out of any suspension of disbelief, or immersion—in his or her reading of the advertisement at

hand. In plain words, informants simply don't "buy it". The message is perceived to be wrong, fake or misrepresentative to such a degree that the informants reject it. Conceptualizing this in terms of what producers try to achieve in their encoding, and what informants actually see and think about in their decoding, the authenticity appeal fails to "connect", and part of the communication breaks down; there is a breach. There is also what seems to be a clear vocabulary and behaviour of rejection, reminiscent of Stuart Hall's oppositional reader position.

The most frequently occurring of reactions that prompted such a breach in my data material was the notion of a perceived mismatch between what was communicated in the advertisement and an external world, or some information that the informants held from before. An example of this is an informant in the senior group. Witnessing Stoltenberg driving a taxi was ludicrous to him, because he knew that Stoltenberg could not possibly have a taxi licence. Therefore, he found the advertisement completely unbelievable and did not take it seriously. Knowledge of media coverage of the taxi stunt also triggered authenticity breaches in some cases, as there was a substantial amount of negative press at the time of its release, due to some participants being paid money to be filmed, which was perceived as cheating, since the whole point of the film was a "real" candid camera situation:

M10: Fun to see him in an act!

I: What?

M10: It is acting, all of it.

I: Tell me more...

M4: (whispering loudly) CONSPIRACY...

[some informants laugh]

M10: Eeeh, I'm not going to put out conspiracy theories here, but ... but in the papers it said (...) that it was an act, and—well well, if he sits in a folksy setting here, it is because he has been put there because his manager has decided it for him (...). (Ship mechanics, 3)

The other prompt for authenticity breaches in my material was related to what was presented in the advertisement itself. If the content was perceived to be "stretching it too far", promising too much or similar—informants tended to go into a cynical mode, stating the well-known everyday topos of "politicians promising too much". A third prompt for authenticity breaches related to the production and presentation of the content. In

the Christian Democrat ad, many informants seemed to react to Hareide as misplaced, reading from a script—and were consequently “thrown”—resorting to disbelief and lack of trust in the information that was presented. A last, not frequently occurring prompt was informants’ strong dislike of the politician in question, prior to viewing the advertisement.

Michelle’s (2007) nuancing of different modes of reception in the often-blurry process of “decoding” is applicable here. The informants moved between “modes of reception”, from a transparent mode—viewing text as life, as reflecting reality—to a mediated mode, in which text was viewed as production (Michelle 2007, 194). In this latter mode, one pays more attention to aesthetics, form and intentionality. Whilst informants seemed to shift rather fluidly and rapidly between modes—commenting both on aesthetics and how the politician presented “is”, the *authenticity breach* seemed to permanently ground them in a mediated mode, and was not seldom followed by strategic, sometimes cynical comments about intentions, manipulation, theatre and trickery.

DISCUSSION

The informants met the authenticity appeals with ambivalence. The ads were both appreciated and deemed relevant or important—but also unsatisfactory and trivial. At times they did not provide enough information, or entertainment—a balancing act that seems difficult to master for a political party wanting to communicate in this way. It seems like the theoretical conceptions of the tension between closeness and distance were highly at work among my groups of informants. People had clear opinions as to what they liked and disliked—indicating that they had some ideals about what a good politician and a good leader is like, and applied these ideals in their everyday practical judgement of political candidates.

It would also appear as if many of my informants had a concrete or ideal appreciation of a particular form of authenticity. In this study, it is apparent that being oneself, true to one self and “one of the people” for most part was a positive aspect. Emphasizing and communicating a short distance between polity and politician seemed desirable—and was appreciated by voters if done right, both in terms of message content, mode of delivery and production/film style of the media message. Judging from my material, I would argue that the more distinct Scandinavian authenticity ideal of “not just one’s true self, but as we are” (Kjeldsen and Johansen 2011; Kjeldsen 2008; Johansen 1999) was present. My informants expressed sentiments

that indicate that they value this particular form of authenticity. Despite their appreciation, it is essential to point out that my informants easily shifted between appreciation and a more critical and nuanced stance. There is no indication that people are duped, or misled by the arguments presented in these advertisements. Even though my informants often “buy into” the ad, they seem very well aware of what is going on—and what they are buying into.

The concrete advertisements can be said to “fail” in some cases and succeed in others. In my material, the Hareide film mostly elicited negative reactions, whilst Stoltenberg mostly elicited positive. Why is this so? First, who “people are”, demographically and socioculturally, what kind of cultural repertoires people have available when they enter the reception situation, matters to a great degree. One example is the senior group—showing affection for both production and politician when it came to Hareide, and the opposite when it came to Stoltenberg. The importance of preconceptions about the person or “initial ethos” (McCroskey 2015) of the politician is apparent.

To explain some aspects of the differences in success, one could turn to the original intentions of the political parties. The Labour Party explicitly only wanted to do one thing with their advertisement—and that is to show the human side of Jens Stoltenberg. As we recall, the Christian Democrats had a split motivation—both to present core policy issues and create some warm feelings around the party leader. It could be that the sheer amount of policy information that Hareide is presenting, *combined* with the desire to appear friendly, created a dissonance. After all, no one goes on repeatedly about school policy and concrete measures at a dinner party. None, except perhaps the typical politician—that it is perhaps not so fun to be seated with at the table. In the attempt to perform two quite separate communicative tasks (inform and create closeness), the Christian Democrats might have ended up creating distanced feelings towards their party leader.

Stoltenberg was more able to communicate that he is present, he comes across as himself, and not only himself but—as the particular Scandinavian authenticity ideal dictates—his “true self”. He also appears more to be someone “like us”. Hareide is present—but it is more frequently unclear for the informants whether he really is himself. He appears awkward, staged—he is perceived to be reading from a script. He is not himself—and he does not appear to be “as us”.

Another important dimension of Hareide's behavior that informants talk about is his relatively high pitched voice and his physical appearance—by several informants deemed as “frail” or “small”. A typical reaction from informants when Hareide appeared onscreen was a lovingly, but slightly condescending outburst of “Nawwww”. The sort of sound one makes at a cute animal, or an infant. Many informants (all groups except for the seniors) mentioned a popular parody of Hareide that ran on the public service broadcaster NRK in 2005. The sketch portrayed him as extremely frail, feeble and weak. The parody was a frequent topic to which informants turned to vocalize their experience of Hareide. This points to the importance and relevance of context in the reception situation and is an insight that traditional rhetorical textual analysis or production analysis would not reveal.

As Daloz points out, the use of clothing can both be used to create closeness and distance. Stoltenberg is first seen in a formal suit (in the role of a politician) but puts on a taxi driver uniform. Hareide keeps his suit coat on for the entirety of his ad. Judging by the responses of many of my informants, Stoltenberg's clothing went by unnoticed, whilst Hareide's suit coat stood out. It created distance, particularly when Hareide “enters” various situations—playing soccer with children, partaking in breakfast with a young family. In many of these situations, a suit coat is not the “natural” attire, something informants frequently made a point of.

Production aspects mattered. Stoltenberg's direct cinema approach and the candid camera format served its purpose better than the more traditional “talking head” format of the Hareide ad. After all, one is associated with a genre in which one is used to watching “real people in real situations”. The other is associated with politicians. Furthermore, the film language in the ads is different. Stoltenberg is constantly presented in close and medium shots, cuing a relation of intimacy and sociability (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996, 148). Hareide is more often seen in medium-to-long shots, with the occasional close-up, which could, if not necessarily cue distance—be a hindrance to the more intimate invitations that the producers envisioned.

The authenticity breach reaction appears to have several triggers. In some instances, it was prior knowledge about the particular advertisement such as media coverage, previous knowledge about a politician or a political party, or a perceived discrepancy between something one knows (the need for a taxi licence to drive a taxi) versus how something is portrayed in the film that set off this response. In other cases, it was the presentation

in the message itself that caused it—when there were “too much” good feelings, too much policy information and too many promises. Or, it can concern production and film style itself. It appears as if film language and *mise en scene* can be a prompt. The authenticity breach is informative, because it points to a point in reception in which a viewer either shifts into a more critical stance, be it oppositional or negotiated. Or, in a more nuanced vocabulary, how viewers shift modes of reception from a transparent mode to a mediated mode (Michelle 2007, 194). Thus, it can teach us something about what aspects of rhetorical utterances and rhetorical situations and contexts that prompt viewers to “disbelieve”—what causes them to drop out of the narrative or argument presented before them.

CONCLUSION

The conversations produced by these interviews show that the informants had a ready vocabulary for managing the appeals that they were presented with. Furthermore, the informants were actively negotiating between what was presented, their own view of the presentation, their own ideals for leaders and their prior individual knowledge and judgement of the two politicians. People had some ideals about what a good politician and good leaders are like and applied these ideals in their practical judgement of political candidates.

More widely, it appears as if these films can function as a resource for negotiating the tension of proximity and distance between politicians and voters. The films can stimulate conversations in which people can think about questions of authenticity and leadership. In my material, people appreciated an ideal—which was the combination of a true individual and a certain form of egalitarian leader. I propose to call this combination a performance of *authentic leadership*. It is a performance that is inherently contradictory. The authentic individual is after all *something one is*. It points to a romantic notion of a core personality. A leader, however, is a clear role in society—a persona one steps into, a part one plays. Authentic leadership then is the combination of appearing as a true individual acting true to oneself, with the right balance between closeness and distance, the right mix of proximity and eminence. The leader ought to be as us, but not completely. In his advertisement, Stoltenberg steps from the top of society down to the people. He moves from the King’s table to the streets. The fact that he is suddenly among us is an important part of the surprise

of his passengers and the spectators of the film. This points to an eminence that is not explicitly accentuated in the film, but highly present.

This study is a testament to how important context and form are to how rhetoric is perceived, as well as how response is shaped by individual media literacy, sophistication, preference or previous knowledge. These are matters one needs reception research to fully grasp. The authenticity breach is a pattern in response that signifies shifting modes of reception. It appears to have several triggers but seems to be closely connected by the interplay between text, context and reception. As such, studies of audiences are the only way to discover it and the best way to gain more knowledge about it in the future.

As Kvale and Brinkmann state: “If you want to know how people understand their world and their lives, why not talk with them?” (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, xvii). The concept of *authentic leadership* can be elaborated theoretically. But that the concept is present as an inherently ambivalent ideal that are at work in citizens’ thoughts and evaluations—and that they often are aware of it—would be impossible without talking to people. It could provide a useful concept in future studies of citizens’ experiences and negotiations with the symbolic communication of their would-be leaders.

NOTES

1. Both films are available on YouTube. The Labour Party ad at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xq7LTnwS7Bs> and the Christian Democrat ad at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXWV-7z8xNI>.
2. For the Labour Party ad, I interviewed the 2013 campaign manager, the party’s head of communication, the project manager and the creative director at the ad agency, and the head of production at the production agency. For the Christian Democrat ad, I interviewed the two people of the party communication department that worked with the ad, as well as the two people in charge of production at the combined production/ad agency involved.

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Focus Group Studies of Social Media Rhetoric

Eirik Vatnøy

Social media challenge established understandings of what constitutes a rhetorical audience or a rhetorical situation. It is difficult to give a proper description of context when different audiences meet a message in different settings, from different platforms, and in their own personal “news-feed”. We have limited understanding of the new linguistic entities these media offer—the “likes”, the “shares”, and the emoticons—and how people interpret these expressions. This fragmentation of the rhetorical situation is in no way new. For decades scholars have talked about the fragmented, changeable, and complex nature of the media reality (Kjeldsen 2008). However, it appears that social media represent a temporary high point in this development. Few things are more fragmented, changeable, and complex than an average Facebook feed.

This chapter demonstrates how focus group interviews with social media users can be a productive supplement to rhetorical studies of Facebook. First, I provide an account of the use of focus groups in audience studies and the general benefits of the method. Then, I show how

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focus groups can be used to study the vernacular rhetoric of social media platforms. Finally, I present results from a focus group study of Facebook users during a Norwegian election campaign. This study shows how Facebook users in different age groups offer very different readings of a political social media campaign and discuss how these readings relate to the circulation of meaning in social media.

THE USES OF FOCUS GROUPS IN STUDIES OF MEDIA AUDIENCES

Focus groups are “a qualitative research method in which a trained moderator conducts a collective interview of a set of participants” (Jarvis 2011, 283). In a focus group interview, the participants are asked about their perception, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards a product, a concept, an idea, or media product. Typically, a focus group consists of between 6 and 12 participants. These participants are free to talk with each other and express their opinions. Conversations and discussions among these participants create data that would be impossible to gather in individual interviews or participant observations. By generating discussions, focus groups are thought to reveal the meanings that people read into the topic of discussion and how people negotiate these meanings (Jarvis 2011, 284).

Focus groups have been a central research method since the start of audience studies. Originally, the method was introduced as a way to deal with the problem of complex readings in experimental studies (Merton 1987, 557). In the 1940s, Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton used “focused interviews” to study people’s reactions to radio programmes and radio advertisements. The overarching goal was to uncover the “social and psychological effects of mass communication” (Merton and Kendall 1946, 541). In practice, the “focused interview” was a supplement to experimental and quantitatively informed research. The aim of the group interviews was to identify salient dimensions and formulate research questions that were then investigated using quantitative methods (Merton 1987).

The perhaps most well-known example of a focus group study of media audiences is David Morley and Charlotte Brundson’s *The Nationwide Audience* from the late 1970s. Here, “group interviews” were used to show how audiences with different socioeconomic backgrounds made different “readings” of a current affairs programme (Morley 1980). The group dynamic that the method created allowed the researchers to study how interpretations were collectively constructed through talk and the

interchange between respondents in the group situation (Morley and Brundson 2005, 155).

In recent decades, focus group interviews have also been an important method in qualitative-oriented political communication research (Graber 2004; Jarvis 2011). Here, the method has been used to investigate a variety of questions, including how voters make sense of and use political information in election campaigns, how they balance this information with their own experiences (Just et al. 1996), how voters make sense of news frames during election campaigns (Hall Jamieson 1992), how voters evaluate candidates' attributes in different media formats (Bucy and Newhagen 1999), and voters' level of political knowledge (Graber 2001). Focus groups have also been commonly used at various stages in mixed methods studies of political communication, either as a way to identify and explore research questions (Mitchell 1999), as a way to unwrap and make sense of data (Waterton and Wynne 1999), or as part of a variety of methods that are used to triangulate the research object (Just et al. 1996).

As a method developed and refined by audience studies, focus groups are still associated with studies of radio or television audiences. Social media provide a different context than broadcast media, and consequently they provide different patterns for sense-making than those that have been charted by reception studies of radio and television audiences (Mathieu 2015, 25). The experience of dissolution of text and context that characterize the contemporary media landscape has led audience scholars to talk about "the former audience" (Gillmor 2004), "imagined audiences" (Marwick and Boyd 2010), and "people formerly known as the audience" (Rosen 2006). Already in 2004, Sonia Livingstone asked: "What is the audience researcher to do in the age of the Internet?" (Livingstone 2004).

These reactions point to a challenge shared by both reception studies, political communication studies, and rhetorical studies. While decades of audience studies have given us a fair impression of how mass media works, we do not yet have a very rich understanding of how people interact in online spheres in their everyday lives and in their role as citizens. Rapid media change creates a need for theories to describe new emerging social practices.

Concerns that audiences as we know them dissolve and disappear have also led to calls for more studies of audiences. Central voices from the field of political communication have encouraged more qualitative studies (Karpf et al. 2015). Focus groups are one of the methods that these scholars point to as a methodological answer to these challenges (Karpf et al.

2015, 1890). Similarly, studies of social media are experiencing demands for more qualitatively oriented studies of how people construct meaning in these media. Until now, the relationship between the text and its audience in social media has been understood mainly in terms of the technology and its usage (Livingstone and Das 2012; Mathieu 2015). When social media users are seen as an audience, it is most often as a television audience that expresses their opinions about television programmes in social media (Anstead and O’Loughlin 2011; D’heer and Verdegem 2015; Karlsnes et al. 2014; Procter et al. 2015).

Today, interviews and focus groups are among the most common research methods in qualitative and mixed method studies of social media (Snelson 2016). In studies of Facebook, focus groups have been used to explore the nature of “Facebook-culture” (Vorvoreanu 2009), norm evolution and norm violations (McLaughlin and Vitak 2011), perceptions of privacy and commodification (Cohen and Regan Shade 2008), identity construction and self-representation (Hollenbeck and Kaikati 2012; Zhao et al. 2008), the nature of “friendship” and other relations in the medium (Bryant and Marmo 2009; Richardson and Hessey 2009), and everyday media use (Fox and Moreland 2015). Still, these kinds of studies are few compared to the number of quantitative-oriented studies.

THE PROS AND CONS OF FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

The analytical attention in focus group studies is placed on the social meaning generated as the participants interact with each other based on the text that is presented to them (Lunt and Livingstone 1996). The unit of analysis is the thematic content or discourse used in the group. A well-led focus group generates discussions, and through these discussions we can observe both the meanings that people read into the discussion topic and how they negotiate those meanings (Lunt and Livingstone 1996, 96). Focus groups combine the benefits of individual interviews and participant observations. It is for this reason that some researchers claim that focus groups uncover how people *really thinks* as opposed to how they are *supposed to think* (Jarvis 2011, 283f).

The emphasis in focus group studies is not placed on generalizability of the findings but on their credibility (Jarvis 2011; Krueger and Casey 2009). The fact other participants can challenge and supplement claims and opinions adds to this credibility. Group discussions provide for context

and depth. The participants can discover and explore new sides of the thematic content that would perhaps not be discovered through individual interviews (Merton and Kendall 1946; Morgan 1998). Therefore, focus groups can often generate particularly rich data for interpretation. Focus groups can give us an impression of how strong participants feel and think what they do. This is indicated by the participants' will to defend their positions when they are challenged or their keenness to get their point across in the group.

The limitations of the method are the same as other types of qualitative interviews. Although a focus group study will typically include more participants than studies based on individual interviews, the number of participants is normally not high enough for findings to be generalizable. This is also the case when focus groups are used to describe variations between different social groups. Focus groups do not produce insights into the experiences of a whole social group but provide an elaborate description of the experiences of a few more or less typical representatives of that group as they are expressed in a particular situation.

The method has also been criticized for allowing the moderators the flexibility to adjust their questions during the interviews and between interviews (Jarvis 2011, 293). This would be unacceptable in a quantitative study that requires standardized units of analysis. However, this kind of flexibility is essential for the kind of knowledge that focus groups produce. In order to produce comparable responses and get the most out of every group, the moderator must adjust to the participants and the situation. This means that the moderator and the analyst are important research tools in focus group studies. How the moderator phrases the questions, asks follow-up questions, and challenges the participants will have significant impact on the findings. As with all forms of interview and ethnographic studies, the credibility of the finding thus depends on a high degree of transparency. When presenting the results from a focus group study, a researcher should be prepared to provide sufficient examples and argue the findings. Also, it is important to always respect the analytical status of the findings. They should not be understood as how the public in general thinks or what "effect" a text has on a social group. Rather, they provide insights into how different groups of people respond to different texts. By studying how people verbalize, discuss, and defend their impressions of different text, we get an impression of the rhetorical process and in what way texts may have persuasive force.

THE BENEFITS OF FOCUS GROUPS IN RHETORICAL RESEARCH

Focus group interviews can be used in a number of ways in rhetorical studies. The method offer an impression of different readings of a text, of people's knowledge and attitudes towards a topic, of how people read visual and textual expressions and styles, of how they interpret nonverbal cues, what contextual factors inform people's understanding of situations, and so forth. The essential question is whether the findings can help inform our understanding of situated rhetorical practice.

One way to incorporate focus groups in rhetorical studies is as a simulation of various aspects of rhetorical situations. By putting together a focus group, we are constructing an audience with some particular properties. Typically, the researcher introduces the participants to concrete texts and encourages them to express their opinions and experiences as audiences. Treating the focus groups as an audience in this way means that the interviews represent events and must be analysed as such. For the rhetorical analyst, then, the findings from the focus groups can be understood as a kind of secondary text that also must be analysed.

Another way to incorporate focus groups in rhetorical studies is as a way to identify salient dimensions or variations in readings prior to rhetorical analysis. Rhetorical analyses should be open to different readings of texts and images. Reception studies, including those conducted with focus groups, are ways to identify such different readings without being limited by the researcher's own interpretations. Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model of communication describes how mediated messages are decoded in various ways and mean different things to different people (Hall 1980). It is the decoding, or the contextualized reading and interpretation of a text, that is of interest to both rhetorical studies and reception studies. As people decode messages based on their situation and their background, different readings of texts and images are not only possible but unavoidable.

According to Hall, the decoding subject can assume three different positions: dominant/hegemonic position, negotiating position, and oppositional position (Hall 1980). Assuming the dominant/hegemonic position means that the audience member understands and accepts the message as encoded by the sender. Assuming the negotiated or the oppositional position, however, means that the audience member is rejecting some or all elements of the message. Focus groups are a way to identify what these kinds of positions consist of in particular situations and sub-

stantiate what kind of audience members assume different positions. Such studies can then be followed up by rhetorical analyses focusing on how different audience positions are rhetorically constructed or how they affect the persuasive potential of the message.

Focus groups can also be used to guide rhetorical analyses on a more detailed level. As the participants express and discuss their experiences, focus groups can give us an impression of their cognitive and emotional processing of arguments. Rhetorical communication is always influenced both by properties of the message and the predispositions of the audience. This is perhaps most clearly expressed in descriptions of enthymemic argumentation. Here the speaker presents a claim that rest on one or more unstated premises, leaving it up to the audience to complete the argument. The enthymeme thus leads the audience to connect the argumentation to their own experience. Group interviews can give us access to how this process works by promoting discussions that exhibit how audiences evaluate new information in light of previous knowledge and opinions. Lunt and Livingstone suggest how focus groups can be a way to bring such predispositions to the surface. Focus groups can “reveal underlying cognitive and ideological premises that structure arguments, the ways in which various discourse rooted in particular contexts and given experience are brought to bear on interpretations, the discursive construction of social identities, and so forth” (Lunt and Livingstone 1996, 96).

THE “AUDIENCIFICATION” OF THE TEXT: “LIKES” AND “SHARES” AS VERNACULAR RHETORIC

In relation to the case study of this chapter, I also suggest that focus groups can give us a deeper understanding of how users read and interpret practices that are made possible by the relational properties of social media. When users “like”, “share”, or “comment” on Facebook updates, they perform different kinds of discursive actions. A “like” can be an acknowledgment of arguments, a sign of support to the sender, an attempt to associate oneself with the content, or all these things at the same time. Adding to this plurality of meaning, a “like” might mean something different to a teenager and to her grandfather, and it might mean something different in the USA and in Norway.

These kinds of discursive actions have a significant influence on how the original content is perceived. The participants in the case study tell that they have more trust in, and are more likely to read, content that is shared

or “liked” by people they know. This displays what Mathieu calls the “audiencification” of the text (Mathieu 2015, 26). Most users are expressing themselves as audience and not as producers of content when they “like” or “share” something on Facebook. But even when they act as audience, users of social media are expressing something about themselves. They make their own tastes, preferences, and standards visible to others (Mathieu 2015, 26), and they give their approval or disapproval to content.

The forms of exchanges that the relational properties of social media make possible can be understood as what Gerard Hauser calls *vernacular expressions*: informal, everyday conversations and symbolic actions through which ordinary citizens engage in public opinion (Hauser 1999). The vernacular rests on a set of shared but informal norms and common understandings. For Hauser, “vernacular rhetoric” accounts for the way in which institutional publics are influenced by everyday talk. Hauser finds vernacular expressions of public opinion in the waving of flags, the honking of car horns, and the expressive colours people use during a political rally (Hauser 1999). In social media networks, the “likes”, “shares”, and “comments” through which the users read and express public opinion become integrated vernacular expressions. When people create memes, share news articles, “like” the pages of political actors, and share personal opinions on current events, they are engaging in the continuous and unruly conversation that make up public opinion in this sphere.

Treating these practices as vernacular expressions of public opinion is to emphasize the dialogical nature of rhetorical practice. The “shares” and “likes” of social media are not simply direct indications of the audience’s response, but are themselves symbolic actions. The question that becomes central for rhetorical studies, which the methodologies of audience studies can help us answer, is how people read and make sense of these vernacular expressions. Introducing focus group interviews to rhetorical studies of social media can give us a better understanding of how new interactive features allow for new forms of symbolic actions and thus influence the way people act rhetorically in these media.

The case study in this chapter displays both how focus groups can reveal how audiences make different readings of social media content and how the vernacular expressions of “liking” and “sharing” influence how users read and interact with this content.

First the focus groups are led through a discussion about the “like” function on Facebook and what meaning they attach to it in different situations. This interactive function has become an important part of the

vernacular rhetoric of Facebook. In the group discussions, it becomes clear that the “like”-function is not only a way for users to react to content, but also a way for the Facebook users to communicate something about themselves. This is also how they read other people’s “likes”. Then the focus groups are introduced to an anonymous meme campaign that uses the well-known “Hey Girl” memes to spread a political message. Although these memes display many of the characteristics of viral content, the participant hesitates to interact with them in any way necessary for them to actually go viral. Despite very different readings, the participants all perceive the memes to have a clear strategic intent. To contribute to the spread of such content, would imply a political commitment that the participants do not want to make. This kind of tension that arises in the balance between the audience’s readings and their understanding of the vernacular expressions facilitated by the media cannot easily be captured by more traditional forms of rhetorical analysis.

THE “HEY GIRL AUDUN LYSBAKKEN” CAMPAIGN

The “Hey Girl Audun Lysbakken” campaign was a series of memes posted by an anonymous Twitter account and Facebook page prior to the Norwegian parliamentary election in the fall of 2013. The campaign consisted of a series of pictures of Norwegian politician Audun Lysbakken with the caption “Hey Girl” and different political statement with a flirty and humorous tone.

The campaign was initiated in the spring of 2013, at the start of the campaign period before the Norwegian parliamentary election in September 2013. Throughout 2012 and 2013 the polls had suggested that The Socialist Left Party would do poorly in the election. Lysbakken had been leader of the party for only a year, following the 15 yearlong leadership of Kristin Halvorsen. Aged 35, Lysbakken was one of the youngest party leaders in Norwegian history and an unfamiliar face for many voters. In the fall of 2012, a poll conducted by TV2 suggested that only 19.3 per cent of the voters knew that Lysbakken was leader of SV. In March of 2013, the same poll showed that 55 per cent of SV’s own voters did not know who Lysbakken was.

The people or organization behind @heygirlaudun was never revealed. The context suggests that the campaign could have been initiated by someone closely affiliated with the party in an attempt to strengthen Lysbakken as a brand among young voters with higher education. The

polls suggested that the party's stronghold on this group were slipping (Figs. 5.1 and 5.2).

The pictures used to create the memes were both press photos and arranged photos from SV's campaign material. The arranged photos can be described as "fashion model"-like, adding a touch of glamour to the young party leader. Several of the pictures are in black and white. Others have dim colours or a bright pink background. Lysbakken is clearly portrayed as young and handsome, posing with a broad collar folded up, while rolling up his sleeves, taping his hands like a boxer before a fight, or posing for a portrait. The press photos used follow the same style. Lysbakken is often squinting or smiling mysteriously, and several of the pictures are retouched or in black and white only.

The form of the memes was copied from a viral phenomenon called "Hey Girl" with different captions on pictures of the Canadian actor and model Ryan Gosling. This was a series of Tumblr blogs and tweets that



Fig. 5.1 Example 1. From the "Hey Girl Audun Lysbakken" campaign, April 23, 2013. English translation of the Norwegian: "Hey girl. Let us crush the patriarchy together" (right)



Fig. 5.2 Example 2. From the “Hey Girl Audun Lysbakken” campaign, April 23, 2013. English translation of the Norwegian: “Hey girl. You look so good in your bike helmet it inspired me to National Transport Plan. #heygirlaudunlysbakken”

went viral around 2010 and reached the height of its popularity in 2012. The memes depicted Gosling with the caption “Hey Girl” and a flirtatious, but obviously fictional, quote appealing directly to the (female) reader. As the memes became more popular—helped along by established media like MTV and Huffington Post—the captions came to include feminist stances, and often academic and cultural references, which suggest that the memes were particularly popular among, and presumably often created by, female students.

The inter-textual reference should be obvious to everyone familiar with the original memes. The Lysbakken campaign clearly tries to connote the same sense of glamour and ideal of manhood that the Gosling pictures express, as well as the same ironic tension between image and caption. The captions also follow the same recipe, with the flirtatious tone and gender frame on the issues, often with academic or cultural references, but always

addressing different high-profile issues for the Socialist Left Party. The party's profile is based on conservation of welfare and labour rights, radical gender equality, and a more active environmental policy. Given a broad interpretation, these values should also be consistent with the ideal reader of the Gosling memes. Some of the captions in the campaign read: "Hey girl. For us to see each other more often, we need to build high speed trains. I'll just get starting, then"; "Hey girl. Real men are feminists. #heygirlaudunlysbakken".

The memes displayed several of the characteristics of viral content. They relied heavily on novelty and humour, and they clearly tried to appeal through pathos and identification (cf. Warnick and Heineman 2012, 64). The campaign quickly became popular. By the fall of 2013 the Twitter-account had almost 1000 followers and the Facebook page had almost 5000, which was a decent amount in a Norwegian political context at the time. However, the campaign did not go viral, in the sense that it got spread on an exponential rate or led to many spin-offs. It very much remained a campaign spread by one account. Still, when encountering the memes in their online setting, the different readers would probably see them accompanied by hundreds of "likes" from friends and strangers.

The "Hey Girl Audun Lysbakken" campaign demonstrates several of the challenges associated with doing rhetorical analysis of social media. As the memes are detached from a known sender and do not contain any clear call for action, it is difficult to establish a situational frame of analysis in which the memes can be understood as more or less successful rhetorical action. Also, the memes have many layers of inter-textual references, which invite many potential readings among different audiences that have different levels of familiarity with the original memes, the on-going election, Audun Lysbakken, and the Socialist Left Party.

Focus group interviews were used to identify variations in readings of this campaign among different voter groups on Facebook. The purpose of using focus groups were to move the focus of the rhetorical analysis from what is encoded in the memes to the situations that arise when different groups of audiences engage in decoding of the memes. The point was not to uncover rhetorical effect, but to get a better understanding of the rhetorical process. The research design made it possible to describe how different groups of audiences read the memes and the rhetorical situation differently. The participants were also asked about the vernacular rhetoric of Facebook and asked to reflect on the vernacular expressions that might accompany this type of campaign and how it affected their experience.

THE DESIGN OF THE FOCUS GROUP STUDY

I conducted six focus group interviews of 1.5 hours with a total of 26 interviewees. The focus groups were divided in three different audience groups: *Category 1* consisted of first-time voters aged 18–19; *category 2* consisted of students or newly graduated young adults aged 25–30; and *category 3* consisted of high school teachers aged 40–55.

All categories were homogeneous in terms of age and education, but every group turned out to have mixed party preferences. Since several of the members in category 2, and all the members in category 1 and 3, knew each other at least by name prior to the interviews, all the groups had functioning group dynamics. The potential challenge was that participants might be hesitant to display divergent political opinions or controversial meanings in front of colleagues and classmates. However, as the topic was not considered particularly sensitive or controversial, the benefits to the dynamic of the conversation and in particular the practical advantages of using already existing social networks were thought to be stronger than the potential disadvantages.

The moderator's role was loosely structured (Krueger and Casey 2009). As moderator I did not try to direct how the topics were discussed. Still I maintained some control over the conversations to ensure that they did not go off track and that every participant was heard. The conversations were focused on the participants' opinions. What they choose to focus on, or what they had a tendency to ignore, were thought to be significant. The style of moderation used here was similar to that of Schlesinger et al. (1992). For them "the discussion involved a funnelling process that is designed to allow groups initially to determine their own agendas as much as possible, before urging them to focus on specific issues" (Schlesinger et al. 1992, 28f).

After the participants had been introduced to a new campaign or text, they were encouraged to describe their first impressions. They were asked questions like "So, what do you think?" or "Any first impressions?" When talking about campaign content, the participants often focused on whether the campaign was "good" or "bad". In such cases, the participants were encouraged to articulate what they mean by "good", steering the conversation to discussions of what the participants regard as "good" or suitable within the media sphere. I would then ask follow-up questions connecting these assessments to how the participants actually behave in social media. The participants were continuously encouraged to use examples to sup-

port their claims, through questions like “What have you shared recently?” “Who do you usually interact with?”, or the frequent question, “Can you give an example?”

All the interviews were conducted during the Norwegian election campaign in 2013. The example used and discussed were thus current and often familiar to the participants. In cases where the participants were familiar with the texts, they were encouraged to concentrate on this and to recall their initial response.

THE VERNACULAR MEANING OF THE RELATIONAL PROPERTIES OF FACEBOOK

One function of the focus group interviews was to engage the informants in discussion about the different relational properties of Facebook. The aim was to get a better understanding of the vernacular significance of the different kinds of responses they allow. The most central of these is the “like”-function.¹

All the informants in the different age groups were very familiar with the function. According to the participants, the chief meaning of a “like” is that it is an endorsement of the content, the sender, or both. The participants also suggested that “likes” communicate a lot about the person “liking” something and that there are different strategic reasons to “like” or not “like” different content. To “like” something on Facebook is both a vernacular expression of recognition and support and a way to form and express ones identity.

The participants aged 25–30, described “likes” as a way to give feedback and endorse what they consider to be interesting content.

Group 4 (age 25–30)

Interviewer: *What’s the function of “liking” something?*

Participant 1: Recognition

Interviewer: *Recognition?*

Participant 2: Yes it is. Fifty percent recognition and fifty percent “more of this”

Participant 1: It says “good job! Cool idea!”

These participants also described how they consider the “like”-function as a way to interact with the algorithm that controls the content shown in

their Facebook feed. This suggests a more strategic use of the interactive functions. They actively “like” content from different users or different topics that they want to be exposed more to.

Furthermore, participants from all age categories stated that they are much more likely to follow a link or read something that a friend has “liked”. They are even more likely to click on a link that a friend has “shared”. In general, to share something on Facebook is seen as a strong endorsement. The number of “likes” or “shares” that an update has gotten seems far less important for the participants than who of their friends have “liked” something in deciding whether or not to read it.

The participants also showed a very conscious attitude to what their “likes” and “shares” communicate about themselves. When asked to reflect on what it means to “like” something, one of the first things the participants talked about was how this function is a way to form one’s digital identity. The “like”-function is a way to communicate something about oneself and to establish one’s ethos. A participant in the 25–30 category gave an honest description of this:

Group 32 (age 25–30)

Participant 1: I think now that Facebook has become a bit more set. Most people understand how Twitter works. I think it’s basically about creating one’s own identity. That’s why I very rarely “like” stuff. And if I hit “like” on something political, I have to be able to vouch for the content. Once I had my profile broken into by someone who “liked” Siv Jensen [politician, Progress Party]. That was very negative for me, because it was a huge contrast to how I wanted to appear.

For this participant, the deciding factor when “liking” something is not the quality or relevance of the content or his impression of the sender, but what the “like” communicates about him. When someone else accessed his account, the worst thing they could do was to “like” a certain politician. The reason for this is the participant’s knowledge of what his friends will interpret from this action: That he is voting for the Progress Party. As another participant in the 40–55 category described it: “the social function is that it defines a person”.

All age categories confirmed that “liking” a politician, a political party, or a political message is a signal of support. The few participants that were reluctant to give such an interpretation clearly did so on normative

grounds. They expressed that we “shouldn’t assume things” about each other based on such superficial acts. However, at later points in the interviews, even these critics admitted that they had a clear impression of what a lot of their Facebook friends were voting, based on what they were sharing and writing.

The combination of interpreting “likes” as an encouragement for friends to read and a clear sign of endorsement makes many of the participants reluctant to interact with political content. There seem to be two main reasons for this: They do not want to make their political opinions public, and they do not want to make others believe that they are trying to force their political opinions on them. The more politically involved the participants were, the more comfortable they seemed to be with sharing and advocating personal political opinions. Among the participants that had no political affiliations, clear endorsements of political opinions were sometimes described in terms of social blunders or at least somewhat inappropriate.

In sum, the participants assumed that by “liking” something, people want to be associated with the person or organization behind the message. To “like” political content on Facebook is seen as a rather strong endorsement. By letting these assumptions affect how they relate to different types of utterances, the participants demonstrates the rhetorical function of “audiencification”: “liking” something should not simply be seen as a reaction to the content but also as a vernacular expression about the person sharing the content and a way to build one’s online persona.

DIFFERENT READINGS OF THE “HEY GIRL AUDUN LYSBAKKEN” CAMPAIGN

The focus groups suggest that different audiences probably decoded the memes in the “Hey Girl Audun Lysbakken” campaign very different. Participants age 25–30 were familiar with the inter-textual references but their impressions of the campaign were very much divided along party lines. The first-time voters (age 18–19) recognized the memes as humorous, but did not understand the humour. They did not draw any message from the texts, and they were not even sure whether the campaign was meant to be supportive or critical. The high school teachers (age 40–55) made a surprising reading of the campaign. Not only did they not find the memes funny, but they were convinced that the campaign was meant to slander the Socialist Left Party.

Several of the participants aged 25–30 were familiar with the campaign prior to the focus groups, and overall the participants in this category seemed to get the cultural and political references in the memes. Some participants claimed that they got a better impression of Audun Lysbakken and the Socialist Party through the campaign. The reason being that the memes are very “eloquent”, “well written”, and “to the point” and that Lysbakken through this campaign shows an up until now unknown capacity for self-irony. The participants expressed that the campaign contributed with relevant political information, since it highlighted the party’s main issues. However, these participants moderated their reactions, describing themselves as sympathetic readers and explaining that they quickly lost interest in the campaign.

Overall, the left-wing voters aged 25–30 were clearly more positive than the right-wing or undecided voters. In terms of the cultural and political inter-textuality of the memes, we can say that the participants got it, but they did not necessarily buy it. In terms of Hall’s theory of decoding, they assumed a negotiating position. In one group in this category, the texts were characterized as “clever”. The majority of the comments were, however, critical, sceptical, or flat out negative. A section of the discussion clearly shows some of their issues with the campaign:

Group 3 (age 25–30)

Interviewer: *What do you think about these images?*

Participant 5: They don’t make me any more positive towards the Socialist Party or Lysbakken, if that’s what they’re trying to gain

Interviewer: *Why not?*

Participant 5: Well, I vote conservative, so it wouldn’t have any impact on me anyhow. And personally I don’t care for Audun Lysbakken. Actually I think it’s quite interesting that he is talking about ... the Socialist Party is so concerned with gender equality and the objectification of women ... And that’s what he’s doing himself! If somebody had done that with [the female politician] Inga Marthe Thorkildsen or somebody else, it would be a huge controversy.

Participant 1: I immediately think it’s very transparent, what they’re trying to do. I think it’s terrible. But are you affected? This is just pop-culture!

Participant 5: Yeah! Because the point with memes is that they’re supposed to be fun and a quick point, and then they go viral.

This is very contrived. Somebody has probably been sitting round a table and thought long and hard on what pictures they should put together with what caption. And that's the opposite effect of what memes are supposed to have.

As the responses suggest, the participants had a tendency to talk about Lysbakken and the Socialist Party as the sender of the “Hey Girl”-memes. This was also the case in the other group in this category (age 25–30), which claimed that Lysbakken showed “self-irony” through the campaign. This was despite the fact that the pictures they saw were clearly labelled with the original account and introduced by the moderator as a viral campaign initiated by an anonymous sender. Some of the participants clearly suspected that the real sender was the Socialist Left Party, while others did not seem to care about the difference. It was the Socialist Left Party and Lysbakken who were thought to communicate something through the memes.

Overall, the participants in the age category 25–30 had apparently no problem grasping the concept of an anonymous account or a viral phenomenon. Yet, they did not find the “Hey Girl”-memes credible as a “real” viral phenomenon, and therefore responded to it like an average political commercial. The memes were described as “contrived” and “transparent”. Of course, the focus group setting may have encouraged this reading. But this was also the age group where most participants were familiar with the memes and had previously seen them through their own social media accounts.

The first-time voters (age 18–19) showed no signs of picking up on the cultural and political references. Because of this, the participants were very uncertain about the meaning of the memes and could not decide whether it was a positive campaign or a slander campaign:

Group 1 (age 18–19)

Interviewer: *Any first impressions?*

Participant 4: I don't think I would have “liked” that

Participant 1: Me neither. But that's because ... I don't think I get it

Participant 3: No, I don't even understand what it is. Not at all!

Interviewer: *It doesn't make sense to you?*

Participant 3: No

((Laughter))

((The participants read several of the memes aloud))

- Interviewer: *It seems to me that you find this ridiculous?*
 Participant 1: No, I don't know. This was hard. Can we see something else instead?
 Participant 3: It almost seems rude
 Interviewer: *Rude? How?*
 Participant 3: "Rolling up my sleeves for equal pay"...
 Participant 5: I don't get that at all...
 Participant 4: I don't understand shit
 Participant 5: What is "Hey Girl"? Is it something from some celebrities?
 Participant 1: I've never heard of it

The joint response from the first-time voters was that they didn't understand what the memes were communicating. The participants seemed aware that they were lacking the references to make sense of the memes and expressed that the campaign therefor was nonsensical to them. They did not even have a clear understanding of what the campaign was supposed to communicate.

Both groups in this category (age 18–19) understood the campaign as an attempt to reach young voters through humour. Yet, none of the participants found the memes funny. Neither did they have a clear understanding of whether it was making fun of the Socialist Left Party or if Lysbakken was supposed to be the funny one. The participants suspected that the memes were sarcastic and hesitated to suggest a definitive reading. Still they believed themselves to be in the target group, an assumption that was made on the basis of the form of the campaign. Viral memes were assumed to be a genre that excludes older readers. Thus, the first-time voters' response to the campaign suggests a negotiated position. The form of the memes suggests to the young voters that this is aimed at them. Yet they cannot make sense of it.

While the first-time voters had a hard time making sense of the campaign, their teachers (age 40–55) gave a more definitive reading. This was very different from the one given by the participants aged 25–30, and the reading that these participants made could probably be described as an oppositional position, in Hall's terms. In one of the groups, the participants agreed that it had to be a slander campaign to hurt the Socialist Left Party:

Group 5 (age 40–55)

- Participant 3: I get pissed off
 Interviewer: *This provokes you?*

- Participant 3: Oh yeah. This provokes me!
 ((Several express agreement))
- Interviewer: But the language ... You've got to be over fifty to understand any of it!
- Participant 1: Yeah, right! What is this?!
- ((Everybody talks at the same time))
- Participant 4: What on earth is he trying to achieve with this?
- Interviewer: *It is not an official campaign from Lysbakken*
- Participant 2: Somebody has manipulated this! It is not from the Socialist Party
- Interviewer: *That's right. It's from another account, as you can see...*
- Participant 2: But it's a professional photographer!
- Participant 1: Lysbakken must have agreed to it! Or they've manipulated the photo
- Participant 4: Maybe it's used out of context
 ((Interrupt each other))
- Participant 5: But it can be from someone else. Someone who wants to contribute to his campaign ...
- Participant 4: Somebody's trying to slander him and hurt the Socialist Party
- Participant 2: Or to hurt him
- Interviewer: *If you saw this in your own feed, what would you think?*
- Participant 4: I would think that somebody's trying to hurt the Socialist Party
- Participant 5: That's what I think
- Participant 4: ... to ridicule them

While the left-wing voters aged 25–30 were more likely to be positive the campaign, the left-wing voters aged 40–55 were clearly provoked. As the transcript suggests, the discussion was rather heated. The larger transcript suggests that the most critical participants were of the opinion that the campaign was portraying Lysbakken as a young and inexperienced leader with nothing but his good looks to lean on. They saw the campaign as an attempt to ridicule the Socialist Left Party as a naive and unserious party. The participants in the group above also displayed confusion around memes as a genre. They expressed disbelief that seemingly professional photographs were re-used in a different context and from another anonymous source. The participants understood this as “manipulation”. At no point did these participants give any impression that they had seen this form of re-use of text and pictures on the Internet before. One reason may be that this focus group had the highest average age. Every participant was

over 50, and hence not assumed to be “digital natives”. They did not understand the vernacular codes of re-use and circulation as intuitively as the other participants.

For the other group in this category (age 40–55), this was not the case. The respondents in this group understood the campaign to be intentionally positive and had seemingly no problem with the uncertainty of the sender. But the group’s reactions to the campaign were divided. Unlike the reactions in the age group 25–30, the division here was by age rather than political sympathy. The elder participants described it as “dumb” and “peculiar”. The younger participants (in their forties) described the campaign as “fresh”, “cool”, “informal”, and “humorous”, even though they showed no signs of picking up on the inter-textual references to former “Hey Girl”-memes. They also found the campaign politically relevant, as it contributed information about the Socialist Party’s main issues. One participant, a long-time conservative voter, described it this way:

Group 6 (age 40–55)

Participant 4: I don’t think I would have “liked” or shared this on Facebook. But I think I could talk about it in other circumstances. I might mention it ... if we were discussing politics or something, I would maybe mention it and say that I thought it was pretty cool

Previously in the interview, the participant explained that she would never share political content that she did not want to be associated with. To talk positive about the campaign offline, should then be understood as a strong endorsement, at least an endorsement of the appearance and style of the campaign, if not of its content.

It is interesting to note that this participant is apparently more reluctant to “like” something on Facebook than to bring it up in a social situation. The participant will not endorse the campaign by “liking” or “sharing” the posts. These vernacular expressions are thought to reflect not only her opinions of this campaign, but her political convictions in general. This is in line with the understanding of the vernacular expressions of “liking” and “sharing” that is shared across the different categories of participants.

In sum, the focus groups reveal variations in both the audience’s interpretation of the memes and of vernacular expressions. Regardless of whether they assume a dominant/hegemonic position, like the partici-

pants aged 25–30, or a negotiating or oppositional position, like the first-time voters (age 18–19) and their teachers (age 40–55), the participants perceive the memes to have some kind of strategic intent. Either they see it as a campaign on behalf of the Socialist Left Party or as a campaign against it. This has a decisive impact on how the participants imagine themselves interacting with the campaign.

Because the relational functions of Facebook are not seen simply as an opportunity to respond to and express their opinions about content, but also as vernacular expressions of their own identity, to “like” or share the memes would be to signal that one is either a Socialist Left Party voter or an active opponent, depending on whether one makes a hegemonic or an oppositional reading. Even if shared content is modified by a comment, the person sharing it is still performing a political action that ultimately reflects on that person. To “share” or even “like” political content of this nature implies a certain political engagement and, not the least, a will to spread political opinions to friends, family members, and colleagues. Such an engagement often comes with a social cost. The knowledge of such costs will influence how they read the vernacular expressions of others, and thus also how they interpret rhetorical situations and ultimately how they read texts. This process is what is here understood as “audiencification”. The participants’ acts as audience members are affected by their awareness of how these acts in turn will be read as vernacular expressions of their political opinions, preferences, and beliefs. This way, the focus groups give us an impression not only of different readings of the memes but of the processes of decoding, which include how the participants interpret their own acts and the acts of other in social media.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter describes in what ways focus group interviews are a useful methodological addition to rhetorical studies of social media. The fragmented, changeable, and complex nature of an average Facebook feed challenges established understandings of what constitutes a rhetorical audience or a rhetorical situation. Thus, we need new methodologies to describe how people interact in online spheres in their everyday lives and in their role as citizens.

Through the case of the “Hey Girl Audun Lysbakken” campaign, I have demonstrated two ways in which focus group interviews give us a better understanding of how people act rhetorically on Facebook.

First, focus group interviews give us an impression of how different audience groups interpret rhetorical situations and how they make different readings of texts. The dynamics of a group interview setting shift our attention from what potential meanings are encoded in the texts to the processes audiences engage in when decoding the texts.

Second, focus group interviews give us a deeper understanding of how users read and interpret the vernacular expressions that are made possible by social media. When users “like”, “share”, or “comment” on Facebook, they do not simply contribute to viral spread of content, but perform different kinds of discursive actions. Focus groups can help answer how people read and make sense of these vernacular expressions and how the awareness of their rhetorical potential affects how they act as audience.

NOTES

1. At the time of the interviews, the “like” in form of a “thumbs-up” was the only response available on Facebook.

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Think-Aloud Reading: Selected Audiences’ Concurrent Reaction to the Implied Audience in Political Commentary

Mette Bengtsson

This chapter explores how selected audiences react to the implied audience in Danish political print newspaper commentary. When introducing the concept of second persona, Edwin Black argues that even if members of the audience do not agree on the arguments put forward, they are still influenced by the underlying ideology in the text. Exemplified by a debate on school integration, Black claims that “actual auditors look to the discourse they are attending for cues to tell them how they are to view the world” (Black 1970, 113). Black is interested in ideology, which can be evaluated on the basis of the discursive audience construction given rise to through a text’s substantive claims and stylistic tokens (Black 1970, 112). Yet, when turning to the actual impact of audience construction, he only uses vague and overall expressions such as “a vector of influence” and “the pull of an ideology” (Black 1970, 113). The lack of interest in a more precise description of the real-world workings of a text (or ideology) fits with Black’s earlier attack on neo-Aristotelian criticism and their occupation with the

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effect on an immediate audience. According to Black, effect is impossible to account for, and therefore he urges scholars only to talk about effect as conjectural assessments of a *probable* effect (Black 1965, 82).

When discussing Danish political print newspaper commentary in this chapter, I endeavour to be more precise about the reactions to the ideology in a text, and the study therefore combines textual analysis of the discursive audience construction in the genre with reception studies of selected audiences' reactions to the audience construction. First, I use Black's analytical concept of second persona as a way of opening up a discussion about commentator discourse. I analyse the genre's substantial claims and stylistic tokens, arguing that the genre enforces a passive citizen role associated with a competitive democracy (see Bengtsson 2016 and more detailed analysis below). Second, I make think-aloud readings in combination with qualitative interviews with selected audiences in order to gain a better understanding of how the commentator texts are understood, interpreted and negotiated. When browsing existing research on the genre, a simple understanding still seems to influence the understanding of the genre's effect. For example, Winther Nielsen et al. claim: "People learn from elite discussion, integrating this in their own understanding of the political. When trying to grasp a complex political reality, they transform into mini-commentators" (2011, 19, my translation). As my study indicates, this is not the case. Rather, the respondents engage with the commentator texts in multiple ways: while some people may engage with the audience construction in the text, others may distance themselves from it, doing what Stuart Hall would call an oppositional reading (1980 cf. Condit 1989). Thus, the idea is not to revitalize a neo-Aristotelian conceptualizing of effect, implying a rather definitive understanding of effect as a simple relation between cause and effect on an immediate audience, but rather to qualify the claim about the "pull of ideology." The genre will most likely have different effects on different people, and also unintended ones. Inspired by Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Erin Rand who link the discussion of effect to the discussion of agency (Campbell 2005; Rand 2008, 2015; Kiewe and Houck 2015, 14–16), I move away from a rhetor-oriented understanding of agency, focusing on rhetor's intention and strategies to a processual-oriented understanding of agency where different audiences' different understandings and reactions are central to the critical assessment. Like Campbell, I understand a rhetor's text as a "point of articulation" (Campbell 2005) and see agency as "communal and participatory" (Campbell 2005).

As a way of introduction, a distinction between different kinds of texts may be useful. With reference to Fiske (1986), Gentikow (1997) and Kjeldsen (2015), I draw on the distinction between three types of text. *Primary texts* are the texts we normally engage with as rhetorical critics because we somehow find them rhetorical interesting and significant, but without relating them to other texts. *Secondary texts* are existing reactions to the primary text that we as scholars can collect and analyse, as when Leah Ceccarelli encourages scholars to perform textual-intertextual analysis (Ceccarelli 2001). Ceccarelli takes a historical perspective, but with social media, secondary texts are increasing in number and accessible in many forms. *Tertiary texts* are scholar-generated texts such as qualitative interviews, participant observation, think-aloud readings and so on. These are sometimes also labelled *empirical* texts and can be considered supplementary to the secondary texts. Tertiary texts can be necessary if no secondary texts are available or if the secondary texts do not touch upon relevant aspects. Others use similar distinctions such as Klaus Bruhn Jensen, who differentiates between *data found* and *data made*, where data found corresponds with primary and secondary texts and data made with tertiary, empirical texts (Jensen 2012a, 288, 2012b, 442). I applaud scholarship that combines these different kinds of text in order to contextualize the reading of the primary text. As John Fiske writes: “Reading the secondary and tertiary texts can help us see how the primary text can be articulated into the general culture in different ways, by different readers in different subcultures” (Fiske 1986, 126). Moreover, Jennifer Stromer-Galley and Edward Schiappa also emphasize that combining methods often gives rise to some of the most interesting and persuasive studies, but hold on to a laudable recommendation, namely, that “audience research should not be pursued to the exclusion of textual analysis” (Stromer-Galley and Schiappa 1998, 34; see Chap. 2 in this volume). Scholars trained in close reading should not give up these skills, but use them in an integrated methodological practice.

HOW TO USE THINK-ALoud READINGS IN RHETORICAL STUDIES

As this book exemplifies, the ways of gaining access to audiences' reactions are manifold. In the study of commentator discourse, I use think-aloud reading in combination with a qualitative interview as a way of collecting reactions. When conducting a think-aloud reading, a respondent is asked

to read aloud, pause and verbalize whatever comes into mind. The pauses can be randomly incorporated whenever the respondent feels like it, or markings or pauses can be added to a text to secure regular pauses or after specific text passages. The interviewer should emphasize that if the respondents have no reactions, they should not force themselves to react. The think-aloud reading can be performed with written, oral or audiovisual texts, and also with digital texts with a respondent constructing the text. The think-aloud reading will provide a concurrent reaction to the text, tying reactions closely to specific text passages. When naming the method *think-aloud reading in combination with a qualitative interview* (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009), this is to underline that think-aloud reading often involves dialogue in one form or another between respondent and scholar. However, compared to a traditional qualitative interview, the involvement from the scholar is downplayed. When collecting think-aloud readings, the scholar does not prepare an interview guide in order to ask questions, but instead sees the reader as the active part in charge. If asking questions, it should only be to make the reader elaborate using questions such as “what do you think about that?,” “you said so and so, can you say a little more” or “will you elaborate?” This can also be done by nodding, saying affirmative words such as “okay” or making invitational sounds like “hmm.” Furthermore, the interviewer can ask the reader to elaborate on nonverbal reactions, for example, if the reader starts laughing. I use the term *think-aloud reading* to refer to the exercise performed by the respondent, but other terms come along with this; the tertiary text you receive is a *think-aloud protocol*, and when you analyse these texts you perform *protocol analysis*.

By way of introduction, knowing the origin of the think-aloud protocol and its development may also be useful for the understanding of its benefits before demonstrating this through a case study. Even though think-aloud protocols have been used within a range of fields since the 1940s, for example, medical problem solving (Duncker 1945), mathematical problem solving (Polya 1954), chess (de Groot 1965) and human problem solving (Newell and Simon 1972), it is not until the 1980s when Anders Ericsson and Herbert Simon published the article *Verbal Reports as Data* in *Psychological Review* (Ericsson and Simon 1980) and, later on, the book *Protocol Analysis: Verbal Reports as Data* (Ericsson and Simon 1984 [1993]) that verbal reports are accepted as a robust methodological approach within cognitive psychology and later on also in other scholarships and sciences. In their book, Ericsson and Simon offer a comprehensive

review of the empirical literature on verbal reports and propose a theoretical framework taking all crucial methodological issues into account, especially the “validity-issue” (how we obtain an accurate representation of thinking) and the “reactive-effects issue” (how people avoid changing their thinking when asked to think aloud). Ericsson and Simon are interested in describing the processes of thinking and problem solving, and their methodological concerns are related to this purpose.

At this first glance, protocol analysis does not seem to be a tailor-made method for rhetoricians. When discussed by Ericsson and Simon, protocol analysis is placed within cognitive psychology, which emanates from natural science, and terms like “validity” and “behavioural data” normally do not fit well in the mouth of a humanist. Nevertheless, as the method develops and with some variation of it, it has proven useful for rhetoricians for some purposes. Around the 1990s, protocol analysis and adjusted versions of it intensively gained ground, both within cognitive psychology (see, e.g., Compton and Logan 1991; Siegler 1987, 1989), but also in other sciences and scholarships; see, for example, on usability testing (Lewis 1982; Benbunan-Fich 2001), text comprehension (Trabasso and Suh 1993) and translation studies (Kusmaul and Tirkkonen-Condit 1995). In writing and reading research, protocol analysis is already integrated as a central method by the late 1970s and early 1980s (Hayes and Flower 1977; Afflerbach and Johnston 1984; Afflerbach 2000), but in rhetorical scholarship think-aloud protocols have, to the best of my knowledge, so far only been used in very few studies and are far from being an integral and well-established method. One purpose in rhetorical studies is the development of quality criteria for a specific genre, doing this not from a scholar's desk but from active engagement with selected rhetors and audiences. For example, Anne Katrine Lund has worked with Scandinavian Airlines (SAS) to improve their customer relations and thereby their external communication and image (Lund 2003): “With fresh letters in our hand, we visited the customers individually and experienced the customers' spontaneous reaction to the text word by word” (Lund 2003, 3, my translation). The analysis resulted in a rethinking of the response strategy motivated by the customers' different underlying motives for complaining (Lund 2003, 4–9). Another example is Catherine Schryer who also uses think-aloud reading for an evaluating purpose. In a similar manner to Lund, she conducts a case study of refusal letters in an insurance company, also working as a consultant for a company performing empirical research (2002). A last body of work using think-aloud protocols in rhetoric is

investigating of the construction of ethos and credibility (Hoff-Clausen 2007, 2008; Sørensen 2016). The basic idea is that empirical studies are inevitable when wanting to understand how ethos is constructed, because as James McCroskey puts it: “Ethos is an attitude toward a source of communication held at a given time by a receiver” (McCroskey 2016, 82). In a study of online ethos, Elisabeth Hoff-Clausen makes a similar argument for integrating a reception component: “In studies of online ethos it seems reasonable to integrate a reception component as part of the rhetorical criticism, partly because *ethopoiia* is both a question of the rhetor’s self-representation in the text and the receiver’s understanding of it, partly because web texts have an adaptive architecture when users, based on their specific interests and needs, tread their own paths” (Hoff-Clausen 2007, 102, my translation). Hoff-Clausen uses the term *user-oriented rhetorical criticism*, which she describes as when the rhetorical critic not only makes analysis and interpretations of a rhetorical text but also conducts user interviews with a selection of intended audiences’ protocol reading the text (Hoff-Clausen 2007, 102).

ADJUSTMENT TO THE TRADITIONAL USE OF THE METHOD

As appears from the above studies, several adjustments to the classical version of protocol analysis are made when rhetorical scholars use the method.

First, classical think-aloud protocols do not typically involve reading a *text*, but rather a task performance, for example, playing chess, building Lego construction or writing an essay. In the rhetorical studies using protocol analysis, the respondent *reads* (broadly defined as read, hear or watch) a text (also broadly defined as both written and oral texts, including oral texts with or without visuals—as well as text fragments constructed by the reader) and thinks aloud along the way. In this way, audiences react to the text, sharing whatever comes to mind during the reading process, as is also the case in Christian Kock’s chapter in this book on the reception of classical music. Second, the purpose is different. In the classical use of protocol analysis, the researcher describes a thinking or problem-solving process, whereas in rhetorical scholarship the method can be used for several purposes, for example, critical evaluation of texts and genres (Lund 2003; Schryer 2002), understanding ethos construction (Hoff-Clausen 2007; Sørensen 2016) or understanding reactions to a discursive audience construction in a text or a genre as presented in the case study in this chapter. In rhetorical studies, think-aloud readings offer

a concurrent reaction from selected audiences that can be used as a valuable insight in the critical investigation of the rhetoric and its impact. Third, for Ericsson and Simon, the traditional use of the method combining think-aloud reading with a qualitative interview would be a violation of the method leading to non-valid behavioural data. In the traditional use, the researcher is placed out of sight, not asking the informant to elaborate, because this will only compromise the validity of the verbal report. This is not the case in humanistic scholarship interested in the interpretation of meaning and construction of social worlds. In this context, qualitative conversations are accepted as research—as the social production of knowledge. Fourth, in classical think-aloud protocols, the respondent is told only to report, not to analyse, explain or interpret, while when used in rhetorical scholarship, the respondent is not restricted in this way, but told to verbalize whatever comes into mind and talk about it with the interviewer. When subsequently using these empirical texts, the critic should consider the texts as reactions that are to be interpreted just as the primary texts. Fifth and last, the methodological considerations are significantly different from the classical use. As mentioned above, Ericsson and Simon are primarily concerned with the “validity-issue” and “reactive-effects issue,” while the methodological concerns in rhetorical scholarship are comparable to those of a qualitative interview. When conducting think-aloud readings of written or oral texts, a range of choices are influencing the investigation: selecting text(s), selecting readers (who, how many, single or in focus groups), choosing the setting (at university, natural surroundings), making marks/stops in the texts as an invitation to verbalize reactions (how many, where, or no marks but just whenever the respondent feels like it), deciding on the duration of the reading (1 hour or more, stopping before the respondent loses concentration), considering placement of the interviewer (next to or in front of the respondent) and deciding on transcription guidelines. All these issues are to be carefully considered—as will be demonstrated in the following case study.

SPECIFIC BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES FOR RHETORICAL STUDIES WHEN USING THINK-ALoud READING

Finally, besides the adjustment of the classical version of the method, the specific benefits and challenges should also be emphasized before moving on to the case study.

When comparing think-aloud reading to other reception or empirical studies, this method has some obvious advantages. One is that you focus the reader's reaction upon the text and the concrete means and characteristics of it. Thus, it can be used as a starting point for a conversation (e.g. on specific content, form or genre), hence, often unfolding as a surprisingly rich and nuanced discussion of the text or genre. If you ask people about their reaction to a text or genre without having a concrete artefact at hand, my experience is that the respondents often echo more general and well-known views and opinions. In the case study, when I initially asked people what they think of political commentators, they often talk about spin and strategy, which is a point made by elitist voices such as politicians and scholars, but when asking them to read and think aloud, they go into details and follow their own reactions. The respondents are interacting with the text, verbalizing what it does to them as they read, analysing, interpreting, showing what they understand and do not understand, getting annoyed, amused and so on. Hence, the readers are not experts on the genre, but rather they are experts of their own reactions to it. Another advantage is the concurrent instead of the retrospective reaction. Again, this is an advantage, because people can pay attention to details in the text. If you are to remember a text or genre, it will often be more general. Barbara Sadler makes a similar point when reviewing Helen Wood's book on women and television in the journal *Participations. Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* (2009). In this study—which is much similar to think-aloud reading (though without calling it so)—Wood is recognized for her methodological innovation: “[I]t is Wood's method that is particularly significant here. Wood is able to question the boundaries of the text as complete and to show how the viewer responds as the program is broadcast (rather than after it as in many other studies)” (Sadler 2010, 181). The reviewer also writes: “I like the potential that the ‘text-in-action’ method offers researchers. It's bold and exciting and I can't wait to see what other researchers do with it” (Sadler 2010, 182).

The method of think-aloud reading, however, also poses challenges of which we need to be aware and continuously reflect upon. First, it is a cognitive challenge for informants to read, think and speak aloud at the same time. One solution is to allow the respondent to read silently, but in this way you lose the paraverbal expressions that are valuable when interpreting the reader's attitude. With audiovisual texts, however, we do not face the same problem. A related problem is handling embarrassed respondents troubled by reading aloud. I have experienced this myself and solved

this by making an effort to assure the respondent that it is insignificant. It was surprising, though, that several readers struggled with reading the commentator texts. Through their performance, one could immediately tell that the respondent was unacquainted with the commentator texts. Second, it is a forced situation when asking someone to read, hear or watch a text and think aloud. When conducting my study, one respondent refused to read from one end to the other. I accepted this and considered what this could tell me about her reading. When performing a qualitative study in the tradition of protocol analysis, it is important to keep an interpretative sensibility, to be open to unforeseen aspects and try to use such changes in the interpretation of the situation. Furthermore, the occurrence of changes and unforeseen events clearly illustrates that the research situation is far from an actual reading situation: that the reader might not have chosen the text at all and/or completed the reading. These aspects may be unfolded in the dialogue. Third, finding and selecting respondents can be difficult. A mechanical selection of respondents with reference to a general stratification (as, for example, age, sex, education) often seems less meaningful and sometimes even unreflective in relation to the research question. Wanting a reaction from a certain group often results in a better research design, as in Lund's study on dissatisfied insurance customers. If using a general stratification, arguments for every selection criteria must be given. Fourth and last, these kinds of study are also time-consuming, and practical preparation, finding and selecting respondents and the communication with respondents both before and after can be a demanding process, and because of these practical issues, it is only possible to use few respondents.

A CONCURRENT REACTION TO THE IMPLIED AUDIENCE IN POLITICAL COMMENTARY

Now we turn to the case study example that integrates textual analysis and think-aloud reading as a way of evaluating the commentator genre. Because this book discusses rhetorical audiences and methodological perspectives, I give priority to the second step integrating think-aloud readings, but I also touch lightly upon the first step in order to show how the close reading and empirical study is integrated.

As mentioned in the introduction, the overall aim is to conduct a critical reading of Danish political commentator discourse. I am interested in the way political commentators position themselves as experts through

their writings and thereby also their readers: how they understand politics, political debate and the different roles for journalists, politicians and citizens when engaging in political debate. How is this understanding passed on through their discourse, and how does this affect our understanding of democracy and the citizen's role? As Miller, I see genres as social action, understanding genres as typified rhetorical actions where people act together (Miller 1984). Genres work as speech acts of power, positioning the readers and writers (Schryer 2002, 77; Freedman and Medway 1994, x).

In a first step, I analyse and interpret a selection of commentaries representing the genre and the way it is practised in a current Danish context. This is done in order to explore the discursive audience construction in the genre and the expectations of the audiences' action that the genre implies. The text corpus contains 90 political commentaries from nine political commentators in the six largest national newspapers during the general election in Denmark in 2011. After several careful readings of the entire material, three types of substantive claims seemed highly noticeable. First, claims about politicians' spin and strategy. The commentators explain to the reader why the politicians are saying what they are, and the underlying logic is that everything the politicians do or say is for a strategic reason, to gain votes, not because they actually mean it or have ideological motivated values or visions for a better society. Besides the explanation, the commentators also judge and give advice on strategic moves and thereby combine the translator role with that of a judge and political advisor. Another body of substantive claims concerns predictions of politicians' future political career paths and future cooperation among the political parties, focusing on persons and parties and their position and power. Finally, the political commentators browse through some of the current cases that politicians discuss, but stressing only how the politicians position themselves, sometimes followed by a catchy soundbite, but almost never unfolding their argument for that position. In contrast, the first two kinds of substantial claims are described in the literature on political journalism, the last is not typically touched upon (see Cappella and Jamieson (1997) on spirals of cynicism, Aalberg et al. (2011) on the framing of politics as strategy and game and Hjarvard (2009, 2010) on political commentators as fortune tellers).

Characterizing the dominant stylistic tokens, the most evident form is the commentators' postulating manner. When evaluating politicians and their (strategic) actions, the commentators express their opinion, but

without making a real argument put forward support for their claims. Apparently, the commentators assume that they are in a position where their authority is enough, and when saying something, they assume that it will function as an implicit argument from authority. Another stylistic token is blurring who is talking. The commentators use expressions such as “nobody believes” or “everyone says” and thereby pass on viewpoints with no clear address and at the same time leaving it unsaid whether they are of the same opinion themselves. Finally, commentators do joint talking, and if having different opinions on, for example, a politician’s way of handling a case, they often align their views within a few days, which can be seen as a way of gaining power. As in the literature on the content of political journalism, some aspects are highlighted in the existing literature, but not necessarily in context with political commentators as new expert sources in political journalism (see Hjarvard 2008 on political parallelism of the press, Wold on 2013 on watchdogs in crowds and Hitlin 2005 on aligning views).¹

And what can this analysis of the genre’s dominant substantial claims and stylistic tokens tell us about the implied audience? The person addressed is interested in the politicians as persons, their positions and strategies for gaining votes, not their arguments for political proposals. The implied audience is one who accepts an authoritarian way of arguing, not questioning this authority or reflecting of what is said in a critical manner. Comparing this discursive audience construction with different models of democracy and their understandings of the citizen’s role, the audience construction, broadly speaking, corresponds to the understanding of the citizen in a competitive democracy (Held 2006, 5; Strömbäck 2005, 334–335). In this understanding, the citizen’s main task is to elect representatives, and the citizen is therefore primarily interested in the politicians as representatives, not discussing politics and having arguments about current issues and how to act. As Strömbäck describes it: “Since people are supposed to react rather than act, there is no expectation that they participate in public life or the public sphere” (Strömbäck 2005, 335).

Having elaborated on the implied audience in the commentator texts and argued that the genre is prompting a problematic understanding of democracy and the role of the citizen, a second step is to ask selected audiences to read a number of commentaries and think aloud in order to grasp how they react to the audience construction. In the study, eight people were asked to read three current political commentaries. The duration of a single reading was 2 hours on average, so all together these tertiary texts

consisted of 16 hours of think-aloud readings, which was transcribed after conventional standards. The respondents were primarily recruited through a database in the so-called Experience Lab at the Faculty of Humanities at Copenhagen University, which secured no prior relation between me as an interviewer and the respondents. When choosing between the people who had reacted to the recruiting email and signed up for the study, I selected a group of people that included male and female (four of each), different in age (from 25 to 66) and in levels of education (from no education to a PhD degree). The texts were all commentaries from the previous day's newspaper in order to secure a situation as close to a real reading situation as possible. The three commentaries represented both left-wing and right-wing perspectives: *Stinkers Pouring Down on the Government* [*Møgsager regner ned over regeringen*] by political commentator Thomas Larsen from the right-wing broadsheet *Berlingske*, *Revolving-Door Government* [Regering med hurtig svingdør] by political commentator Hans Engell from the tabloid *Ekstrabladet* and *Campaigning against Bødskov* [Kampagnen mod Bødskov] by political commentator Peter Mogensen from the left-wing broadsheet *Politiken*. Choosing three commentaries (not two) was done in order to avoid respondents speculating in a “one good, one bad set-up” like in Schryer's case study (2002). If the respondents were to get a hint of such a setup, the reactions might be affected.

Elaborating on this research design, two aspects require careful consideration. First, the number of people: eight people might seem a small number, but the purpose of this qualitative study is not to say something about people's reaction in general, but rather to gain a more nuanced understanding of the possible reactions to the implied audience in the commentator genre and contribute with a careful description and discussion of these reactions. Second, the selection criteria: one could object that the criteria for the selection of respondents are irrelevant and perhaps even misleading at this stage, because you only have one or a few respondents representing each category, but by using these criteria as a way of choosing between the applicants, I was able to preempt some of the categories that might be useful in a subsequent larger study.

MARCHING ALONG

On an overall basis, the think-aloud readings show that while some respondents engage in the passive citizen role offered in political commentary, others have strong negative reactions towards the implied audience

construction, refusing to go into the suggested ways of talking and thinking about politics that this implies.

First, the reactions in continuation of the discursive audience construction: When reading and thinking aloud, two of the respondents, in particular, begin imitating the commentator discourse, talking like mini-commentators reproducing both the genre's substantial claims and stylistic tokens. In terms of content, in one of the texts the commentator makes guesses as to who will be the new Minister of Justice, because the current Minister of Justice has had to resign because of a developing political scandal (he lied to the Legal Affairs Committee). Thomas Larsen, the commentator at the broadsheet *Berlingske*, browses through a number of possible candidates, their merits and his personal evaluation of their chances of being appointed. When asked to stop and think aloud, the two respondents continue analysing the candidates' potentials and pitfalls. For example, after a text passage evaluating Nick Hækkerup (MP, Social Democrat and former Minister of Defence), the one respondent adds another reason: "And he [Nick Hækkerup] didn't do well in the Ministry of Defence, because he didn't succeed in joining Defence Command Denmark and the department of the ministry." The other respondent does much the same after a similar passage with the pros and cons for another candidate, Mette Frederiksen (MP, Social Democrat and then Minister for Employment): "Mette Frederiksen is a strong communicator, and she has a strong position in the public. I don't believe that Thorning [Prime Minister] would move her from her current post, because of the ongoing reform work." Both respondents imitate the commentators' way of talking about politics, and when asked to think aloud, much of the time they enter into a discussion with the commentator on strategic considerations and dispositions.

In terms of form, the same two respondents also undertake stylistic expressions from the commentators. Both respondents copy the postulating manner. For example, one of the respondents is surprised that the commentator says that Henrik Dam Kristensen is considered a possibility (MP, Social Democrat who served as minister in several former Social Democratic governments has also been the Secretary general of the Danish Social Democrats since 2006): "I don't think so, because I would say that he is not a vote-getter, and she [Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt] needs that." Characterizing Henrik Dam Kristensen in this way is open to discussion, even though the respondent advances the claim without any support. The postulating manner is also evident in the characterization of

Mette Frederiksen above as a strong communicator and popular, public person. Furthermore, the respondents undertake the passing on of viewpoints with no clear sender: “People talk about rivalry among Mette Frederiksen and Helle Thorning-Schmidt, and therefore it is more likely that the Prime Minister will keep her in the Ministry of Employment where she has to prove herself in a coming challenging task [implementing a new employment reform], than giving her a promotion [the respondent assumes that it is more prestigious to be Minister of Justice than Minister of Employment].” By referring to “people talk about” it is unclear who has said that there is some rivalry going on between the Prime Minister and one of her ministers, and what data support this claim. Like the political commentator, the respondent circulates understandings that are uncertain and difficult to track and confirm.

The two respondents who imitate the commentators are both frequent readers of news and political journalism, and it seems that they are so used to the genre that imagining alternative ways do not occur to them—they more or less accept the genre as it is. An interesting question is now: Are these people influenced by the commentators’ discourse because they are exposed to it to a wider extent, or are they a certain type of individual who thinks and talks about politics and politicians in this way and are therefore seeking this kind of political journalism? A further study might divide respondents into different groups stratified by their news media use and background. The two respondents are both well-educated and older, which might also be something to take into consideration in a future study.

OPPOSITIONAL READINGS

Other respondents are more critical and react in dissociative ways towards the genre and its discursive audience construction. When asked to stop and think aloud, they start talking about what they want and do not want. One respondent says: “They should devote themselves to concrete cases and what is happening, not the game (...) They are always in a fight and lying (...) I don’t want that.” The respondent does not act like a mini-commentator, but envisions an alternative political culture. The respondent negotiates how he is to act as a citizen and places himself in opposition to the role offered in the commentator discourse. In this way, the text becomes a point of articulation that the reader reacts to and from which he envisions alternatives. Another respondent reacts to the speculative

behaviour, when the commentators act as fortune tellers and assume that the reader will accept an asymmetrical relation and be persuaded by an unsupported prediction: "He [the commentator] can speculate, but I can also speculate. You can also say that I can be political commentator for myself. I also have an opinion as a voter and ordinary citizen." The respondent does not accept the asymmetrical relation, and he objects to the idea that the commentator's opinion should be more valuable than his own. He challenges the commentator's authoritarian style and the passive role in which it places the reader.

"IT'S KIND OF UNDOCUMENTED"

Five of the eight respondents react to the commentators' postulating manner to some extent, but two respondents, in particular, return to this theme numerous times. In the commentary *Campaigning against Bødskov* by political commentator Peter Mogensen from the left-wing broadsheet *Politiken*, he criticizes the press for being an uncritical mouthpiece for the employees in the Danish Security Intelligence Service, criticizing their management and especially Jakob Scharf (the Head) for spending a great deal of money on expensive dinners and hotels and being involved in the case about the Minister of Justice and his lie, covering up for him. In the commentary, the commentator argues that Jakob Scharf has no part in it, and the reason he provides is that: "I know Scharf well enough to know that he is not that stupid, quite the opposite." One of the respondents reacts to this by criticizing his argument: "He is not very good at arguing for why this should be the case. It is just his opinion without any support. It's not good enough." Another respondent reacts by saying: "Then again, I am to take his words for it. It seems a bit arrogant to me—'now I am to tell you this and that'—I don't think that it is a good argument when he says that he knows Scharf, and that he knows that he does not make these kinds of mistakes. It's kind of undocumented." As with the fortune telling, the postulating manner creates an asymmetrical relation between rhetor and audience, which apparently offends the readers.

USING POLITICAL COMMENTARY FOR WHAT?

Furthermore, some of the respondents emphasize that the postulates are not useful for them, because they cannot bring the arguments into new contexts where they can use them themselves in discussions with family,

friends and colleagues. One respondent puts it this way after having read the abovementioned commentary where the commentator, Thomas Larsen, makes guesses regarding who is to be the new Minister of Justice: “It is not enough that he is saying that he [Nikolaj Wammen, MP, Social Democrats] will succeed as Minister of Justice. It is just a claim (...) As the reader, I don’t know why this would be the case. I’m to take his word for granted. Yes, that might be the case, but I’m unable to give a good reason or argue for it. If you were to explain it yourself, it would be difficult. Yes, he will succeed, but if somebody asked me why, I would only be able to say that Thomas Larsen says so.” Here, the respondent considers her own agency. She wants to be able to take away arguments that she can use as a resource in new contexts. This is not a function that I have heard scholars or political journalists emphasize, and this use of the commentator text would not be revealed solely by analysing primary texts. Another respondent talks about getting to know arguments from people with whom you do not normally agree, so that she is better prepared when discussing politics with her boyfriend: “It [reading commentary] gives me something extra when discussing with people. My boyfriend and I vote for different political parties, and it is nice for me to know his arguments in advance so I can turn things around.” In media studies, they have focused on the use of media for several decades: for example, Elihu Katz encourages scholars not only to explore what media do to audiences but also what audiences do with media (Katz et al. 1974; Katz 1959).

A FEELING OF EXCLUSION

Four of the eight respondents return to a feeling of exclusion during the readings, elaborating on the theme several times. This makes a rhetorician think of the concept of third persona (Wander 1984). The reaction clashes with the purpose of the genre explicated by media theorists and political journalists, seeing the commentators as translators helping the citizens in understanding politics. For example, media scholars such as Jay Blumler explain the genre as a way for the media to “fight back” against a professionalization of political communication (1997, 399), and, along the same lines, Brian McNair talks about “counter-spin” (2000, 83). A commentator also defends the political commentator as fulfilling a crucial translator role: “There are hidden laws in politics just as there are in, say, physics. Our job is to explain how those laws work, bring them into the open” (Hobsbawm and Lloyd 2008, 21).

When studying the reactions, the feeling of exclusion apparently relates to (at least) two aspects: First, the expectation that the reader should have a relatively updated knowledge about what has happened in Parliament in the last couple of days and the persons involved, otherwise it might be difficult to follow. One respondent says: "The commentaries are, in some way, for those in the know. If your knowledge gap is not that large, you can piece it together, but if it is too large, then at last you'll just give up, right?" Another respondent also talks about the expectations that you, as a reader, should have a certain knowledge and about giving up when you do not: "There are a lot of names here. If you don't know who they are, you can just as well give up." Another respondent simply states: "Well, perhaps, I'm not the intended reader here. Of course, the audience is all readers of the broadsheet *Politiken*, but perhaps he writes for people who are more intelligent than me or have greater insight." Second, the commentator's language use seems to have an alienating effect on some of the respondents. One respondent dissociates himself from the language used in the commentaries: "They always use a lot of difficult and complicated wording instead of saying things straight out." The same respondent continues talking about how this affects him: "Wow! All his geese and swans! There are many words I would never use or don't know of and choke on (...) He is totally losing me." What interests me here is that the readers do not just react to the passive citizen role in the discourse; they react with feelings of exclusion, not feeling as the intended readers at all. The content and form of the commentator text are considered too complex, sometimes to an extent where the respondents just give up on their reading (several of them having trouble reading aloud). They meet a language considerably different from their own, and the commentary texts involve persons and actions that are unfamiliar to them. When Philip Wander introduces the third persona, there is an ethical concern in the concept because it is often used to relate to people or groups who have been refused human rights, and often the discussion of third persona is related to age, gender, sexual preferences, race and so on. This is not the case here, but instead the third persona is the citizens in opposition to a smaller intellectual elite. The respondents do not see themselves as part of the elitist community that the commentators address, which is a point that cannot be made from text analysis alone, because it has to do with the audiences' feeling when encountering the text.

The think-aloud reading gives a more nuanced insight into the understanding, function and use of the genre. The genre might influence the

way people think and talk about politics, as argued by Winther Nielsen et al. (2011), but the reactions also reveal a critical opposition to the genre and the way it positions its writers and audience. Black's notion that the discursive audience construction will work "a vector of influence" seems too general and assumes that the audience acts like an uncritical mass, but, as shown in this study, people are much more reflective when they read and negotiate the audience construction offered to them.

EXPERT INTERVIEWS AS A WAY OF CONSTRUCTIVE INNOVATION

After having performed the rhetorical criticism, including both close textual analysis and think-aloud readings, I conducted expert interviews with a selection of political commentators, discussing the reactions from the think-aloud protocols with them (Bengtsson 2014). Hence, the research design contained three methods adding importance to text (close textual analysis), audience (think-aloud readings in combination with qualitative interviews and also a textual-intertextual analysis with existing public reactions to the genre in the press, which is not mentioned here) and rhetors (qualitative expert interviews), respectively. The qualitative expert interviews were part of a more practice-oriented way of enacting scholarship with the ambition of circulating arguments and insights. The commentators genuinely discussed their own texts—their functions, purposes and potential influence—and I and the commentators continued this discussion in the press in the following month. Unfortunately, the limited space does not allow for a detailed presentation of this part of my study here, merely a few examples. When introduced to respondents' statements concerning the postulating manner, all commentators agree that this is essential and something which they might be more aware of. At the same time, they also defend themselves by saying that the limited space does not allow for developing an argument and that the editor-in-chief does not approve of a more arguing style. Furthermore, the commentators argue that they are sometimes restricted in giving reasons because of their sources and the information given to them in confidence. When introduced to respondents' statements about joint talking and the harmonization of views, the commentators constructively suggest that, to a wider extent, they should be separated physically and that continual renewal of the commentator corps is highly required.

CONCLUSION

As is hopefully clear when reading this chapter, the idea is not to encourage all scholars to integrate secondary and tertiary texts as part of their rhetorical criticism, but rather to use it as a method in selected works when it can provide an insight not possible through analysis and interpretation of primary texts alone. When tertiary texts, including think-aloud protocols, are still not used to a greater extent within rhetorical scholarship, it may be because rhetorical critics are primarily trained as close readers (Leff and Mohrmann 1974; Leff 1986) in a critical-theoretical tradition (Jasinski 2001; Blair 2015). Empirical studies such as think-aloud readings are somehow considered social scientific—and perhaps some rhetoricians are reluctant because they see a risk of simplifying when generating reactions to texts within artificial setups, or because they worry about doing too many rookie mistakes when conducting these new, tertiary texts. When Ceccarelli suggested incorporating secondary texts, I believe that many colleagues felt inspired and perhaps willing to go along, but for some reason, integrating tertiary texts may be considered a somewhat more daring and unfamiliar endeavour. Let us be more open to new methods and not exclude additional text material from which we can sometimes benefit when engaging in rhetorical criticism. Instead of rejecting empirical methods, we should discuss how to integrate these in rhetorical scholarship in meaningful ways as I hope to have done in this chapter.

NOTES

1. The analysis is presented in a full version with examples of substantive claims and stylistic tokens in the article “Det indskrevne publikum i politiske kommentarer” [“The Implied Audience in Political Commentary”] in *Rhetorica Scandinavica* no. 71/72 2016.

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The Semiotics and Rhetoric of Music: A Case Study in Aesthetic Protocol Analysis

Christian Kock

Does music have meanings? If so, what are they like? These questions concern the *semiotics* of music. I will address these questions, using evidence from what I call *aesthetic protocol analysis*. I will further ask about the *rhetorical* significance of music having the kind of semiotics it apparently has. Given that music has the meanings it does, in the way it does, then what is the *aesthetic* function of that? In my view, asking what role meanings in music play for its aesthetic effect is to ask a rhetorician's question. Rhetoricians will want to know what sorts of things artefacts *do*, and *how* they do them. That also goes for artefacts whose function is to provide aesthetic experience—and that, I believe, is what many of us listen to music for most of the time. So I wish to say something about what role the experience of musical meanings plays in this.

Rhetorical studies of music are still rare, as are rhetorical studies of all kinds of aesthetic artefacts considered as such. We may, however, recall that the rhetorician Longinus, around the time of Christ, commented on the sublime in all genres of texts—poetic, philosophical, or otherwise.

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Quintilian (Book I, x) declared the study of music a necessity for orators. St. Augustine, a formidable practitioner and theorist of rhetoric, knew and celebrated the rhetorical power of music, and I believe he saw the power of, for example, Biblical rhetoric and that of music as related. In the Renaissance and Baroque periods composers were advised to use rhetorical theory and practice as models. As for modern times, it seems clear, as discussed by Bostdorff and Tompkins (1985), that Kenneth Burke's early aesthetic theory in *Counter-Statement* (1931) grew out of his work in the late twenties as a music critic. Gregory Clark's *Civic Jazz* (2015) is about the rhetorical effect of hearing jazz music as a collaborative, improvisation-based art form. Musical artefacts are in large part created by humans to affect and impress other humans. It seems natural to do rhetorical studies of how musical artefacts do it.

My main claims are these. Meanings in music constitute a real phenomenon, but a very different one from meaning in linguistic utterances. For one thing, meanings in music are not of a kind that makes the understanding of them a worthwhile *goal* in listening to music; we do not listen to music *in order to* extract a meaning from it, that is, to hear "what the composer has to say." On the other hand, experiencing meanings, such as they are, in a piece of music is a major source of the aesthetic gratification to be derived from listening; it is an important *means* (not the only one, though) to the goal of aesthetic gratification.

MUSICAL MEANING: SOMETHING THAT HAPPENS

Few musicians in any genre doubt that the music they write and/or perform does have and should have meanings. Usually, though, the term used by practitioners is *expression*. Among some of the theorists who have, in recent decades, addressed the issue of meaning in music, such as Peter Kivy (1989), the preferred term is *expressiveness*. A violinist, for example, who can play virtuoso pieces but cannot play with expression will not go far. The idea that there should be expression or "expressiveness" in music is so deep-seated that some composers have had to mark off the exceptional passages where they do *not* expect this. Gustav Mahler, for example, has passages marked "ohne Ausdruck," as in the song "Der Einsame im Herbst" in *Das Lied von der Erde*; Modest Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* has, in the movement "The Great Gate at Kiev," passages imitating a medieval hymn marked *senza espressione*. However, even here it

can be argued that the “expressionlessness” is intended by the composers to bear a meaning, that is, as being expressive, on a different level.

Some might object here that meaning and expression/expressiveness are not synonymous. True, meaning is a covering term that subsumes many categories, including expression/expressiveness, but not all kinds of meaning are instances of expressiveness. This goes, for example, for allusions in a work to other works, or the stylistic references called *topics* by scholars like Hatten (2004a) or Agawu (2014); the latter explains: “Topics are musical signs. They consist of a signifier (a certain disposition of musical dimensions) and a signified (a conventional stylistic unit, often but not always referential in quality)” (49). The imitation of the style and idiom of a medieval church hymn in the “expressionless” passages in the Mussorgsky piece is surely a “topic” in this sense—in other words, it instantiates musical meaning or semiotics of a special kind. These passages directly resemble the song of medieval Russian monks and thus instantiate meanings grounded in auditory iconicity (as do passages that sound like church bells in the same movement). Clearly, music is full of signs of numerous, partly overlapping kinds, grounded in several semiotic mechanisms, and expressiveness is just one type of musical sign among others, albeit one of the most intensely discussed.

All in all, then, the *semioticity* of music cannot be seriously doubted. More challenging questions are the following. (1) What, more specifically, is the nature of musical semiotics? This is a semiotician’s question. (2) Given the nature of musical semiotics, whatever it might be, what can be said about the purpose or function of music having such a semiotics? This is a rhetorician’s question. This essay addresses both.

A central assumption I make at the outset is that semiotic meanings are, and should be treated as, *empirical* phenomena. Like *all* meaning phenomena, musical meaning is only “there” insofar as at least one individual perceives (or has perceived) it. Meanings are not, for example, in a text unless someone intends or has intended the text to have that meaning, or someone perceives or has perceived that meaning in it; a constellation of markings left on a surface by nature has no semiotic meaning. Semiotic meanings are empirical, mental and social. They are not “there” in things the way *Na* and *Cl* are “there” in table salt; they are in individuals’ *relation* to things (cf. Genette 1997). Accordingly, this essay is concerned with *meaning perceptions that happen to individuals*—rather than with meanings that are claimed to inhere, in some sense, in musical artefacts considered in themselves.

Such an approach often encounters the objection that I appear to consider no interpretation more “correct” than any other, so anyone can construct a wildly speculative interpretation of the meaning of some work and “get away with it.” But I am not talking about “interpretations” that are “constructed,” but about meanings that *happen* in human minds. Granted, anyone can construct a far-out interpretation of anything (most far-out interpretations of aesthetic artefacts are deliberate constructions by professional intellectuals). But no one can deliberately make meaning perceptions *happen* in their minds. They do happen when people listen to music, or they don’t; they are not made by acts of volition.

A further objection to my approach might be that surely some such meaning perceptions are more competent, more perceptive or simply “richer” than others. But rather than saying that some meaning perceptions are more correct than others, I consider it a task for musical analysis and pedagogy to make rich and perceptive meaning perceptions happen, empirically, in many more listeners’ minds. Again, this is not to say that one can deliberately “make” authentic meaning perceptions happen, but rather that scholars should help create necessary and helpful conditions for them to do so.

AESTHETIC PROTOCOL ANALYSIS

To understand more about meaning perceptions that happen in listeners’ minds, and what bearing such an understanding might have for understanding aesthetic experience and value in music, I staged a reception study employing *aesthetic protocol analysis*.

In protocol analysis (Ericsson and Simon 1984), a “protocol” is kept to tally informants’ mental processes concurrently, that is, not in retrospect, but *during* informants’ engagement in some activity. Most examples of protocol analysis have studied cognitive, volitional activities such as decision processes by informants. This was done in the classic studies of mental processes led by Herbert Simon (e.g., 1979), who won the “Nobel Prize” in Economics in 1978 for his studies of organizational decision-making. Volitional cognitive processes involved in writing were studied from around 1980 by rhetorical scholars and psychologists inspired by Simon, who sometimes compared professional and inexperienced writers (so-called expert-novice studies; e.g., Flower et al. 1986). The method used in these studies is also known as

“think-aloud” protocols; informants’ spoken verbalizations of their mental processes while performing cognitive tasks (like writing an article) were recorded, transcribed and analyzed.

The present study, however, will focus on a purely *receptive* activity: listening to a piece of classical music—an activity where informants tend to sit still and not engage in any deliberate actions or decisions. Reception-related protocol analysis is not very common (Mette Bengtsson’s article in the present volume is an instance). Moreover, within the category of reception-related protocol analysis, this essay exemplifies what I call *aesthetic* protocol analysis: it concerns the reception of an aesthetic artefact. Such studies are still far between; however, Miall (2015) is an interesting example. Most protocol analysis records informants’ spoken (“think-aloud”) responses and thoughts; in the present study informants *write* their responses on prepared forms. A protocol analysis of the reception of an aesthetic object, done with *written* protocols, is something I have not come across in the research literature.

All in all, I believe protocol analysis has been used far too little in humanistic scholarship (cf. Jensen 2013, 179). It is a powerful tool of rhetorical research—if by that we mean scholarship seeking to understand the nature, making and workings of human artefacts that are devised to somehow affect other people. On this definition, analyzing how aesthetic objects (poems, music, pictures, plays, operas, films, etc.) affect audiences is rhetorical research. What an aesthetic protocol analysis can illuminate is phenomenological processes, and what causes them, not physiological ones—what happens in informants’ minds, not what happens in their brains. Of course, phenomenological processes must have neurophysiological correlates, and studies employing, for example, functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) of these (as in, e.g., Menon and Levitin 2005) are certainly desirable; it is simply that we also need more knowledge about phenomenological processes, that is, what informants *experience*.

I did this: together with a professional cellist, who is also my daughter, I gave a public “concert/lecture” (a genre we are developing). The venue was a public assembly hall in a Danish provincial town. Our title was “Experiencing music—what is it? What characterizes great musical experiences?” The audience, c. 35 people who had come to hear the concert/lecture, not knowing that they would be asked to be informants, included locals as well as tourists (the town is a favourite vacation spot). One item

was a performance of the first movement of the Cello Concerto (1919) by Edward Elgar (1857–1934); the local church organist, a friend and an accomplished pianist, accompanied, using Elgar’s own piano version of the score (so the audience did hear a composer’s “original” work). I said nothing about the piece that might influence informants’ responses before they heard it. On a screen I showed the rehearsal numbers from the score as the corresponding sections of the music were being played. I gave this written prompt: “While you hear this music (c. 10 min.) you may write your responses and associations to the successive sections of the music in the form below. Think of what you feel happens in the music, and what it ‘is about.’” The form had slots for all the numbered sections of the music; for example, notes on what section 7 of the music was “about” could be written in slot #7. The question aimed to prompt statements from informants about “meanings” that they perceived in the music, but I deemed the term “meaning” more confusing and question-begging than the question actually used.

Methodical reservations may be raised about this procedure. Doubts are often expressed as to how mental processes can be tallied at all. Most protocol studies, as mentioned, ask informants to think aloud while they perform some task. However, what happens in informants’ minds as they actively and deliberately execute a cognitive task may arguably be closer to overt speech than processes that presumably occur spontaneously and involuntarily in the minds of listeners while they listen; they are, after all, involved in reception, not problem-solving. It is a valid reservation that if mental processes in people who listen to music are non-volitional and to a large extent non-verbal, then a prompt to record them verbally will not elicit the actual and authentic mental phenomena (and it is doubtful how that could be done at all); however, the records that will be produced will give us an impression of whether, how and to what extent the meanings informants experience, given the prompt I had used, are convertible into words. The verbal records obtained in this study are *sources* to the meanings of whatever kind—images, ideas, emotions, memories, associations and so on—that occurred to these listeners.

Further reservations might be that for listeners to *write* their concurrent perceptions is intrusive on the musical experience, and surely slower than thinking aloud. On the other hand, it is hard to see how one could better register phenomenological processes occurring during a musical experience. If informants were to talk softly while listening (as in think-aloud studies), that too would certainly intrude on their listening experience, probably more so, since both the stimulus (the music) and the

responses would then be auditory phenomena that might interfere with each other. In addition, each listener's spoken responses would interfere with the experience of the other listeners.

Counterbalancing all the reservations, the weightiest argument for having informants record their responses in the way described is a version of the same argument that speaks for protocol studies generally: we get a window on listeners' musical experience *as it unfolds*; we get concurrent evidence, that is, data on what happens in listeners' minds *while* they listen—not on impressions on the finished experienced that have crystallized in their minds afterwards. Music, unlike, for example, painting or sculpture, crucially depends for its reception on being experienced as a process elapsing in a predetermined temporal sequence and at a predetermined pace, rather than all being present at the same time. Trying to tally a listener's experience as an unfolding process is very different from methods where respondents are, for example, interviewed or asked to participate in focus groups after having had some experience. The musicologist Edward Cone has emphasized the importance of not just considering what we may call the “synoptic” understanding of a piece gained when one has heard and understood it all—a perspective that professional musical analysts often take; instead it is crucial to attend to the impressions a listener has *during* the experience of the music. To exemplify this, Cone writes that only thus can a listener “ever experience the delight that accompanies the transformation of puzzled wonder (Is it a dominant? Can it be a tonic?) into satisfied relief” (1977, 566).

THE DATA

Below is the piano score along with all the notes written by the listeners (except a couple of unreadable ones); the filled-in response forms (32 in all) were numbered, and next to the pertinent pages of the score are all the responses (in English translation) to the sections on that page, prefixed with numbers (#1–32) that refer to the individual listeners. Thus one can see at a glance what notes were written in response, for example, to section 7, but it is also possible to see, for example, what listener #18 wrote as the music unfolded.

Before reading on, the reader is advised to listen to a performance of the music, for example, the celebrated version with Jacqueline du Pré as soloist and Daniel Barenboim conducting, available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUgdbqt2ON0>¹ (Fig. 7.1).

DISCUSSION

A first observation is that there is a significant *overlap* between different individuals' responses to the same sections of the music. When listening to section 0, for example, many of the listeners think about "drama"; their notes say: #4: "Drama with melancholy tendencies"; #5: "Drama, Rising tension"; #7: "Drama, violation"; #9: "darkness/drama"; #16: "Drama, black sea"; #20: "drama—seriousness"; #22: "Drama looming"; #26: "Dramatic"; #28: "dramatic prelude." Here we find no less than nine occurrences of *drama/dramatic*, and there is also a semantic overlap between a group of responses that somewhat more specifically denote the

CONCERTO

I

Edward Elgar, Op. 85

VIOLONCELLO

PIANOFORTE

Adagio, f. su.

Adagio, f. su.

a tempo

ad lib.

Moderato.

Moderato f. su.

0

- 1: Opening: Why did it have to happen? (Prologue)
- 2: Opening – presentation
- 3: War – cannons
- 4: Drama with melancholy tendencies
- 5: Drama, Rising tension
- 6: Intensity, Onset => introduction (mood)
- 7: Drama, violation
- 8: Omen that something is under way – threat
- 9: Darkness/drama
- 10: Omen of calamity
- 11: Suspense conformation expectation, "something about"
- 13: Threat – silence before storm – insecurity – disquiet – lightning/thunder
- 14: Awakening to a new unforeseen, shocking situation
- 15: Sombre contrasts
- 16: Drama, black sea
- 17: Discrepancy, contradiction
- 18: attention => engagement
- 19: destruction
- 20: drama – seriousness
- 21: traversed battlefield
- 22: Drama looming
- 23: Fight against superior force
- 24: collapse
- 25: storm – abates – deep powerful
- 26: Dramatic
- 27: darkness
- 28: dramatic prelude
- 29: Calamity / Wreck at sea?
- 30: Bach sarabande
- 31: Dramatic, threatening, somber! – called off somewhat

1

- 1: "Once upon a time everything was simple - - -"
- 2: Narrative begins)
- 2: Child's play
- 4: Misery
- 5: P alone
- 6: Piano presents theme
- 7: Hares jumping carefree, "England's pastures green"
- 8: It didn't get to be so bad
- 9: thoughtfulness
- 10:
- 11: "Dance" / power struggle/unequal relation
- 12:
- 13: clearing – drippings
- 14: consolation drawn from another quarter
- 15: reflections
- 16: lullaby
- 17: indecision
- 18: now focusing on movement/development
- 21: a bird flies over the fields happily
- 22: no peace, temporarily
- 24: play
- 25: Tracks
- 27: weather clearing up
- 28: theme A
- 29: Alone
- 30: piano
- 31: opps, not so threatening – clouds clearing, sunrays breaking through
- 32: questioning

2

- 1 And we walked together
- 2 Round dance
- 3 idyl
- 4 repetition
- 5 C: repeats tune
- 6 Theme
- 8 calming down
- 9 joy/sorrow
- 10 Brightness: this life, which I may soon lose
- 11 "Dance" / power struggle/unequal relation
- 12 pause
- 13 awakening - life
- 15 more spaciouly
- 16 long
- 17 attempt, dialogue
- 18 ?
- 22 idyl
- 26 Thinking
- 28 repetitions
- 30 \ and cello
- 32 narration

Fig. 7.1 Elgar concerto responses: The score of the first movement of Edward Elgar's Cello Concerto in the composer's own version with piano accompaniment. In the boxes on the right all the written comments made by listeners are given (in translation) next to the corresponding passages in the music. Numbers in the boxes refer to the rehearsal numbers in the score. The score is from a public domain edition of the music from 1920, reprinted from the website <https://imslp.org/wiki/Special:ImagefromIndex/31082/qx84>, which states: "Content is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License"

The image displays a musical score for piano, divided into several systems. Each system is annotated with a large number (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) and a corresponding list of semiotic and rhetorical interpretations. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (pp, f, dim.), articulation (acc., marc.), and performance instructions (a tempo, alla breve, alla parca).

System 1: 1 More showed up, and we had a good time
2 Harmonization, collaboration
3 activity
4 Drama
5 Crescendo effect
6 Upbeat Intensification Volume
7 Roar of the sea
8 getting merry
9 sorrow
11 "Dance"/ power struggle/unequal relation
12 insecurity
13 joy - dancing
14 complexity over partial clarification
15 more dramatic dialogue
16 love, longing, unhappy
18 attempt at dialogue, serious, aimed at listener
25 sliding

System 2: 1 Wedding - or now what, are we losing some?
2 Climax goal reached
3 preparation for canon
4 Existential
5 p alone
6 Redemptive Climax
7 Climax - settling to rest
9 attempt at mastery
10 reflection
12 it will be all right
13 seriousness - solemnity Peak
14 there is a need to emphasize the consolatory
15 relaxation
16 love, longing, unhappy
18 now again calmer repetition
21 walking down the steets
24 hope
32 repetition (?)

System 3: 1.1 Many now, still advancing
2 We are taken higher up
3 reflection
4 Existential
5 violé ?
6
7 storm
8 relief
9 excitement
10 omen of calamity
11 liberation, breaking loose, standing on own legs
12 I think I'm coming along
13 seriousness - solemnity
14 intensification seeking clarification
15 now contradictions are being sharpened
16 love, longing, unhappy
17 heat
18 repetition w/emphasis
21 again cities stand empty, destroyed
22 Thunder, summer
24 longingly
25 very loud, "insight"
26 ideas
28 accentuation of theme
30 Lark ascending
32 ?

System 4: 1 What is happening? The character's changing. We sink. Threat
2 Clarification
3 rest - repose
4 relaxation
5 c repeats
6 Theme Longing Search Sorrow
7 Trench - silence in
8 It's over end done with
9 calmer mood
10 reflection - ends with calamity/death
11 rupture/change -> something new is under way
12 I'm relieved and convinced
13 relaxation - rest
14 Question is if the consoling can endure
15 quieter contemplations, perhaps dialogue
17 sad, clouds on the way
18 vehemence reduced. Full stop.
19 empty and sad
24 gloomy
25 repose
28 things becoming clear
29 abandoned
30 Lark descending

System 5: 1 There, there, it won't be that bad. Faint optimism?
2 new light on things
3 new beginning
4 courage
5 change - lighter -> p's syncopations
6 waves, going back and forth, out/home
7 wondering
8 no danger - look ahead
9 conversation between two about the foregoing
10 no - it'll be all right, you know
11 new situation / new balance of powers. I imagine a girl and a guy (authoritarian father/lover). From 4 she begins her fight for liberation. From 7 she takes over and takes control but it cannot last.
12 I need to go on
13 the day after - evaluating
14 awakening to greater light of day
15 others, other things involved
16 sadness
17 better times to come
18 New 'viewpoint', patiently sorrowful
22 Autumn

Fig. 7.1 Continued

4 *mf* *esultante* **8**

1 Let us forget the threats. Mind one's own business, live. Quiet.
 2 Joy and happiness spreading
 3 peaceful
 4 Dreams
 6 Theme in MAJOR BUILD-UP
 7 Irritation / Anger
 8 incipient extra energy
 9 lightening up a bit
 10 *leg.* - it will be all right. I look at my love
 12 it's going fine
 13 New day - new vision
 14 new wave of reassurance and bright memories
 15 new ways / solutions proposed
 16 more cheerful
 17 a kind of redemption
 18 broad persuasiveness, optimistic
 24 bright and playful
 25 fields
 28 change of mood towards → major
 29 "It will be all right"

9

1 No, it's too much ...
 2 expansion and cessation
 3 forced - disharmony
 4 melancholy
 5 c high - change of tempo
 6 Runs Building up Large span BUILD-UP
 7 cognition
 8 relief, bright
 9 insecurity
 12 it's going fine - still
 13 surprises both good light and serious
 14 but still the foundation is shaken
 15 discussing passionately
 16 joy, harmony
 18 nuanced argumentation
 21 wounds must be healed in (unreadable)
 24 drama

10 *pass string*

11 *a tempo* *p dolce* *erotic.*

12 *mf* *lucamente* *con rit.* *dim a rit.*

11

1 Memory, about what it could be
 2 New light on things
 3 idyll
 4 Repetitions
 5 back to 7, p and c taking turns
 6 Repose BUILD-UP
 7 cognition
 8 making progress
 9 lightening up a bit - but?
 10 joy in diversity
 12 now I am serene
 13 surprises both good light and serious
 14 "Tristan" in a more questioning version
 15 things maybe becoming clear?
 16 joy, harmony
 17 back to the usual
 18 repetition, calm
 28 reasoning
 32 longing and hope

12

1 Understand the seriousness of the situation
 2 Elaboration
 3 activity increases
 6 BUILD-UP
 7 Despair
 8 "we can"
 9 repeated insecurity
 10 ominous
 12 or so I believe
 13 fright
 14 again it speeds up, shaken
 15 no, more passion
 16 joy, harmony → redemption
 18 underlinings

Fig. 7.1 Continued

- 1 Hello, what comes now. Urgency.
 2 summing up
 3 now what?
 6 (unreadable)
 7 Despair
 8 foresight
 9 calmer mood
 10 resignation - it'll probably go wrong anyway
 12 relief
 13 relief - freedom from care
 14 more questioning, creeping in
 15 (unreadable) contrasts are sharpened
 16 more minor
 17 giving up
 18 supplementary material adduced

13

- 1 We need to get away. It's serious. I'm leaving you
 2 summing up continued
 3 one more time
 5 back to original theme
 new themes build-up in p

14

- 2 continued summing up
 3 energetic duo
 6
 7 back to "pastures green" "leitmotif" - after the incident
 8 and exulting
 9 confusion
 10 It's snowing - realization of death
 12 leaning back - relieved
 13 "What did I tell you!"
 14 an open and honest (shaken) clarity
 15 convincingly delivered
 18 come alone, now follow me
 29 "Well, no one is coming to rescue me." / Surrender. Death?

15

- 1 Lost horizons
 2 Clarity
 3 calming down
 6
 7 Weighed down by experience / the adventure
 8 with joy
 9 confusion
 10 It's snowing - realization of death
 12 relaxing
 13 "What did I tell you!"
 14 an open and honest (shaken) clarity
 15 decision is under way
 16 melancholy, morale
 17 Hope
 18 further explanation
 29 "Well, no one is coming to rescue me." / Surrender. Death?

16

- 1 Horror and loss. Left behind alone. That's as deep as it gets. (EPILOGUE)
 2 Clarity + Rounding off
 3 calming down
 6 Theme
 Finish contrast . . .
 7 certainty
 8 and satisfaction
 9 tiredness calm (?)
 10 close the eyes
 13 "What did I tell you!"
 14 An exhausted acceptance of: this is reality!
 15 the conflict is settled, but not solved
 16 melancholy, morale
 17 agreement, redemption
 18 quiet conclusion, with solemn weight, no real dialogue, but at times vehement monologue
 29 "Well, no one is coming to rescue me." / Surrender. Death?
 30 heiliger Dankesang eines Genesenen an die ...

17

Fig. 7.1 Continued

negative nature and valence of the “drama”: #1: “Why did it have to happen?” (an expression of regret); #3: “War—cannons”; #4: “melancholy tendencies”; #5: “Rising tension”; #7: “violation”; #8 and #13: “threat”; #9 and #27: “darkness”; #8 and #10: “Omen”; #10: “calamity”; #11: “confrontation”; #13 and #25: “storm”; #13: “insecurity—disquiet—lightning/thunder”; #14: “shocking situation”; #15: “Somber”; #19: “destruction”; #21: “battlefield”; #23: “Fight against superior force”; #24: “collapse.”

The overlap, however, is only partial; there is a great deal of *individual variation* between responses. As we can see from the above responses to section 0, the many responses that share a kernel of the “dramatic” and somber nevertheless inflect it in quite different ways: it can be something to do with war or fight, or dramatic weather, or an inner emotion or mood, or a general concept ranging from “tension” to “collapse.”

A similar phenomenon is seen where nearly all listeners record meanings sharing a positive valence, for example, in relation to section 8: #1: “forget the threats”; #2: “Joy and happiness”; #3: “peaceful”; #8: “extra energy”; #9: “lightening up”; #10: “*YES*—it will be all right. I look at my love”; #12: “it’s going fine”; #13: “New day—new vision”; #14: “new wave of reassurance and bright memories”; #15: “new ways/solutions proposed”; #16: “more cheerful”; #17: “a kind of redemption”; #18: “broad persuasiveness, optimistic”; #24: “bright and playful”; #29: “‘it will be all right’.” While all these share a core of positive valence, the range of the specific positive content elements includes, for example, joy, happiness, energy, reassurance, redemption, persuasiveness, brightness.

What is interesting about musical semiotics is not only *what* is signified at any point but also—and even more—*why* and *how*. In other words, borrowing a term from I.A. Richards’ theory of metaphor (1936), what are the *grounds*, in each case, that help connect the signifier (specific passages and properties of the music) with the items signified?

The responses to section 8 could be attributed to a combination of features: we have here a very audible but unprepared and abrupt change from minor to major (a continuation in minor is the “unmarked” expectation, to apply the terminology suggested by Hatten 2004b). This is not to say that listeners consciously recognize the notions of minor or major, let alone that the key is E; only listener #6 uses such musicological terms. But a change like this is still distinctly noticeable, and it very likely contributes to the many inflections of positive valence found in the responses. At the same time there is also a set of other features that may have helped add

specific features to the meanings experienced; for example, the theme played by the cello here is a variation of the theme introduced at 7, but with differences: it now sings out in E major and begins directly on G#, the third that identifies the major tonality, where the earlier version (at five measures after 7) was in a minor key (B). Further, the new version makes two upward leaps of a fourth—from G# to C# and then from C# to F#—where before the cello made only one such leap (from C# to F#) and then moved down again. Also the dynamic nuance is different: it was *pp* before, but at 8 it is *mf*, however marked *dolcissimo*—a rare combination, which, if well executed, may help explain why listener #10's response combines the following two elements: "it will be all right" (possibly caused by the stronger, more assertive dynamics) and "I look at my love" (possibly caused by the "very sweet" timbre).

However, responses like #7's "Irritation/Anger" testify to the fact that the valences and meanings experienced by listeners, while they mostly tilt in a certain direction, are not "universal." Most likely there will always be contradictory responses like this. Also, there will be outliers not so easily assignable to the "positive" category, like #25's "fields" and #4's "Dreams."

This and other similar examples suggest a hypothetical generalization: musical meanings experienced by different individuals are not completely arbitrary or idiosyncratic but will tend to share certain (rather vague) content elements (they have shared "semes," as some semioticians would say); there is, in other words, significant intersubjectivity. On the other hand, individual variations and inflections of shared core elements are also noticeable. While it would be wrong to think of musical meanings as completely idiosyncratic, on the other hand specific meanings perceived by different individuals are unlikely ever to be identical. This further suggests that it would be misleading to dichotomize musical meanings as either fully "objective" or else as idiosyncratic. It is more plausible to imagine musical meanings as placed on a gradient with "objective" at one end and "idiosyncratic" at the other—where no meanings, or very few, place themselves at either extreme.

The presence of these divergent meanings experienced by different listeners recalls the concept of *rhetorical polysemy* as discussed in Ceccarelli (1998). Distinguishing it from other types of polysemy studied by contemporary rhetorical critics, she describes it as a "'both-and' sort of polysemy" that "seems less concerned with explaining and judging different audience interpretations of a text, and more concerned with developing a

unique reading of a text that encompasses and tolerates all possible readings” (409). Such polysemy Ceccarelli finds in actual “rhetorical” artefacts as, for example, the Vietnam Memorial analyzed by Blair et al. (1991), that is, artefacts not primarily conceived to function aesthetically, which may explain why she has reservations about this type of polysemy. I suggest that in aesthetic artefacts like music, the fact that given features can mean different things, clustering around a shared core (which, for example, is what happens at 8 in the Elgar piece), is a potential, not a hindrance, for aesthetic gratification.

Looking at the responses of one listener at a time, we find that they sometimes suggest a continuous *narrative*. Listeners who have experienced the beginning of a piece as somehow signifying a situation may perceive what follows as signifying developments of that situation. For example, listener #1’s narrative while experiencing the unfolding sections of the music goes like this:

0: Opening: Why did it have to happen? ? (Prologue). 1: “Once upon a time everything was simple—” (Narrative begins). 2: And we walked together. 3: More showed up, and we had a good time. 4: Many now, still advancing 5: Wedding,—or, now what, are we losing some? 6: What is happening? The character’s changing. We sink. Threat 7: There, there, it won’t be that bad. Faint optimism? 8: Let us forget the threats. Mind one’s own business, live. Quiet. 9: close eyes. 10: No, it’s too much ...11: Memory, about what it could be. 12: Understand the seriousness of the situation. 13: Hello, what comes now. Urgency. 14: We need to get away. It’s serious. I’m leaving you. 15: Lost horizons. 17: Horror and loss. Left behind alone.

Listener #1’s “narrative” is perhaps the most explicit and coherent one in the set. But despite the narrative thread that can be discerned, even this series consists of linguistically very heterogeneous elements: we have, for example, a first-person narrator’s diegesis, where the speaker belongs to a *we* (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 14); at one point, however, the *we* seems to dissipate, and instead we get sentence fragments, including diegetic noun phrases (4, 15), verb phrases (12), lines apparently spoken into the narrated situation (8, 14) and combinations of all these (6, 7). The narrative, that is, becomes elliptical, groping and indistinct, with the experiencing subject becoming blurred. Other listeners’ protocols too suggest narrative sequences, where the narrative, rather than relating actions by agents, is about a string of states of affairs, apparently experienced by the mind(s) of

one or more subjects, or it is about an evolving situation, without indication of who experiences it (this applies to, e.g., the notes by listeners #1 and #2).

Several responses include *fragmentary narrative phrases*—little shreds of narrative content not connected into longer strings. Some of these listeners' narrative response items are more or less centred on a first person *I* as agent and centre of consciousness—for example, “Yes—it will be all right. I look at my love” (8, #10) and “I feel joy, life is good” (9, #10); others are incomplete in the sense that we are not told *who* has the feeling or the experience described—as in “sad, clouds on the way” (6, #17), “abandoned” (6, #29), “new light on things (7, #2). Some vacillate and are sometimes impersonal, whereas some, if an experiencing and/or acting subject is mentioned, waver between the first and third person.

Generally, the *categorial heterogeneity of content items* stands out. Many discussions of meaning and expression in music (e.g., Kivy 1989) have exclusively dealt with *emotions* as content entities in music; Kivy's main approach is to consider music as potentially *expressive of emotions* in the same way that a face may be expressive of emotions—which means that the emotion expressed is not one felt by the composer, nor one aroused in the listener, but one signified by inherent features of the music. This approach, incidentally, was anticipated by observations by Wittgenstein and by Bouwsma (1950). However, listeners record content entities of several heterogeneous kinds—heterogeneous in terms of what grammatical categories are used and also in terms of content categories in a broad sense. As one might perhaps expect, words and phrases expressing emotions are well represented in the protocols: we have, for example, “Misery” (1, #4), “longing” (2, #16), “relief” (4, #8), “irritation, anger” (8, #7), “more cheerful” (8, #16), “melancholy” (4, #10). We also encounter some descriptive words (nouns, adjectives, adverbs, verbs) that seem to characterize *the mood of the music as such* rather than an emotion felt by anyone, for example, “Dramatic” (0, #26), “more spaciouly” (2, #15), “longingly” (4, #25). But on the whole emotions are less dominant than be suggested by the sometimes exclusive focus on emotions in discussions of musical semiotics by Kivy and other scholars.

Clarke (2005), who is primarily interested in how music may signify *motion*, notes that listeners may at times hear a self-motion being signified, at other times a movement by others (76). Johnson and Larson (2003) have suggested a related, but more systematic typology of how music may be metaphorically perceived as signifying movement. In our protocols

words denoting motion do occur, but are not numerous—for example, “Lark ascending” (4, #30), “Lark descending” (6, #30), “great leaps” (9, #17). Some of the “narratives” in the material are at times impersonal in regard to motion, and at other times the listener seems to perceive self-motion; this is the case, for example, for listener #12, who has a series of responses like this: “heavy, deep; relief; pensive; insecurity; I think I’m coming along; it will be all right; I’m relieved and convinced; I need to go on; it’s going fine; it’s going fine—still; it’s going fine—still; now I am serene; or so I believe; relief; relief phew; leaning back—relieved; relaxing.” There is something dreamlike about a sequence like this: some units in it are elliptical adjectival phrases unattributable to anyone or anything in particular, and only after a while does an *I* appear as experiencing subject.

Some items are *one-word phrases denoting a single property of some narrative situation*, but leaving out any specifying information, for example, “idyll” (11, #3), “ominous” (12, #10). There are several *words denoting physical objects or properties of an imagined scene*, for example, “fields” (#8, 25), “darkness (0, #27), “storm” (4, #7), “heat” (4, #17), “Thunder, summer” (4, #22), “Lark ascending” (4, #30), “Autumn” (7, #22), “traversed battlefield” (0, #21), “destruction” (0, 19).

A few listeners sometimes respond with *words denoting formal properties of the music*, for example, “p [i.e., piano] alone” (5, #5), “BUILD-UP” (12, #6), “varied repetition” (14, #18), “great leaps” (9, #17). One respondent in particular prefers to comment on such properties, using either symbols known from musical notation or ad hoc graphic signs to signify them, for example, \leftarrow , \circ .

A special category of meanings is *reminiscences of other musical works*, for example, “heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die...” (17, #30); this alludes to the celebrated third movement of Beethoven’s String Quartet opus 132—whose superscript is “*Heiliger Dankgesang* eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart.” Also, we have “Lark ascending” (4, #30) and “Lark descending” (6, #30)—allusions to Ralph Vaughan Williams’ tone poem “The Lark Ascending”—and “‘Tristan’ in a more questioning version” (11, #14) (an allusion to Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde*, presumably the Prelude).

It is unclear whether the respondents hear these allusions as intended on the composer’s part or “merely” as personal associations. Significantly, though, no respondent has anything to say about any possible *intentions* in Elgar to make the music signify anything in particular. This, I suggest,

points to a significant difference between how meaning generally works in verbal utterances and in music. According to Grice's classic account (1957), to understand a linguistic utterance is basically to understand what the utterer *intended* to say (and do) in making it. In contrast, the individuals listening to music in our study, while they have many experiences of meaning, have no thought for what the composer may have "intended" the music to mean.

A meaning category deserving mention is *reminiscences of literary texts*, as in "Hares jumping carefree, 'England's pastures green'" (1, #7)—alluding to William Blake's poem "And did those feet in ancient times," known also as "Jerusalem," set to music by Hubert Parry. ("England's pastures green" actually mixes two phrases in Blake: "England's mountains green" and "England's pleasant pastures.")

A general observation is that when the listeners in this study attempt to verbalize what the music is "about," their formulations are mostly *non-propositional*: they tend not to be regular propositions with noun phrases and verb phrases. This goes for the individual responses, but it is also clear that one cannot with any certainty "translate" any of the aggregated strings of responses by individual listeners into a coherent utterance consisting of one or more propositions, stating what the whole piece "means" or "has to say" for that particular listener.

THE QUESTION OF SEMIOTIC GROUNDS

A major factor in the way musical semiotics is relevant for musical rhetoric is the issue of what I propose to call the *semiotic grounds* of musical meanings. The term refers to the principles that connect the expression and content sides, the *signifiant* and the *signifié*, of a musical sign relation. What I wish to suggest is that a large part of the aesthetic attraction and gratification afforded by musical meanings has to do with the nature of these grounds—more specifically, the fact that they seem to connect expression and content in ways that are perceived as instantaneous, spontaneous, multifarious and not immediately explicable.

A first observation concerning the meanings perceived by the informants in this study is that they *vary widely in regard to the semiotic grounds that seem to account for them*.

Some responses, for example, are *synaesthetic*: they connect musical properties with properties pertaining to other senses, mostly sight, for example, "Darkness" (0, #9; 0, #27), "black sea" (0, #16), "England's

pastures green" (1, #7), "balancing between overcast/sun" (2, #31), "heat" (4, #17); other responses are "mono-aesthetic," that is, the musical sounds have suggested some other auditory phenomenon, for example, "cannons" (0, #3), "lullaby" (1, #16), "Thunder" (4, #22), "Lark ascending" (4, #30), "Lark descending" (6, #30), "'Trench'—silence in" (6, #7).

As stated, there is no doubt that a large part of the musical meanings reported in this study do fit under the label "emotions"—for example, "love, longing, unhappy" (4, #16) or "sadness" (7, #16). However, there are many *other* kinds of meaning represented in the protocols apart from those relating to emotions, moods, or the like. For example, references to "autumn" (7, #22), or to "fields" (8, #25), cannot in any direct way be aligned with statements that hear the music as expressive of, for example, longing or sadness.

In fact, associations such as "autumn" or "fields" in particular raise a question that is rhetorically relevant because it bears on the *aesthetic effect* of music: the question of semiotic grounds. Just *why* is it that particular musical features, at the point in time where the listener in question jots down the word "autumn," activate an association with autumn? What establishes this semiotic relation between, on the one hand, a particular constellation of musical sounds in a certain context of other sounds and, on the other hand, a season (or, in the case of "fields," the landscape)?

In the "autumn" passage (section 7 in the score), the metre (time signature) changes from 9/8 to 12/8. The preceding music has died down to a state of repose, almost a standstill, ending with a *fermata* (i.e., a prolongation that suspends the metrical beat). The key is E minor. The new beginning in 12/8 after this—which is where the listener writes "autumn"—is also in E minor and even quieter but in other respects more energetic. It has the indication *a tempo* (i.e., back to the original tempo after a slower passage), and the 12/8 metre (a "compound" metre: in each measure one must, as it were, count to three four times) connects more easily than does 9/8 with a walking or otherwise forward moving motion; also, the cello, when it sets in one measure later, has accents on the first note of each of its phrases. These are just some of the expressive properties of the music that might have triggered the content association "autumn" in listener #22's mind. But the "ground" question is, *why* did they do it?

A similar question could be asked for semiotic connections like that between section 8 and #25's "fields." A definite answer cannot be

given. If the above-mentioned sudden change from minor to major plays a part, it remains an open question why that is so. Perhaps the two upward leaps by the cello at 8, heard against the background of the earlier upward + downward movement, made the listener think of a higher vantage point with a wider view, as over a stretch of fields; perhaps a perception of added energy in the music (in major vs. the earlier minor) triggered an association with a brisk walk across fields. Or is there perhaps something potentially but inherently rural or “pastoral” about the 12/8 metre itself? Several classical pieces that refer to pastoral and bucolic situations in fact use this metre; among the examples are the shepherds’ music that opens the second cantata of Bach’s *Christmas Oratorio*, to return unexpectedly in the cantata’s final chorus; the second movement of Beethoven’s *Pastoral* symphony, titled “By the brook”; and the “Pastorale” movement of Sibelius’s *Pelléas et Mélisande* suite.

FROM SEMIOTICS TO RHETORIC: THE AESTHETIC DIMENSION

We could go on listing categories and varieties of meaning perceptions. Devising of a typology of categories with exhaustiveness and mutual exclusiveness of the categories, such as would be theoretically neat, would probably be impossible. Too many items would be unclear in regard to what precisely is meant by the listener, and/or they would be borderline cases, or belong in several categories simultaneously.

But this failure regarding the categorization of response items is an important point in itself. It is a noteworthy fact that meaning in music is such a heterogeneous and multifarious phenomenon. And it casts doubt on those discussions of musical meaning that have assumed that musical meanings belong to just one category: human emotions.

This highlights a more general perspective: the issue of the semiotic ground (or grounds) for musical meanings. What makes section 7 “autumnal,” or what connects section 8 with “fields,” in the experience of particular listeners? These perceptions “happened” to them. But they probably would not be able to say why. There are no conventions, no culturally instituted musical “vocabulary,” saying that particular features mean “autumn” or “fields.” The associations arise in a way that we, with Jakobson and Waugh’s term (1979), may call “immediate.”

This “immediacy,” I suggest, is a large part of what can make music a fascinating aesthetic experience. It means that the meaning perceptions happen in a momentary, involuntary process. It is likely that it is not a verbalized and fully conscious process in “ordinary” music listening, where one is not required to record one’s responses. It is also debatable how far cultural learning plays a part in it. It happens (*when* it happens) as an event comparable with an unexpected gift. It is not caused (and could not be caused) by a conscious, voluntary effort; it is brought about by some semiotic connection between sound and content that the listener does not consciously understand—and which, for that very reason, has a striking and fascinating quality. The connections between the expression side (properties of Elgar’s music) and the meanings listeners perceive in it are of numerous different kinds, and many of these connections are of an “ad hoc” kind in that they do not seem explicable by preexisting semiotic mechanisms or principles. Hence it is as if they arise in a spontaneous manner that is not learned or known to the listener beforehand.

This may help explain why experiencing musical semiotics may fascinate: semiotic connections happen in listeners’ minds as it were out of the blue. They have phenomena occurring in their minds that were until then unknown to them. I argue that the value listeners attribute to these experiences resides in this multitude of rapidly shifting, ad hoc sign relations not previously experienced, rather than in the content items signified.

Indeed, it is hard to see how the content items signified could hold much value for listeners. We have seen that they are heterogeneous, fleeting, fuzzy, ambiguous, truncated, groping, missing in coherence and specification. By contrast, verbal messages that hearers find worth attending to for the content they convey are typically texts with great internal coherence or at least complete sentences. But in our material many responses are single words with no specific syntactic function like “foresight,” “despair,” “relaxing”; others are sentence fragments that have no coherence with anything else written by the same respondent. Also if we were to collate responses across respondents, or try to synthesize all responses, we would only get a totally confusing picture: on the one hand, there is a certain thematic overlap between responses plus a great deal of subjective variance, but there is also a welter of contradiction, incoherence and obscurity.

Assuming that we consider music as an auditory sign with an expression side and a content side, then I suggest that the “content” side of the celebrated piece of music in our study is not worth attending to for its own

sake. For the individual listener, the string of content items perceived as the music elapses makes little sense and contains little or no insight with any kind of generalizable relevance or usefulness. For the scholar too—the musicologist, philosopher, psychologist, rhetorician—any attempt to use our respondents’ notes as a source to what Elgar’s music is really “about” is a wild goose chase.

The responses certainly have value for an attempt to understand the nature of musical semiotics and its bearing on aesthetics—but they have little value if we try to read them as any kind of “message.” The string of elliptical references to emotions, scenes, events, moods, seasons and a broad variety of other types of content items has none of the three Ciceronian qualities that would enable it to either *docere*, *delectare* or *movere*. There is no “revelation” here, no enlightenment to be gleaned.

It might be in place here to quote a statement of Kenneth Burke’s. In *Counter-Statement* (1931), he sets up a distinction between *revelation* and *ritual* and affirms that what art can do is like ritual rather than revelation: “Revelation is ‘belief,’ or ‘fact.’ Art enters when this revelation is ritualized, when it is converted into a symbolic process. ... Art as eloquence, ceremony, ritual” (168). Burke, a great lover of music, also writes: “Music ... deals minutely in frustrations and fulfillments of desire, and for that reason more often gives us those curves of emotion which, because they are natural, can bear repetition without loss” (36). These statements are much more to the point regarding the aesthetic functioning of great music. Structural micro- and macro-phenomena of the kinds that Burke refers to go hand in hand with semiotic phenomena of the kinds reported in the present study to imbue the experience of music like Elgar’s concerto with deep aesthetic gratification.

DELIBERATE VERSUS INVOLUNTARY

It might also be in place, in closing, to comment on an issue often addressed in semiotic theory: that of nature vs. culture. If, for example, there is indeed a semiotic connection between, for example, the 12/8 metre (as signifier) and notions of something rural or pastoral (as signified), is that connection then a “natural” one, that is, is it inherent in this metre as such and hence cross-cultural? Or is it conventional, culturally learned and hence in principle arbitrary—is it, in other words, simply a traditionally established “topic” (in the sense of Hatten and Agawu) in musical semiotics?

My response here is, first, to say that most likely there is a certain amount of both factors in musical semiotics: naturalness *and* convention. Some meanings associated with musical sounds do seem to have natural, cross-cultural grounds, for example, the association of “high” notes with high places rather than low places. Other associations seem to be more culturally determined, for example, some of those most often connected with major vs. minor tonalities. But even here there might still be an element of naturalness: the notes constituting a major triad (and a major scale) are in fact more “natural” than the notes of a minor scale in that they hold more prominent places in the tonic’s series of harmonics (over-tones); on the other hand, the way this naturally (i.e., physically) grounded difference is experienced by individuals (as associated with, e.g., joy vs. sadness, extraversion vs. introversion, etc.) may be more bound to specific cultural tradition. So, at any rate, it seems misleading to posit an exclusive dichotomy between natural meanings and culturally learned ones. As for the 12/8 metre one might say, for instance, that the rather slow quadruple beat it indicates lends itself rather naturally to a feeling of harmonious repose, whereas the 3/8 rhythm of each beat, especially when dotted (as it often is), might suggest a blithe, innocent lightheartedness. But these are only *potential* content items that performers and listeners may, in some cases, associate with this particular feature. Musical semiotics, as discussed above, tends to involve a broad band of ambiguity around a shared but fuzzy core. The particular modulation given to this core is probably where convention and precedent tend to make themselves felt.

However—and that is the second part of my response—the natural/cultural polarity is, as I see it, much less important than the one between such content items as occur to listeners involuntarily and those that result from deliberate, conscious processes. I suggest that a large part of the aesthetic gratification felt in listening to music comes from those *involuntary* semiotic processes that unfold in listeners’ minds while listening: aesthetically powerful meanings in music are those that *occur* rather than those that are *constructed* by acts of volition. I believe that many, perhaps most, of the meanings reported in the present material are of the involuntary kind. They occur quickly and momentarily to listeners engaged in listening to sections of the music that average c. 30 seconds in duration. And—more importantly—in most cases there is no obvious, discernible ground for connecting a particular passage with a particular content.

No such grounds are indicated by the listeners, and in most cases one cannot with any certainty trace the steps that might have led the listeners to perceive just these meanings.

In a sense the gratification obtained from listening to music can be compared with the experience that many people know from listening to a good comic. If the comic delivers good jokes, punch lines and stories, listeners will laugh—in other words, something happens in their minds that they could not have brought about themselves with any amount of deliberate effort. Likewise in engaging with music, listeners experience semiotic connections which occur involuntarily, unexpectedly and inscrutably, and which gratify, partly for precisely those reasons. That is why the natural/cultural polarity is less important than the one between involuntary and volitional processes.

I suggest that semiotic connections are more aesthetically fascinating precisely when they occur to listeners who have not come to them by following a series of steps in reasoning—and who probably cannot specify, even in retrospect, what made them occur. These very circumstances may explain why a listener might connect the occurrence of such meanings with a particular kind of gratification: the listener's own efforts could not have brought them about; in this metaphorical sense they are "gifts." And these gifts rely on grounds (semiotic mechanisms) that listeners experience as new, unexpected and, at least while they are experienced, unfathomable. They may be based, in part, on culturally acquired habits—but that does not prevent them from occurring involuntarily, beyond the reach of the conscious will, or from appearing new and gratifying.

To sum up, the meaning processes documented in this study are, I suggest, of the kind that contributes to the aesthetic gratification music may bring. A major source of aesthetic gratification in music is the wealth of semiotic processes that engagement with the music may activate. These processes themselves, the engagement with the music as signs, account for the gratification. As listeners we tend to become engrossed in the sign relations that music activates.

This is essentially a claim analogous to Roman Jakobson's definition of the poetic function: when words function poetically, we have "focus on the message for its own sake" (1960). As for the musical signifieds as such, the "content" of the musical sign processes that we engage with when listen, is not—to put it bluntly—of a kind that makes it worth having.

The cognitive psychologist Aniruddh Patel, a pioneer in the application of brain imaging and other scientific methods to the study of musical cognition, has come close to what I would conclude about the role of musical meanings in creating experience; writing with L. Robert Slevc, he says:

musical meaning lacks the specificity, the compositionality, and the communicative motivation of linguistic semantics. Yet these limitations of musical semantics may be the very things that give music much of its power. The ambiguity and flexibility of musical meaning allows music to mean different things to different people, different things at different times, or even to mean many things at once ... This semantic flexibility and fluidity creates a form of meaning that is part of the uniqueness and importance of music. (Slevc and Patel 2011, 111)

Clearly, then, there is such a thing as musical meaning, but it works in very different ways from semantic meaning as we find it in language. Musical meanings are of multifarious kinds, both in regard to the nature of the signifier, of the signified, and of the grounds that connect signifier and signified: in all these respects multiple different types (in fact, an open set of types) seem to exist. This has to do with the fundamental fact that meaning in music differs from meaning in, for example, languages in two decisive respects—at least insofar as we are talking about language in its canonical functions (i.e., its communicative functions).

First, perceiving the aesthetically relevant meanings in music is *not* a matter of understanding the utterer's intention (the composer's or performer's intention)—whereas, in contrast, we believe that we understand the meaning of an utterance in daily linguistic communication if we understand what the utterer *intended* or *meant* to say.

Secondly, the aesthetic interesting meanings in music are not those that result from volitional interpretive efforts on the part of listeners; in fact they could not have arisen as results of such efforts. They are, instead, as Jakobson and Waugh would say (1979), *immediate*. They arise involuntarily, unexpectedly and in virtue of mechanisms that listeners themselves may not be cognizant of. This in contrast with many interpretations of poems, music and other aesthetic artefacts by academics—who tend to practice interpretation as a demanding, deliberate, intellectual act following procedures sanctioned by their interpretive communities.

The distinctive features of musical semiotics help understand the aesthetic relevance and potential of musical meaning. They explain why the

very process of engaging with the unfolding musical semiotics in the act of listening is an important factor—while not the only factor—in affording aesthetic gratification. The semiotic processes triggered in a listener’s engagement with music may be experienced as gratifying precisely because of their distinctive features, that is, *because* they are multifarious, fleeting, immediate, involuntary and enabled by semiotic mechanisms that the listener often does not understand. Engaging with artefacts that elicit such processes in one’s mind is, to many music enthusiasts, a highly prized activity that enhances quality of life because these processes are euphoric and because listeners could not have activated them by any efforts of their own.

Rhetoric should study these processes because rhetoric is about how human artefacts impact human minds. If one wants to talk about the “rhetoric” of this music, one should not talk about what the music “says,” but about its aesthetic impact—an impact partly engendered by listeners’ engagement with the multitude of sign relations that occur in their minds as they listen.

NOTES

1. In the piano score used here, I have, for each numbered section, inserted the time count at which that section begins in the du Pré/Barenboim YouTube video. The time counts in the video for the numbers in the score are the following: 0: 0.08—1: 1.18—2: 1.38—3: 2.00—4: 2.23—5: 2.47—6: 3.09—7: 3.45—8: 4.26—9: 4.45—10: 5.02—11: 5.26—12: 5.45—13: 6.11—14: 6.42—15: 7.05—16: 7.28—17: 7.53.

A performance of the entire concerto, with orchestral accompaniment and with the same cellist playing the solo part as in the present study, can be heard and seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3apFfcFbjg>.

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Competing Perspectives: Using Ethnographic Methods to Study Embodied and Emplaced Rhetorics

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As rhetorical scholars take to the field to explore emplaced and embodied rhetorics, they have increasingly turned toward ethnographic methods to augment textual approaches (Hess 2011; Herbig and Hess 2012; Middleton et al. 2011; Middleton et al. 2015). Ethnography, interviewing, and participant observation connect the critical-rhetorical impulse directly to the place and people of rhetoric, providing scholars with nuanced understandings of audience behaviors and interpretations. Inherently, rhetoric has an emplaced and embodied character, meaning that the places and people—both rhetor and audience—are centrally focused within the rhetorical critic’s analysis. Given this, ethnography offers an ontological positioning for the critic that is situated within or in proximity to the audiences of rhetorical exchanges. Ethnographic approaches can therefore illuminate those sensorial and affective elements of rhetoric that are often missed under textual analysis alone. Feelings of material connection, intensities of people/space connections, and those affective shivers that run down the spine of critics and audience members

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alike can be experienced and apprehended by critics who pick up ethnographic approaches within their critical projects.

These notions are especially important when considering the nature of audience within the rhetorical situation. Participatory methods, such as ethnography, blur the lines between audience, rhetor, and critic, providing new vantage points from which to examine and analyze rhetoric. Epistemologically, this means that the knowledge gained through participatory methods includes first-hand experiences into the reactions from audience members, including those of the critic who often stands alongside audiences. In contrast with textual methods, ethnographic approaches can inquire directly into the impact and effect of discourse upon audiences *in the moment of the rhetorical exchange*. Moreover, audiences can be configured directly into the emplaced character of rhetoric. Whether at memorials and museums, public protests, or public speeches, audiences contribute to the overall emplacement of rhetoric, underscoring the kairotic character of discourse (Middleton et al. 2015). Embedding the critic not only within but in direct interaction with the audience of rhetoric enriches the evaluative potential of rhetoric to understand the audience's perspective on discourse.

Drawing from my own use of critical-rhetorical ethnography (Hess 2011), I outline the ways in which rhetoric and ethnography can be mutually beneficial theoretical and methodological approaches. Specifically, I discuss my work studying the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, which included interviews with visitors as well as an exploration of the affective involvement of the site. I do so to explore how memorial sites are rhetorically constituted by both their stone and metal inscriptions and by the people who visit them. Moreover, my case study displays how ethnography can open up the possibility of multiperspectival judgment about the memorial site. Before the case study, I outline the particular elements of ethnographic approaches that can illuminate rhetorical processes, vernacular public memory, and rhetoric's effects.

ETHNOGRAPHY AND PARTICIPATORY METHODS

Typically understood under the banner of interpretive methods, ethnography has been used in a variety of settings to study communication and culture (Conquergood 1992; Philipsen 1975). While its etymology signals the "writing of people," ethnography refers to both the *process* of embodied and emplaced methods for data collection and the *product* of the

write-up (Lindlof and Taylor 2010). Participant observation, interviewing, and self-reflexivity are hallmarks of its methodological activities. Through these practices, ethnographers engage in sustained contact with the cultural places and people in order to learn of the languages, rituals, attitudes, and behaviors commonly expressed within the cultural context. In rhetorical contexts, ethnographers can embody a unique perspective that is situated between audience, rhetor, and critic. Through interviews and participant observation, ethnographers can gain a sense of how rhetoric works specifically upon audience members. Moreover, as a part of the audience, ethnographers within spaces of public memory can reflect upon and analyze the ways that the memorial space works symbolically, affectively, and corporeally.

Engaging the cultural context offers ethnographers a chance to apprehend the native's perspective. As they spend time within the culture, the ethnographer seeks to become more like those under inquiry, or more like an insider. Simultaneously, ethnographers carry their own outsider and personal experiences into the scene, which alter their understanding of the culture. The deeper the ethnographer goes within the culture or organization, the more he or she will lose sight of the outsider perspective, which is necessary for writing up the experience (cf. Adler and Adler 1987). Yet, if the ethnographer does not become enough like the insiders, the validity of the approach is threatened, underscoring the central insider-outsider dilemma within ethnography. As such, ethnographers engage in a constant balancing act between the insider and outsider perspective. This issue is especially pertinent for rhetoric scholars—and even more so for critical rhetoricians—who are seeking to explore the advocacy of political organizations and especially those organizations with which the ethnographer disagrees. Indeed, the personal political identity of the ethnographer is a critical component of the methodology.

In line with interpretive tradition, the self operates as the research instrument for data collection. In contrast with social sciences, which seek to distance the researcher from data collection to preserve objectivity, interpretive approaches embrace the subjective positioning of the researcher as she or he takes part in the cultural activities of the research scene. To understand the identity of the researcher, interpretive scholars engage in an ongoing process of self-reflexivity by which they take into account the various ways in which their subjective life experiences may affect their interpretations of the data being collected (Guillemin and Gillam 2004). This means that the researcher takes stock of their identity,

both in demographic and personal terms. For example, in studying the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, it was important to reflect upon my identity both as a US citizen and someone without a direct Jewish ancestry.

Self-reflexivity leads to a significant challenge for rhetorical critics engaging in ethnographic approaches. Traditionally, the critic has been at the center of rhetorical inquiry, meaning that the critic guides the interpretation of rhetorical acts. Their insight illuminates the speech or other events through rhetorical theory. Yet, in rhetorical *ethnography*, the critic is decentered in the process of engaging with the people that make up the scene of rhetorical expression. Reflexivity involves the act of stepping back and questioning one's own position in relation to both the people and to the types of knowledges offered within a cultural context. It means that the critic does not maintain exclusive control in guiding the interpretation of the rhetorical act. In yielding to those involved, the critic opens himself or herself up to new perspectives and judgments about rhetoric, but cedes the theoretical and disciplinary tools that would otherwise inform the act of criticism. Audience members located at the site of rhetoric become more active in their involvement within the critical act, offering perspectives and judgments that may complicate the critical impulse.

As mentioned above, ethnography is both the process of data collection and the product of the research endeavor. The process of ethnography includes a number of data collection methods, such as participant observation, interviewing, and embodied methods of knowing. As a participant observer, the ethnographer takes copious field notes as a primary mode of data collection (Emerson et al. 2011). Often taken in the scene and elaborated upon later, field notes inform much of the final reporting. They appear in a variety of forms, including personal journals, diaries, photography, and professional accounting, and will often vary greatly in style and form between ethnographers. Other methods often utilized within ethnography include interviews, which present participants with focused questions about their cultural and rhetorical activities. Interviews range from spontaneous ethnographic interviews, which may be simple, short follow-up questions to a naturally occurring event, or depth interviews which are formally marked with interview guides, consent forms, and audio recorders (Kvale 1996). Depth interviews provide the context for uncovering the deeper motives, attitudes, and values that underpin the cultural activities at hand. Finally, as an embodied approach, ethnography provides a means of knowing that is corporeal and affective (Middleton

et al. 2015). The sensations and vibe of a scene gives a feeling that can be documented in field notes. These lasting bodily and sensorial impressions can guide interpretations of places, spaces, and people.

Ethnography is also about the product of the experience: the write up (Goodall 2012). As a research document, an ethnography is a detailed description of the people, places, and activities that make up a social scene. The writing style of ethnography can include a more detached voice, but typically includes the first-person accounting, and often embrace narrative or creative non-fiction as a way of enriching the reader's experience of the scene (Goodall 2012). Indeed, ethnographic writing often aims to capture and recreate many of the sensations and activities found in the field in the language of the people under study. This provides a sense of fidelity for the research conducted; the ethnographer is able to display their knowledge and participation in such a way that signals a profound knowledge of the scene. The stories, metaphors, and languages spoken by participants have become a part of the ethnographer's vernacular, which, in turn, animates the authorship of ethnography.

ENGAGING IN ETHNOGRAPHY

For those rhetorical scholars considering ethnographic approaches as a way of accessing the on-the-ground vernacular practices of communities (Hess 2011), one of the more difficult elements to consider is how to gain access. In some cases, like the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, gaining access will be as simple as being in the site of the public activity, observing the types of practices and behaviors inherent to that space, and being willing to interview those who engage in those practices. In other cases, gaining access into an organization can be quite difficult. Many community organizations look toward academia with suspicion. Publication motives or concerns about promotion and tenure may be largely irrelevant to the needs of an organization. Finding moments of connection or ways to give back through volunteer efforts or authoring report might provide sufficient reasons for an organization to agree to the study. Keep in mind that without a clear benefit, the organization may perceive an ethnographer's involvement as a risk to their advocacy (Stewart et al. 2009). Once access has been granted, the rhetorical ethnographer should consider appropriate research questions and begin collecting field notes in the scene.

Of the more pressing concerns in using ethnography or ethnographic approaches is the question of rhetoric: What is *rhetorical* about rhetorical

ethnography? While discussed at great length elsewhere (Middleton et al. 2015), taking the time is also appropriate for this volume and its aim in understanding rhetorical audiences. First, since the vernacular turn in rhetoric, numerous scholars have advocated for rethinking the *place* where rhetoric is examined (Hauser 1999; Ono and Sloop 1995). Recognizing that, by definition, vernacular rhetorics are those that are expressed in the most local—hidden even—locations, gaining entrance into the vernacular spaces of speaking will require a different sort of approach. Scholars have increasingly sought to explore the ways in which rhetoric is experienced and expressed in the most local of places and spaces. Vernacular rhetorics, which inform larger notions of public opinion (Hauser 1999) or challenge oppressive systems in mainstream discourses (Ono and Sloop 1995), provide nuanced understandings of how the rhetorical microtransactions that occur in everyday spaces can have significant impacts on larger social and political issues. Reflecting on how the smallest of conversations at coffee shops and street corners can impact larger public opinion, Hauser (2011) encourages rhetoric scholars to seek out these conversations and has advocated for using ethnographic methods to learn about the struggles within vernacular communities. Second, research projects that maintain a rhetorical focus will have a particular focus on the nature of expression, understood locally, contextually, and historically. This means that the rhetorical theories that inform textual approaches can also inform the use of ethnography. How do local communities and organizations utilize language strategically and tactically? How do community organizations engage in identification practices? What forms of persuasion guide public advocacy and expression? Which are most effective in convincing their audience(s)? And, finally, how do audiences process rhetoric, interpret it, and internalize it within their daily lives?

Ethnographic practices range across studies, but typically ethnography involves the sustained engagement within a cultural site and a sense of involvement with the cultural natives of that site. Within the contemporary debates regarding ethnography and qualitative methods, disagreement exists about what qualifies as *sustained* engagement and whether that pertains length of time or level of involvement with participants (Tracy 2010). For example, in my own work, I have engaged in ethnographic approaches that have spanned years working with a health advocacy organization (Hess 2011, 2015a) and those that lasted mere days (Herbig and Hess 2012). The level of involvement depends on the types of activities under investigation. Long-term investment into the health

advocacy and its efforts to persuade youth to rethink their drug choices was necessary. By contrast, examining the tenth anniversary of September 11th only last about a week in New York (Herbig et al. 2014). This begs the question: Can a short-term research project, such as those I have done with public memory, be considered an ethnography?

The question is akin to questions of validity in the social sciences: Can a brief engagement with the place and people under investigation produce deep knowledge about that phenomenon? Answering that question depends on several factors, including the types of research questions, intent of the research project, and other affordances available to the researcher. On the one hand, brief engagements with particular scenes can produce illuminating details about the rhetorical practices within a community and can lead to a point of analytic or ethnographic saturation. Frequently, scholars—including myself—will adopt the description of “ethnographic approaches” or “the spirit of ethnography” that guides the research as a way of acknowledging that the time spent within a cultural environment was limited but still maintained many elements of ethnography. Some profound scenes, such as museums and memorials, are designed for brief yet intense tourist encounters. On the other hand, sustained engagement within rhetorical communities and cultures can produce much deeper knowledge into the motivations undergirding their practices and strategies. Still, the question of sustained involvement persists and should be taken seriously by rhetoric scholars who are considering ethnographic approaches for their research.

Embodied and emplaced methods provide remarkable insight into rhetorical processes, and they are especially helpful for those investigating the nature of *audiences*. Ethnographic practices, including interviews, participant observation, and embodied/affective modes of interpretation offer rhetorical scholars with direct access to the production and reception of rhetoric. “Interviews of speakers and audiences in the context of speaking can illustrate the thread that links message preparation, delivery, and reception, all of which are wrapped up in the microconstructions of rhetorical culture” (Hess 2015a, 240). Situating the critic within these practices, witnessing audience reactions, and inviting audiences to elaborate on their interpretations breathes new life into rhetorical analysis and critical judgment (Hess 2016). Audiences gain the opportunity to augment the interpretation of rhetorical acts, adding nuance to the critical read that may challenge or affirm many of the critical judgments produced in rhetorical criticism.

Moreover, interviews become a new site of rhetorical invention. Following McGee's conceptualization of the rhetorical critic as inventor (McGee 1990), rhetorical scholars have opened up the possibilities afforded to the critic in producing texts suitable for criticism that include digital discourses and the places and spaces of speaking. Within participatory critical rhetoric, another inventive possibility exists. Interviews with rhetorical audiences afford critics with an opportunity to gain interpretations of rhetorical acts and artefacts while also providing an opportunity to voice the critical interpretations authored by the critic. For example, as I discuss below, my interviews with those at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe also provided moments of reflection upon the symbolic elements of the site and the affective experiencing of the memorial. These types of questions place the critic in the active role of inventor alongside audiences in a collaborative space of critical invention and interpretation. Between critic, audience, and rhetor—in this case, the memorial—the critical judgments about the site and its significance were animated by multiple perspectives.

CASE STUDY: EMPLACED PUBLIC MEMORY AT THE MEMORIAL TO THE MURDERED JEWS OF EUROPE

I traveled to Europe in 2016 to examine several memorial sites pertaining to the Holocaust and World War II, including two concentration camps—Sachsenhausen, just north of Berlin, and Terezin, just outside of Prague—as well as a variety of museums, memorials, and monuments in Berlin, Nuremberg, and Prague. For this chapter, I only discuss my time at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. A robust comparison between the many sites would be fruitful, but is beyond the scope of this essay. The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe is unique due to the constant flow of visitors to the site and its urban placement, largely in contrast with concentration camps, which were purposely located outside city limits and frequently experienced within a guided tour setting. Located in the heart of Berlin and visited by hundreds of thousands each year, the Memorial exists as a “field of stelae” across roughly 19,000 square meters (Foundation Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe 2016). New York architect Peter Eisenman's final design was approved in 1999, and the rectangular stelae across the site are about 3 × 8 feet across and only vary in height, from mere inches to a towering 15 feet. The 2711 stelae are arranged in a grid-like pattern that goes up and down, almost as waves (Foundation

Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe 2016). Stretching across the city block, those who come across the site may not immediately realize its association to Holocaust victims. Indeed, visitors to the site are invited to walk within the stelae by small placards placed around the perimeter of the memorial, which also prohibit loud noises, jumping across stelae, and drinking alcohol on the site. Curiously, however, many visitors to the site engaged in what could be seen as disrespectful behaviors for a site with such serious historical significance, including jumping across the blocks, taking selfies, or even playing hide-and-seek within the labyrinthine space.

Over the course of my research trip, I visited the memorial on four occasions ranging from less than an hour to sustained visits over the course of roughly 4 hours. The first was in the context of a guided memorial tour of the city, while the rest were sustained interactions with the memorial site that included observations of and interviews with visitors. During my observations, I paid close attention to the emplaced character of the memorial and the embodied interactions that visitors had with it. Drawing from participatory critical rhetoric (Middleton et al. 2015), I examined the ways that the field operates as a site of research, a community of meaning, as context for rhetorical exchanges, and as a rhetorical actor. Places and spaces are imbued with meaning, both in the ways that they are constructed and by the people that traverse through them, creating a dynamic and fluid social text. I coupled my observations with extensive digital photography and videography using smartphones to augment my data collection, keeping in mind the problematic use of such technology at a memorial site (Hess *forthcoming*). Indeed, many of my own questions were about the use of photography and technology at the memorial site, which could be read as disrespectful to the site as a Holocaust memorial. My own use of the technology—even for research purposes—perceptually added to the overall use and acceptance of smartphones in serious places.

It is at this intersection of public memory and place/space that I arrive at my own inquiry into the memorial. Although deserving of a more thorough explanation, place/space can be summed up by as “an interrelationship between sets of spatial norms and particularized performances in places” (Middleton et al. 2015, 94). This means that explorations into the emplaced character of rhetoric will attend not only to the ways in which places are rhetorically marked, such as a public park or memorial, but also to the ways in which spatial norms affect visitors’ behaviors within those places. Arguably, many—if not all—memorial sites are “subject to historical transformation” as they are read along with different temporal rhythms (Koselleck

2002, 324) and other social changes in tourism. This is especially evident within the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, which is a tourist destination surrounded by other famous historical monuments. Many visitors may arrive with socio-spatial norms that are playful in nature as they dismount bikes after a ride through Tiergarten or finish taking selfies at the Brandenburg Gate. Between these complex socio-spatial practices and the marked place of a Holocaust Memorial, I arrived to analyze the embodied practices within the place/space of the memorial and inquire into the motivations and reasons why visitors would approach the memorial in the ways that they did. My Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved interviews with 20 tourists and one tour guide included questions about how they read the memorial, the use of digital photography, and the appropriateness of other visitors' behaviors at the memorial. At the Memorial, digital and locative practices, such as the taking of selfies, highlight the tensions within the use of technology in physical spaces (Hess 2015b). The intersection between vernacular rhetorics, public memory, and digital technologies is fruitful for exploring the potential of ethnography and rhetorical audiences.

VERNACULAR PUBLIC MEMORY AND ITS RHETORICAL EFFECT

The rhetorical study of public memory is a vibrant form of inquiry in the field (Blair 2001; Dickinson et al. 2006; Dickinson et al. 2010; Phillips 2004). Public memory making is a culturally contested rhetorical process. Stephen Browne (1995) recognized that the site of public memory is that of “symbolic action, a place of cultural performance, the meaning of which is defined by its public and persuasive functions” (237). In other words, both the memory itself and the contest over its creation can be understood as rhetorical acts. Memories are formed, in part, by collective decisions about the past in the form of monuments and memorials, which include details of what is worth remembering or forgetting (Vivian 2010) and what those memories mean for the present and future. Yet, in every construction and in every story, some elements are left out, some forgotten.

Looking more specifically, many scholars have turned to how individual memories intersect or interact with public monuments, memorials, and other commemorative activities. Research into this area has examined how memorials materially operate on people (Blair 1999, 2001; Chevrette and Hess 2015) or how memorials can be democratically comprised of individual representations, such as the AIDS Memorial Quilt (Blair and Michel

2007). Importantly, these acts of vernacular expression entail specific reactions to public memory, whether in support or in opposition of an official historical account. John Bodnar (1992) believes that “[p]ublic memory emerges from the intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions” (13). Within this intersection, “vernacular expressions convey what social reality feels like rather than what it should be” (14) and are often in opposition to the preferred reading of history offered by an official rendering. These acts can be considered as vernacular interpretations of memory or as acts of private grief performed publicly (Hess 2007). Rhetorical scholars have attended to the ways in which individuals cope with national memories or interact with sites of public significance. These individual-physical interactions guide the memory making process, both in terms of the *creation* of memorials that physically work upon on the visitors’ bodies and how individuals behave in response.

Finally, Roger Aden and his colleagues (2009) have pushed the study of memory into “re-collection,” believing that “memory studies can be enriched and enhanced by exploring processes of remembering within places through the integrative unit of analysis persons-with/in-places” (313). In this way, memory becomes a process and product, which challenges much of the textual focus of rhetorical criticism as it has been deployed in memory studies. Regarding *re-collection* as a theoretical understanding of memory, Aden and his colleagues examine the “emplaced character” of memory (313) that is built through the physical space and the people found therein. In this way, seeing memorial sites as locations of national rhetorical significance that are expressed and understood through individual embodiment and emplaced contexts, the rhetorical critic can ethnographically enter the places/spaces of public memory to apprehend their effect upon audiences.

In examining vernacular public memory, I also address a larger concern about the effects of rhetoric upon audiences (Kiewe and Houck 2015). Public memory provides an ideal site and theoretical lineage for engaging with effects, given that many sites of public memory have frequent vernacular interactions and interpretations of official discourses (Bodnar 1992). Moreover, public memory research has been at the forefront of the participatory and spatial turns in rhetoric (Blair 2001; Dickinson et al. 2006; Middleton et al. 2015). By attending to the site of public memory, critics both participate in the memorial act and can witness other visitors’ interactions with memorials. As Dickinson et al. (2006) contend, directed movement that is incorporated into museum and memorial spaces act

upon the visitor, guiding narratives through the space of a museum, which requires that critics participate in the spaces and places of public memory. Branching from participatory spatial rhetorics, critics can also gain a perspective on the *effect* of museums upon audiences by incorporating visitor reactions to the rhetorics found therein, much like I have with the interviews at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe.

Effect, in the rhetorical tradition, has a complicated history. Understood broadly as “how a message is received by an audience” (Kiewe and Houck 2015, 16), claims of effect are “interpretive claims made by a rhetorical critic that link a rhetorical act to some sort of reaction—behavioral, attitudinal, textual—to that act” (Kiewe and Houck 2015, 18). Gauging or measuring the effect of rhetoric has been difficult within rhetorical scholarship, or as Davis Houck and Mihaela Nocasian (2002) frame it, “a critical Achilles heel” (650). This critical vulnerability can be traced back to Herbert Wicheln’s (1927/2005) earliest arguments that rhetoric is concerned with effect. More recently, Kiewe and Houck (2015) offer that studying effect should be “more expansive and ought to include the interplay between speaker and audience” (14). Reacting to biting criticism that rhetoric scholarship uses the language of effects but has little regard for evidence of it, Kiewe and Houck respond by encouraging rhetoric scholars to provide “some evidentiary grounds for their claims about rhetoric’s work...with real audiences or for the potential for agency to reside in audiences” (4). I suggest that the “difficult *epistemological* questions of [audience] effect can be answered through an *ontological* repositioning of the rhetorical critic” through ethnography (Hess 2015a, 261). In other words, gauging how rhetorical audiences are comprehending public messages about controversies, advocacy, and memory requires a positioning of the critic in direct interaction with audiences. Ethnographic approaches can provide such a positioning.

ANALYSIS: THE EMPLACEMENT OF HOLOCAUST MEMORY

The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe provides an interesting example of emplaced memorial rhetoric. Located within the heart of Berlin among other tourist sites, the emplaced character of the memorial reads much more playfully than one would expect for a Holocaust memorial. Indeed, by contrast, many other sites of memory dedicated to the Holocaust rightfully present bleak visions of life in concentration camps and the death squads associated with Nazi Germany. This vision is also

crafted in the museum that rests below the surface of the memorial. Displayed in a series of four rooms, the subterranean museum offers visitors a glimpse into the personal narratives of Jews in death camps, the families ripped asunder by Nazi persecution, and the timeline of German domination of Western Europe in World War II. These messages exist in stark contrast with the above ground memorial, which is vaguely marked as a memorial at all. Indeed, tourists who arrive at the Memorial from Tiergarten may initially read the site as an extension of the playful park behind them. As an investigation into rhetorical audiences, this memorial provides an interesting case for seeing how different reads of the memorial are crafted. During my interviews, I inquired about the various behaviors found at the memorial, including the frequent games of hide-and-seek played by both children and adults, the use of digital photography and taking of selfies, and the ways that visitors would climb, sit upon, and jump across the stelae. To gain a variety of perspectives, I positioned my ethnographic interviews in a variety of places across the acre-sized memorial grounds, including the entrance and exit of the museum in the middle of the Memorial, and around the site's perimeter. While visitors exiting Tiergarten park and entering the Memorial may maintain a playful attitude toward the grounds, those exiting the museum into the middle of the memorial had a noticeably different affective composure that altered their embodied understandings of the memorial and its emplaced character. Below, I structure my analysis through three main elements of the memorial: the various affective states that surface in reading both my personal embodiment and reactions from visitors; the ways in which visitors discuss their interpretations of the memorial's emplaced character; and the types of audience behavior such as selfie taking, hide-and-seek, and climbing the stelae change the read of the memorial.

AFFECTIVE EMBODIMENT, AN EMLACED MEMORIAL, AND HIDE-AND-SEEK

Ethnographic and participatory methods provide critics with corporeal modes of understanding. These affective states are produced in the “in-between-ness” and from “intensities” of bodies, places, and spaces (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 1). “Affect moves and engages people who are copresent, experiencing rhetoric together as it unfolds and calls upon and creates shared meanings and feelings” (Middleton et al. 2015, 75). As an embodied approach, ethnography invites both a visceral and cor-

poreal comprehension of rhetoric as well as a cognitive and analytic understanding. This often neglected form of expression is relatively uncommon for rhetorical critics, whose bodies typically rest in the background during textual analysis. It is certainly not to say that engaging in textual criticism means severing the body from research; rather, it is the case that embodied and *in situ* methodologies call forth an embodied knowledge that is difficult to grasp from a textual perspective alone. As Jamie Landau argues, rhetorical criticism has long dismissed the *feelings* of criticism. She invites rhetoric scholars to be “feeling rhetorical critics” that “more fully embody the political practice of rhetorical criticism, expand the object of analysis beyond traditional symbolic texts, and take seriously the possibility of another participant in rhetoric” (Landau 2016, 73). Affective embodiment through ethnography actively attends to the modes of knowledge often eschewed more detached perspectives. Indeed, with the privileging of cognitive and representational politics, rhetoric has traditionally been reliant on the epistemological assumptions found within the textual products, that is, the spoken word. Yet, those non-representational practices—those of the body that lurk beneath the surface of thought and emotion—provide important frames for understanding rhetoric. As Phillip Vannini (2015) makes the case, the use of ethnography can inform many forms of non-representational research, which “seeks to cultivate an affinity for the analysis of events, practices, assemblages, affective atmospheres, and the backgrounds of everyday life against which relations unfold in their myriad potentials” (318). The affective atmosphere provides a sensorial foundation for comprehending the types of potential expressions within places and events. Turning now to the memorial, I use my own embodied experiences as an audience member at the memorial site to make sense of its affective atmosphere.

Although featuring common sites of the Holocaust around Berlin, my bike tour was strangely jovial. My international group including tourists from Canada, the United States, Australia, and Israel was quite the hodgepodge of English speakers. Traversing the city on rented bikes, we received a short course on the history of Nazi Germany, including the early stages of the Weimar Republic, the rise of Hitler, and the massive bureaucracy dedicated to the extermination of millions. In between stories of pain, suffering, and death, the wind whisked through my hair, perhaps cleansing me of the details of the atrocities that are peppered across the memoscape of the city. Leaving the familiar collegial grounds of Humboldt

University and its uncomfortable history of book burning, our group arrived at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe.

Having seen pictures of the site in my preparation for the trip, I immediately recognized it. Strangely, but unexpectedly, I was excited. Dismounting my bike, I was struck by the sheer immensity of the Memorial. Clearly, the space is designated and designed to be significant, so much so that attempting to take in each and every block would be nearly impossible. The prime tourist real estate that surrounds it, such as the Brandenburg Gate right around the corner, is noticeable. But as a tourist site, it also carries the oddities that are familiar to tourism, such as the same strip of restaurants and souvenir shops selling the same kitsch statue and overpriced cup of coffee. The signs for their wares were loudly sprawled around the memorial, much more than the signage for the memorial itself, which was seemingly absent. Occasionally, a small placard, roughly the size of a square foot would give title and directions to the space, indicating that visitors were not to jump across the stelae, drink alcohol, or make loud noises during their visit. The prohibitions were unheeded as tourists poured into the memorial from the nearby sites, jumped across the stelae, and shrieked with delight as they hid from each other in the sea of concrete blocks.

Knowing this site is a memorial space, I tried not to smile as I witnessed the other tourists. I shouldn't smile. This, after all, is the Memorial to the *Murdered Jews* of Europe. Yet, I couldn't help but chuckle as children *and* adults found the maze of blocks to be *fun*. Sitting on the blocks on the perimeter of the grounds, a young couple was finishing lunch together, sipping coffee drinks over non-Holocaust-related conversation. Spilling cabbage from her doner kebab onto the concrete gravestone, the young woman brushed away the debris, smearing some of the sauce onto the dark gray surface. Another couple, laying upon their backs, looked up at the cloudy sky, possibly grinning about their young love. The vibrations of positive feelings undergirded the memorial, as if the wavy ups and downs that created the spatial effects of the environment were always trending upward. Smiling faces were captured with smartphones adorned upon selfie sticks, giving a larger vantage and purview for the memorial, but somehow missing the commemorative detail offered on those small placards. It was as if the collective sentiment was: *It feels good to be alive*.

Interviewees felt this, too. As an opening question, I would ask them how they felt while experiencing the memorial. Recognizing that asking this question invites a cognitive and rational explanation for their affective state, which largely moves beyond the intensity of sensation associated with affect theory, I paid close attention to those moments when interviewees

struggled to come up with an answer that could reconcile the dual sensations of playfulness and somberness, which highlights the conflicting atmospheres of playground and memorial. Interviewees described the sensation as “raw,” “cold,” “depressed” but also a “fun” space with “people laughing.” One interviewee indicated that he would have preferred to visit the site without so many people running around. He also expressed concern about the lack of solemnity expressed by other tourists that played in the space or took selfies, which bordered on “disrespectful” but “inevitable.” Another interviewee says that “you go through it and you feel, kind of, the pressure.” Another in her group agreed, “Yeah, and you feel very small when you go inside.” She replies, “Maybe (the memorial designers) wanted to take us out of the society of today.” Another interviewee described the haptic response of touching the stelae was about “feeling the baggage and connection” of the Holocaust, and reflected upon the importance of the touching sensation: “If you only look at it, then it’s just looking, you’re just looking at a few stones, but when you sit on them ... you get a different type of feeling with every stone.” Also speaking of the “feel” of the stones around the site, one Jewish interviewee indicated that the stelae gave her “chills when you touch it.” Other interviewees expressed confusion about the memorial site, outwardly wondering about the vague meanings associated with it, largely because the memorial does not have obvious signage about what it is or what it means. Many interviewees openly wondered if other visitors would experience the memorial as a playful space before realizing that it was dedicated to the memory of murdered millions.



Fig. 8.1 Tourists visiting the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe

In this way, the memorial's emplaced character can be read through the types of activities that occur around the space. Laughing, taking selfies, playing hide-and-seek; these activities add to the overall understanding of the memorial and the embodied sensations felt by visitors. For one heterosexual couple, the read of these activities was quite mixed. For her, the playful activities in the massive space of the memorial among the grave-like stones gave her "goosebumps" from "the feeling of the people that come here to look at it and to take pictures and sit on the stones and talk to each other and eat a little bit." The playful composure of the people within the memorial, she told me, was a powerful frame for understanding the memory of the Holocaust: "It's amazing how people come together, to be together and to look at stones. It's only stones, but it takes a lot of memories with it and a lot of pain, but also a lot of love." On the other hand, he had "mixed feelings. Smiling while it's really serious what happened, and people are just smiling, taking pictures... It felt a bit strange for people to walk over the stones, smiling, taking the pictures." This is consistent with Aden and his colleagues' understanding of public memory in processual terms, as *persons-with/in-places* (Aden et al. 2009, 313). In this way, the process of comprehending the emplaced character of public memory includes both an observation of the types of behaviors that make up the memorial and simultaneously realizing that the audience of the memorial is actively creating the overall interpretations of its rhetorical force. This turn sees rhetoric as imbricating audience upon space, space upon audience, and rhetorical interpretation across both. Inquiring through ethnographic approaches about the ways that people form their interpretations provides an opening into the overall rhetorical potentiality and influence found within the site.

Finally, and branching from the mixed reading of the emplaced character of the memorial, many of the behaviors witnessed and enacted by interviewees shed light on the ways in which the memorial can be read as a complex situated space. This is to say that the many behaviors of the memorial reveal a multiperspectival and embodied judgment about the space (Hess 2016; Middleton et al. 2015). Rather than leaving the interpretation as merely "mixed," as many of my interviewees indicated, I sought out those who committed the acts of selfie taking or hide-and-seek to determine their motivation and reasoning behind committing such an act upon such hallowed ground. From a detached, critical perspective, it was easy to say that narcissistic technological culture had led these tourists to grab their selfie sticks and capture their smiling faces. Yet, this read is

limited in perspective. Inquiring into the reasons for these behaviors illuminates additional practices that are a part of the memory making processes for tourists at the memorial. Ethnographic approaches, which rely upon participant observation and interviews, provide access into these insights.

For those visitors who engaged in many of the behaviors that provide a mixed understanding of the memorial, their practices of hide-and-seek and taking selfies were, unsurprisingly, of less concern than for those observers. What was surprising, however, is how these practices became wrapped up into the overall memory making process. One interviewee marked the sensation as one filled with “levity,” commenting that, regardless of the memorial designation, “spaces are for people” and “people should be able to use them in the way they want.” When asked about why they would take selfies at the memorial, one couple responded, “Memories. Because of memories.” Another visitor agreed, saying that, “It’s cool. Pictures are memories” and another indicated that pictures are “memorabilia.” One young couple, who I witnessed playing in the memorial, described the stones as graves, but when asked about how people play in the memorial, responded saying, “It’s as if they actually are graves, is it? Yeah, everyone has their own way to enjoy it.” When asked about the other tourists jumping across the blocks, one interviewee said, “I think it’s cool because it gives life to a monument. It doesn’t have to be a dead place, it’s a live place. People come here; kids are kids. So, I like that it’s a little bit interactive.” Another pair of interviewees, both Germans, remarked about how the location of the memorial in the city helps to explain the interactions with it: “I think it’s good that the memorial is central in the city because it’s present. People go here, people come here, and talk about it.” In that same interview, the other interviewee added, “I think it’s good combination, too—this site is a part of our history. Kids being symbols for our future. And being inside here is like, it’s like it’s happening *now*.”

These comments add texture to the overall critical judgment that can be ascertained through interacting with the memorial. Rather than relying on a detached, textual perspective, including the audience comments about how they read the memorial, how they reacted to it, and how they observed other visitors’ interactions provides a more robust account of the complex site. Visitors recognize the complicated affective sensations of melancholy and levity as they touch the stones of the site; however, they also recognize that places/spaces are designed with people in mind and

that reading the place as a rhetorical actor that includes the people within it, much like Aden and his colleagues (2009), crafts a complex image of a memorial that considers questions of appropriateness, living memory, and vernacular expressions. Certainly, for some, the act of taking selfies in such a serious place feels strange, but for others, the sharing of the selfie across social media is a way to accent the personal memories and expression that the memorial invites. The landscape and its design invite playful uses of photography and perspective along with playful interactions as visitors easily lose their friends in the labyrinth. Overall, the message of the memorial is, according to these audience members, one of invitation, interaction, *and* introspection about its historical significance.

RHETORIC, ETHNOGRAPHY, AND THE AUDIENCE

Ethnographic approaches offer embodied and emplaced encounters with rhetoric and audiences. Through participatory models, rhetoric scholars that take up ethnographic methods can learn of the first-hand interpretations of rhetorical artefacts, texts, and speeches. Moreover, ethnography offers rhetoric scholars an opportunity to assess the impact and effects of these rhetorical moments, shedding light upon how audiences make sense of the complexities of persuasion, identification, and advocacy. At the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, audiences—typically in the form of tourists—took up the entire rhetorical scene, reading the memorial with/in the people and place of Berlin. They often found the memorial a confusing place, with differing interpretations about the significance of the site and the practices found therein. Returning to the nature of rhetoric's effect upon this audience as evidenced by my interviews, two paired ideas surface. First, the embodied understanding of the space as simultaneously playful and somber—largely through the types of behaviors and especially through the use of digital photography—indicates that audiences of memorials are significantly impacted by the current social, cultural, and technological practices of tourism. The power and ubiquity of smartphone technology and the act of taking selfies serve as frames for interpreting the nature of the memorial site, likely in ways that surpass its initial design (Hess and Herbig 2013). Second, this judgment about the importance of play and technology within the vernacular memories of everyday tourists challenges how rhetorical critics may read the site. Indeed, as I approached the site, I was taken aback by the ways in which tourists and others treated the memorial space. Yet, as my interviews com-

menced, I found my perspective questioned by the responses in the interviews. Critical judgment, as derived through a textual perspective, often surfaces in the presence of deep thinking about rhetoric, but in the absence of competing perspectives and reactions from audiences. Studying the memorial ethnographically invited a healthy refutation to my preexisting beliefs and interpretation about tourist memory- and meaning-making practices.

The complex read of the memorial by visiting tourists left many confused about the sensations that the memorial generated. As an embodied researcher in the field, I also felt the strange raw character of levity and depression as I entered the scene. Talking with those other visitors at the site offered additional judgments into my overall rhetorical read, as they signaled their own forgiving interpretations of the behaviors that would otherwise feel out of place at a memorial. Shared through the moment of the interview, their experiences added to my overall understanding of why and how audiences make sense of this memorial and public memory writ large. Furthermore, interviews with visitors also engage a level of interactive invention, whereby, as a rhetorical critic, I can ask questions of their interpretations in an effort to think through the complex character of public memory. Interacting with visitors provided an opportunity to vocalize their interpretations and, in some cases of interviews with more than one person, invites a dialogic spirit of inquiry between interviewees, as guided by my questions regarding symbolic values, curiosities about haptic connections with the stela, or pointed observations about the behavior of other visitors. Ethnography, and its participatory spirit, has much to offer to the study of rhetoric. Whether sustained encounters with rhetorical cultures or brief participatory interactions with visitors at an event or site, ethnographic approaches encourage direct interaction with both the embodied and emplaced elements of rhetoric. As an embodied approach, it also calls forth the affective and corporeal elements of rhetorical experience—elements that have long been absent from the scholarly discussion of rhetorical methods. Even a relatively brief encounter with a Holocaust memorial can provide insightful intensities about the *feel* of rhetoric.

Although the aim of this essay is to investigate the ways in which ethnography can enrich the study of rhetoric and audience, it is also the case that rhetoric can add to the long-standing considerations of ethnography (Endres et al. 2016; Middleton et al. 2016; Middleton et al. 2015). Traditionally, the intersection of rhetoric and ethnography has been focused on the suasive function of the text; that is, has the ethnographer

made a persuasive case about their read of the culture under investigation? Looking to how rhetoric may inform the process of ethnography, three specific ideas come to mind. First, rhetoric has a multiple millennia-long tradition of studying the power of language and its influence upon human behavior. Theories of rhetoric, spanning from Aristotle to the most contemporary branch of critical rhetorical theory, can provide ethnography with a wide array of theoretical lenses for understanding culture and language. Second, much of the history of rhetoric has been focused on powerful moments of deliberation, public advocacy, and political argumentation. This strong focus on governmental policy and politics can offer ethnography new avenues for exploring the intersection of governmental and citizen culture. Finally, ethnography has a long history of sustained engagement within particular scenes, which can generate in-depth knowledges of culture. Rhetoric shares this focus, but has also had a larger contextual frame that takes into account the social and historical forces that intersect within particular moments of speaking. Together, rhetoric and ethnographic approaches create fruitful new directions for inquiries into the politics, culture, and languages of embodied and emplaced rhetorical encounters.

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The Audience and the Spectacle: Bodu Bala Sena and the Controversy of Buddhist Political Activism in Sri Lanka

Michael Hertzberg

In the beginning of 2013, the newspapers in Sri Lanka were full of reports from the political rallies held by the new Buddhist activist group Bodu Bala Sena. I was now invited to join them to such an event. The public meeting started with a ritual procession from the temple to the stage of the public meeting, in an open square in the small town of Kolonnawa, in the outskirts of Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka. The distance between the temple and the stage was approximately around 500 metres. The purpose of such processions is to mark a ritual opening of the meeting but also to make noise to attract nearby audience that something is happening. Buddhist monks, engaged laypeople and ornamented drummers marched in a cacophonous procession to the stage, where the speakers find a chair on the stage. Row by row, Buddhist monks were sitting on the stage, waiting for their turn to speak. The grand opening of the event, the drummers, the march, the procession, was in stark contrast to the vast ocean of empty white plastic chairs around the stage. I had been told to

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expect around 3000 spectators, but now a mere 30 attendants had found their way to the event among 500 empty white chairs. Not much of an audience.

I did not know what to expect. Twelve Buddhist monks were sitting on the stage, and soon six of them had already delivered a speech. Even though I could follow the topics of their speeches with my crude and broken Sinhala, the event was a tedious affair. Three hours passed. The ocean of white chairs was slowly turning into a crowd, a mixed crowd, of people from all ages. Families with their children and lunchboxes, businesspersons, tuk-tuk drivers, elder people, a diverse crowd. The expectations rose, and a Buddhist monk delivered a funny speech, especially popular among the younger segments of the audience. I could feel the sun scorch the back of my neck, but now the open square was packed with people, sitting and standing alike. Some of them had planned to come to this event, while others had apparently stopped on their way as ‘something was happening.’

After 4 hours of speeches, some furious and others humorous, Ven. Galagodatte Gnanasara Thero, the leader of Bodu Bala Sena, went on stage. When he commanded his powerful voice, the murmurs of the crowd silenced instantly. His speech was intense and full of anger, and the message was to warn the audience of the upcoming threat from radical Muslims, who conspire against the nation, Sri Lanka. He denied rumours of the circulating conspiracy theories around Bodu Bala Sena (there are many) and proposed new initiatives to restore the glory of the ancient Buddhist heritage. Extra focus was given to their achievements, how Bodu Bala Sena had stopped the halal certification in Sri Lanka and especially how they had been able to curb the unlawful activities of the Muslims at Kuragala earlier in 2013. Kuragala is a mosque in another part of Sri Lanka, where Bodu Bala Sena claimed that the Muslims were erecting new buildings illegally, nearby a Buddhist sacred site. The audience nodded in agreement.

Bodu Bala Sena is extremely active in different social media forums, and throughout the year 2013, there was rarely a week without Bodu Bala Sena on the front-page of some newspaper, obsessed with public screening. The vast media coverage of Bodu Bala Sena generates more interest for them, and through these public meetings, they are able to remain in the public spotlight. This circle of attention in the media gives the impression that the members and followers of Bodu Bala Sena are more powerful than they really are. Several film cameras were set up to film the event at

Kolonnawa in July 2013, and it was later posted on their webpages. Ven. Gnanasara Thero told me in April 2013:

Our mobilisation has been quite successful. We were able to hold huge demonstrations in many places about the halal issue. Now, even the government is afraid of us. We mobilize through facebook, through chief priests in the temples. We have organizers. They make phone calls. (Interview with Ven. Galagodatte Gnanasara Thero, 7th of April, 2013)

The temple in Kolonnawa was in charge of organizing the event, the public meeting, while Bodu Bala Sena was in charge of the stage. By drawing upon the authority of the local temples, the chief monks at each particular locality engage in mutual relations with Bodu Bala Sena. Another asset of this way of organizing public meetings is that each temple already has close contacts with their Buddhist constituency, which makes these meetings both religious and political. An estimate of the attendance at the public meeting in Kolonnawa would be around 2000–3000 people. But there were no controversies. No newspaper journalists. No national TV cameras. Not much of a spectacle.

This chapter has three arguments: (1) A rhetorical political analysis based on ethnography and historiography will identify the rhetorical patterns of Buddhist activism, and the reaction among audience subgroups; (2) the rhetorical repertoires of Buddhist activist groups can be understood in the tension between their position on the stage and their ability to engage multiple audiences by their messages; and (3) the production of public spectacles enhances and transforms the political capital of Buddhist activist groups. These three arguments are tightly interwoven, but it is my aim to unravel the ways in which we can pursue new lines of investigation within the religio-political activism and audience studies. With an aim to expand our notions of the public, Gerard Hauser launches the concept of ‘vernacular rhetoric’ to pursue new lines of investigation. Thus, each ‘manifestation of sentiment [of public opinion] may be read as a text: consumer behaviour of purchase and boycott, public letters, letters to public officials, speeches, symbolic acts, demonstrations, votes, strikes, essays, uses of public places, attendance at public meetings, graffiti, and an assortment of other forms of approval and disapproval’ (Hauser 1998: 102). Following the vernacular turn in rhetoric, Aaron Hess develops the idea of critical-rhetorical ethnography: ‘As a rhetorical method, it highlights elements of advocacy, identification, and persuasion, using theoretical

concepts familiar to rhetoric' (Hess 2011: 132). With this turn, rhetorical endeavours rely more upon ethnographic methods, interviews and participant observation, and often highlighting the importance of place (Hess, this volume), and, as I will emphasize further in the chapter, the importance of moments.

The ethnographical material for this chapter was collected over 5 weeks in Sri Lanka in 2013, 2 weeks in April and 3 weeks in July/August, but many of the observations are also based on a longer fieldtrip for 8 months in 2011/2012. In the chapter I will use the case of Kolonnawa to discuss how the political repertoires of Buddhist monks have developed historically (exception vs. norm), and then look upon how the public meeting at Kolonnawa is connected to another conflict over a sacred site in Kuragala. Both of these cases illuminate methods of historiography and ethnography that will give us valuable input as to how we can better understand the relations between political Buddhism, public spectacles and multiple audiences.

BODU BALA SENA AND POLITICAL BUDDHISM IN SRI LANKA

Buddhist political groups like Bodu Bala Sena have in the recent years captured the headlights in Sri Lanka due to their ardent nationalist imaginaries, their violent confrontations with minorities and their active opposition against the UN and other international development actors. These Buddhist political groups emerge in contexts of national political instability and beckon us to rethink the relations between Buddhism and politics. By exploring how Buddhist activism is a major protagonist of public spectacle (political marches, rallies and riots) both targeted against ethnic and religious minorities as well as international agents, this chapter aims to understand how Buddhist political mobilization draws upon cultural anxieties and rhetorical repertoires in the construction of public spectacles and multiple audiences. Sri Lanka has faced tumultuous political instability in the last decade, with the devastating tsunami in 2004 and the long-ranging civil war (1983–2009). These events have not only beckoned substantial international attention, involving both political and humanitarian interventions, but also stirred intensified political engagement among Buddhist nationalist groups.

Bodu Bala Sena, led by the charismatic Buddhist monk Ven. Gnanasara Thero, has spearheaded the new anti-Muslim stance in Sri Lanka, which has led to violent outcomes. They have been able to garner support by

tapping into a variety of cultural anxieties: ‘unethical’ conversions, inter-faith marriages, halal certification and contestation over sacred sites. Seth D. Kaplan (2015) argues that social cohesion in fragile states is increasingly challenged by religious ‘conflict entrepreneurs,’ leveraging their influence through formal and informal institutions and, as I will argue, through public spectacles and multiple audiences.

In Sri Lanka, Buddhist monks are known for their ability to create public spectacles: the burning of Norwegian flags in opposition to the peace facilitation in 2003, the fast-unto-death campaigns to oppose the P-TOMS (a joint mechanism to disburse aid after the tsunami, but which was perceived as a peace agreement in disguise) and the rallies and demonstrations in opposition to the UN-ordered Darusman report in 2011 (which demanded greater accountability of the last stages of the civil war). Stephen C. Berkwitz argues how political visits to Buddhist shrines often are turned into ‘large-scale ritual spectacles’ (Berkwitz 2003), and opening ceremonies of development projects take the form of religio-political rituals (Tennekoon 1988), in a double-symbiotic patron-client relation between monk and politician (see also Bechert 1966). Buddhist marches and demonstrations are public displays of power and show how political monks are important agents in the process of focalization and transvaluation (Tambiah 1996), transforming local level incidents into high-profile national issues. The importance is not only to note the potency of Buddhist activism to create public spectacles, but also how the production of such public spectacles enhance and transform the political capital of Buddhist activist groups. Thus, a public spectacle should be defined as an event that is transformed into a high-pitched public event, which may both draw a huge crowd of spectators, but also extensive media coverage. Murray Edelman defines a political spectacle in terms of a dramatic setting, a leader/enemy distinction and the identification of pressing problems, and argues that a prime intention of political spectacles is to divert attention away from other political issues (Edelman 1988). Hence, public spectacles are concerned with accentuating (media) attention as a form of labelling political problems, either head on or as a concealment of something else.

Bodu Bala Sena was formed in 2012 and arises from a lineage of political monks and Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka. The political monks in Bodu Bala Sena can both be seen as an extension and critique of Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), a controversial political party consisting solely of monks, established in opposition to the peace process in 2004 (Deegalle 2006). Many of the same monks have been involved in the same organiza-

tion, but many are disappointed with the current state of JHU. Bodu Bala Sena is led by the vociferous Ven. Galagodatte Gnanasara Thero, and they publicly hold a high profile by using a newly built Buddhist iconic building, called the Sambuddhatva Jayanthi Mandiraya, as office. In contrast to other Buddhist activist groups in Sri Lanka, they are organizationally adept and have several operating local branches.

The formation of Bodu Bala Sena happened in the wake of the Dambulla Mosque attack in April 2012, where a mob of 2000 people attacked a mosque over a land dispute (Heslop 2014). Within only a couple of months Bodu Bala Sena was able to seize the position as the leading Sinhala-Buddhist organization in the country. During the month of March 2013, the groups came into national momentum after initiating a series of demonstrations and communal rallying (allegedly ranging between 5000 and 35,000 in numbers) against halal certification in Sri Lanka, putting the country into high alert whether violent riots would unfold. The leader of Bodu Bala Sena, the monk Ven. Gnanasara Thero, has a dubious reputation due to his confrontational methods and violent disposition against evangelical Christians. Violent incidents against Muslim enterprises and mosques underlined the religious divide between Buddhists and Muslims in Sri Lanka, jeopardizing the political climate in the country to head into another conflict with a minority group in the wake of the long-winding civil war. In order to define an audience, there is a need for a text, sender or transmitter, an audience is not defined in themselves, but how they all are in a particular relation to something or someone else (Livingstone 1998). Thus, the cornerstone of the audience in this chapter are those who are connected to Buddhist activism, more closely Bodu Bala Sena, but also how they reach out to different groups, both among fellow Buddhists at different localities, but also how they provoke Muslim groups in Sri Lanka.

It is time to return to my first argument in the chapter: A rhetorical political analysis based on ethnography and historiography will identify the rhetorical patterns of Buddhist activists, and the reaction among audience subgroups. What can the public meeting in Kolonnawa tell us about Buddhist political activism, multiple audiences and public spectacles? Nothing really happened at Kolonnawa. It was a regular public meeting among many other similar public meetings held by other Buddhist temples around Sri Lanka at the same time, in 2013, by Bodu Bala Sena. Sometimes the non-significance of an event can be the most telling part of it. A historian, however, will not find the public meeting in Kolonnawa

insignificant, but as an event that challenges the historical role of Buddhist monks as nonpolitical. To grasp this aspect of the public meeting, we need to take a close look at the role of political monks in Sri Lanka.

THE POLITICAL MONK BETWEEN NORM AND EXCEPTION

The anthropologist Jonathan Spencer claims that it was a rare sight to see a Buddhist monk onstage during a political meeting in the 1980s, but now Buddhist monks have the show all by themselves (see Spencer 2012). How can we understand political monks and their presence on the stage, and even as organizers of public political meetings? To my knowledge, Bodu Bala Sena's systematic use of temple networks to organize political meetings is new altogether. This is quite significant, when we know that very few monks in Sri Lanka would willingly label themselves as 'political monks.' Not even the monks from the political party JHU who were voted into parliament in 2004 would endorse this concept to describe themselves.

The very concept 'political monk' is seen as a contradiction in Sri Lanka: Per definition, monks should be apolitical and not interfere in political matters. This attitude is common among politicians, the general public and among the monks themselves. Hence, whenever a monk, or a group of monks, decides to engage into political issues, they will immediately face questions around their own role as a political monk. However, despite the tradition that monk and politics in principle should be separated, Sri Lanka is the country with the longest history of political engagement among the monks. Several times Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka have arisen to 'the needs of the hour' to rescue their country and Buddhist values from danger. Rather than a constant factor in Sri Lankan politics, various groups of monks have at certain times mobilized on their demands, as a state of exception.

A possible way to understand this is through what Quentin Skinner calls 'innovating ideologists,' who attempt to legitimate a questionable course of action. While Skinner beckoned historians to uncover the 'local canons of rational acceptability,' he himself is mostly interested in a particular phenomenon of the so-called innovating ideologists. These figures are at the threshold of such norms found in the local canon of rationality and are in the need of legitimating their position. By explicating upon how such innovating ideologists are 'legitimating some form of social behaviour generally agreed to be questionable' (Skinner 2002: 148), Skinner is

able to portray the inherent dynamics in how a given value system can be adapted to changing circumstances by rhetorical efforts. However, the rhetorical options are not entirely free and open but need to take into consideration the constraints and limitations to what extent these new ‘rhetorical redescrptions’ may be legitimated within its sphere of context. Seeing the public as a constraint, it is important to identify how political monks carve themselves a stage to disseminate their political opinions. Perhaps, the non-significance of Bodu Bala Sena organizing a political meeting in Kolonnawa is an indication of political monks as an everyday phenomenon.

Buddhist monks usually mobilize through temporary political formations. The official hierarchy of the monkhood, *the sangha*, very seldom comments on political issues directly. However, monks have involved themselves in various activist and pressure groups, staged huge demonstrations and conducted political marches, yet all of these initiatives have proven to be of a temporary nature. Already in 1976 Urmila Phadnis observes that these groups often are ‘loosely structured, ad hoc in nature and highly personalized in character’ (Phadnis 1976: 273). Moreover, the political repertoires of Buddhist monks can also be seen through their unique position in the society, their social prestige, network capabilities and lack of mundane vulnerability (Hertzberg 2014; Smith 1965). In Myanmar, Michael Gravers (2012) notes how some monks have acquired a status as ‘enchanted subjects,’ which gives them a special form of spiritual and moral capital. Benedict Korf et al. (2010) argue likewise in the context of Sri Lanka, where Buddhist monks operate as influential patrons within a larger canvas of a patrimonial rationale, both on local and national terms.

The political participation of Buddhist monks in Sri Lankan politics should not be understood as a constant factor, but how it operates in rhythms. The historian Peter Schalk observes how it is easy to underestimate these groups because of their shortlivedness, but also exaggerate their importance in the moment, due to their intense mobilization around a particular issue (Schalk 1988). Their mobilization is always linked to a particular crisis, which demands political involvement from the monks. A political monk is dependent on an agenda: a given ‘enemy’ distinction that is seen as a threat. Sarath Amunugama (1991: 127) remarks that ‘[a]ny doubts concerning their proper role had to be suppressed in a time of crisis.’ Where David Morley (2006: 106) warns that ethnography is in constant danger of running into anecdotalism, we here see that historical contextualization of both Buddhist activism and of the notion of ‘crisis’

itself can supply nuances and perspectives to the intense feeling of spectacles, enmity and crisis in the moment. Reinhart Koselleck (2002) argues that the use of 'crisis' is often followed by rigid compulsory alternatives of action combined with prophetic associations, and through historical studies of Buddhist activism we can find other examples of how Buddhist monks have used a 'crisis' to legitimate an otherwise questionable form of conduct. History, in other terms, functions as an antidote to such anecdotal exceptionalism, but history can also provide the framework of norms to identify the exceptions, such as the case with Bodu Bala Sena and Kolonnawa.

The issue of political monks is better understood from an angle of societal and political contexts, and not through an idealized image of what monkhood entails. In her book *Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar* (2011), Juliane Schober takes a decisive stance against the mundane/sacred divide of understanding political monks and rather explores how 'Buddhist conceptions and practices are intimately tied to conceptions of political power in social, economic, and political realm' (Schober 2011: 11). To be able to accomplish such a task, scholars need to be working close among the (political) monks. Ethnography and participant observation are adept methods to unravel how, why and when monks interact with, and involve themselves in political issues in various ways. Can we really separate the everyday politicking of Buddhist temples from the more formal political participation in political groups? How can rhetorical perspectives contribute into methods of ethnography and participant observation by asking a new set of questions? How can we understand the relation between Buddhist activism, public spectacles and multiple audiences?

Historiography and ethnography offer a powerful mixture in the study of Buddhist activism, public spectacles and multiple audiences. Through historical studies, it is possible to unravel the rhetorical patterns of Buddhist activism and identify changes and repetitions in their rhetorical and political repertoires. Ethnography is especially useful in the unfolding events of public spectacles, where it is possible to gain a firsthand experience of the various roles played and taken within and outside a spectacle. When a Buddhist monk operates as a political figure, he can expect controversy. Whenever Buddhist monks involve themselves in politics, they stir a moral outrage among the public. This combination of moral outrage, controversy and the allusion to a given 'crisis' enhances the creation of public spectacles. Thus, combining ethnography and historiography enables us

to study rhetorical patterns both from a distance but also more closely to the events. Expectation between the various Buddhist agents and the target audience(s) can explain how Buddhist monks can create potent spectacles, not only because it is controversial for Buddhist monks to engage in political matters, but also because when they do engage politically it is seen as targeting a serious crisis. Thus, political monks instantly attract an audience and very often stir up spectacles along the way. My two first arguments were interested in unfolding the rhetorical patterns and the position on the stage available for Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka, and I will now turn my focus to how this affects their relations to different audiences. The Buddhist monks in Bodu Bala Sena have perfected many of the repertoires available for political monks in Sri Lanka, and we will now see how a coordinated effort around a Muslim shrine in Kuragala was turned into a national issue by the use of public spectacle, sacred moments and indignation among the audience subgroups.

THE SPECTACLE AT KURAGALA: THE RHETORIC OF SACRED SITES AND SACRED MOMENTS

During my stay with Bodu Bala Sena in April 2013, they were planning a campaign to remove parts of a Muslim shrine at Kuragala from its present location in Balangoda, in central Sri Lanka. Their demand for this removal is that the shrine is placed amidst ancient Buddhist archaeological findings and that several of the buildings of the shrine were illegally erected. At a public meeting on 17 March 2013 in Kandy, a symbolically important town in Sri Lanka, the Bodu Bala Sena leader Galagodatte Gnanasara Thero urged fellow Buddhist nationalists to ‘get ready to celebrate Wesak¹ at Kuragala.’ Behind his comment was an unspoken threat to unleash riots at Kuragala, and Bodu Bala Sena said that the government had a mere 2 months to solve the issue around the disputed sacred site. In many aspects the controversy over Kuragala follows the familiar dynamics of other disputed sacred sites, most famous perhaps the controversy surrounding the Babri Masjid (Mosque) in Ayodhya, which has divided India’s Hindu and Muslim population along communal lines since 1992. However, rather than looking at each side’s various claims to the site of Kuragala, a rhetorical political analysis will identify the rhetorical context of the dispute, the rhetorical importance of the site, the particular timing of the demands and the role of the audience or, more precisely, audiences.

Before we can undertake a rhetorical analysis of the controversy around the Kuragala mosque, a background for the dispute is necessary. The Jailani shrine in Kuragala was built in 1922, but the particular place can document about 800 years of Muslim activity in the area. The shrine is built in commemoration of the Sufi saint Sheikh Muhiyadeen Abdul Qadir Jilani (d. 1166 CE, in Baghdad), as he shall have meditated for 12 years in a nearby cave. The saint founded the Qadiriya order, and now particularly Tamil Muslims visit the shrine, usually during the annual 1-month-long Kandoori festival. Located in a scarcely populated Sinhala-Buddhist area, this festival is the main activity of the shrine. In the 1970s local Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists claimed that parts of the site were built on ancient Buddhist sacred land, but through a compromise in 2001 the Jailani shrine was allowed to continue, but not to expand its activities (McGilvray 2004).

Sites of religious worship have been increasingly contested in recent years and often subjected to both political and legal disputes. Several high-profile cases in recent years are Dambulla (see Heslop 2014), Dighavapi (see Spencer et al. 2015) and Kuragala. In a recent collaborative ethnography *Checkpoint, Temple, Church and Mosque*, Jonathan Spencer et al. dedicate a chapter to ‘the making of sacred space’ and discuss in particular the case of Dighavapi in the east. This case was brought forward by Ven. Ellawala Medhananda Thera (see 2005) to preserve the heritage of ancient Buddhist sites and has become a thorny issue between Muslims and Buddhists in the eastern part of Sri Lanka. In short, the question posed was whether a Muslim house scheme, set up after the tsunami in 2004, located 13 km away from the Dighavapi site, would endanger future Buddhist expansion of the site. Working on memorial sites in Europe, Aaron Hess argues that ‘Rhetorical performances are always emplaced’ (Hess 2017, this volume), which implies both the geographical context of an utterance and also the particular significance of a given location.

Organizations such as Bodu Bala Sena and Sinhala Ravaya (another similar Buddhist activist group) are catalysts of this tendency of increased conflicts over sacred sites and religious constructions since the end of the civil war in 2009. Ven. Galagodatte Gnanasara Thero has, from his time before Bodu Bala Sena, a reputation of forcing the closure of numerous evangelical Christian house churches, through intimidation and threats. However, with the attack against a mosque in Dambulla in March 2012, attention changed towards the Muslim population of the island. While Christian groups in Sri Lanka have closely monitored any hostilities against themselves, the Dambulla attack beckoned civil society groups in Sri Lanka

to investigate into the latest attacks on places of worship. A Sri Lankan-based civil society organization Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) released a brief note in 2012, the ‘Legal Framework Governing Places of Religious Worship in Sri Lanka’ (CPA 2012), which was followed by more extensive documentation in a report launched on religio-political violence in 2013 (CPA 2012). This report documents multiple religious micro-conflicts across Sri Lanka, and notes a general trend of hate campaigns against Muslims, and even warns of the possibility for riots.

The fear of the CPA report is that amplification of local conflicts shall become issues of national significance, in the manner that has been documented by Paul Brass (2003) in India and Stanley J. Tambiah (1996) in Sri Lanka (the ethnic riots in 1983). In a recent article Ward Berenschot (2009) argues against the idea that spontaneous crowds are behind riots and unravels that riots can be seen as maintaining relations within an informal patronage network. Further, he argues how riots are more prone to erupt in some areas than others, due to the networks between inhabitants and the politicians (Berenschot 2011). But this can be seen both through place and through time: The CPA report quotes a leading Sinhala-Buddhist politician, Udaya Gammanpila, warning of riots between Buddhists and Muslims ‘As someone who has studied the Sinhala–Muslim clashes in 1915, I strongly feel a repetition of that disaster is imminent’ (CPA 2012: 30). This quote shows a direct use of historical expectation—the use of the Gampola riots in 1915 into present-day context.

With the allusion to the Gampola riots in 1915, we turn from sacred geography to sacred moments. By the same way that allusion to place can be effectively used rhetorically, and build on pre-existent meanings of a place (Endres and Senda-Cook 2011: 259), so can historical or sacred moments be evoked in a similar sense. While we see that conflict over sacred sites increases the religious tensions in Sri Lanka in the postwar period, an analysis of the relevant sacred moments in play is just as important to read the political climate in 2013. Sri Lanka has experienced many serious ethnic riots, but the Gampola riots in 1915 are known as the worst religious riots. The Gampola riots in 1915 were the first nationwide riots in Sri Lanka, initiated when a Buddhist procession at the Wesak (full moon day) celebrations turned violent after Muslim provocation in the small town of Gampola. Riots soon emerged in 116 locations in 5 of Sri Lanka’s 9 provinces. 25 Muslims were murdered and a total of 186 people were severely injured, and 412 persons (mostly Sinhalese) were arrested by the colonial authorities, and of them 34 were sentenced to death in the

aftermath. Property, especially Muslim shops and mosques, was also destroyed in a massive scale. Various causes have been attested to the outbreak of the riots: ranging from economic motives, instigation by national and local Sinhalese elites and the development of radicalized religious mobilization (see Roberts 2011; Tambiah 1996; Ali 1981).

A rhetorical political analysis of the mobilization around the Kuragala mosque in 2013 needs to acknowledge the ways the Gampola riots of 1915 play into the imagination both of the Muslim community and among the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists. Thus, when Bodu Bala Sena sets the ritual commemoration of Wesak as the critical date of decision, silently warning of a riot, this is not only a religious event but also political date of remembrance. Where the historian Reinhart Koselleck (2004) argues how chronology and lived time both coincide and diverge, we see that the temporal orientation towards dates and moments are themselves part of the temporal structure which we endow lived events, and thus the expectancy and commemoration of riots will be given a dual form and conjoined interpretation by the various communities. Commemoration of sacred moments in riot-prone contexts elucidates how different (religio-)political actors negotiate the temporal possibilities opened by sacred moments, in how they frame and narrate specific events within the political context. The date itself marks the engaged subgroup audiences, between those who see this as a legitimate policing of Muslim misconduct at sacred sites and those who read the Wesak celebration at a Muslim shrine at the 100th anniversary of a tragic riot as an overt threat. Buddhists and Muslims become characters in a dramatic setting, with pressing problems coming up.

While the dispute around the Kuragala mosque at least is more than 40 years old, Bodu Bala Sena has been able to frame the issue in such terms that the case became of utmost and urgent importance. When the issue was put in religious terms, both through the notion of sacred geography and sacred moments, Bodu Bala Sena was aiming for a confrontation. The issue around the Kuragala mosque draws upon a space of experience where both the attack against a mosque in Dambulla and, also more generally, the postwar situation ignite various responses to the escalation of another round of hostilities against minority groups. Through this framing we see that the issue of Kuragala becomes critical for several types of audiences: Buddhists, who care about ancient Buddhist heritage; the Muslim community, who feels the sharpened discourse of identity politics; and the general, and sometimes indifferent, public. In an article on the political rhetoric of religious interest groups, Elisabeth E. Knutson

defines ‘framing’ ‘the process by which a communication source constructs and defines a social or political issue for its audience’ (Knutson 2011: 314). What we see in Kuragala is the choreography of a public spectacle. My argument is twofold: The Kuragala issue defines its audience in subgroups, engaging them in support and opposition. In addition, the confrontational style of Bodu Bala Sena stirred a moral outrage in the otherwise indifferent public, beyond the normal stakeholders of Kuragala. Recall my third argument: The production of public spectacles enhances and transforms the political capital of Buddhist activist groups and creates an identity-based political momentum.

To be able to create a public spectacle, you need to know your subgroup audiences. Expectation and indignation are keywords to understand the ignition of a spectacle. In these terms, groups like Bodu Bala Sena are just as dependent on an audience in agreement with them but also on an audience in forceful disagreement with them. By tapping into the markers of identity, they are able to reach different audience subgroups at the same time. They are also able to reach the indifferent audience through attraction and repulsion, and are able to send their message through a spectrum of multiple audiences, creating dynamics of us vs. them. This us vs. them is not only between Buddhists and Muslims, but it also provokes fellow Buddhists. It is the feeling of indignation that is conducive of the engaged (supportive/opposed) audience subgroups. Identity-based public spectacles are pitting these subgroups against each other, often highlighting the issue or problem disseminated through the spectacle. Hence, even engaged opposing subgroups contribute to how these controversial actors are mediated through public screens. Bodu Bala Sena re-invents political rhetoric in how their messages simultaneously both provoke and attract different audiences, by invoking emotional issues that infers indignation among various groups and spectators. By spectacles and public screening they broadcast messages of indignation that makes it hard for the public to stay indifferent.

If we read the public meeting in Kolonnawa within a larger frame, we can start to analyse the rhetorical significance of the event. First, by looking deeper into how Bodu Bala Sena mobilized on Kuragala earlier in 2013, we see that this contestation around a Muslim/Buddhist sacred site is given national momentum through a series of public meetings at temples around Sri Lanka. While a public spectacle is defined through a high-pitched event, a huge crowd and massive media interest, ethnographic

methods can provide insights into the build-up, and the follow-up stage, of such momentums. By travelling around the island, especially visiting local temples and staging rallies there, Bodu Bala Sena is hosting a multitude of micro-spectacles at different localities. This has the effect of public screening in itself. Their controversial messages bring both attraction and repulsion, and people come to watch these rallies out of pure interest, but are challenged by an emotive conflict between indifference and indignation. Hence, we see that the Kolonnawa meeting indeed has a role to play in the dramatic setting of the Kuragala dispute and that these public meetings around Sri Lanka accentuate a leader/enemy distinction and the identification of pressing problems with alleged Muslim misconduct at sacred sites.

Public meetings organized by temples around Sri Lanka connect Bodu Bala Sena to their prime audience, Buddhists concerned with heritage, but it also connects those temples to the name and political capital of Bodu Bala Sena. Bodu Bala Sena's ability to generate public spectacles has become a main feature of their political leverage. Ethnographic methods help us to understand the contemporary function of these public meetings. Thus, the apparent non-significance of the public meeting in Kolonnawa has its form of significance, not as a spectacle or a momentum itself but as a method to connect the pressing problems (Kuragala) and the solution (Bodu Bala Sena) to particular localities and multiple audiences around Sri Lanka.

BUDDHIST ACTIVISM, PUBLIC SPECTACLES AND MULTIPLE AUDIENCES

What can rhetorical political analysis contribute to the study of religio-political mobilization in Sri Lanka? It will evade viewing these political monks either as religious figures or as political figures, but rather analysing the hybrid forms of authority they espouse when they claim this position. Rather than portraying this position as something tarnished, which is often the case when viewed from either the perspective of religion or politics alone, we need to delve into how these monks challenge both their religious and political authority by engaging into political issues. At one level the issue is how the agency of political monks are interventions to 'appropriate' particular situations, by negotiating structural constraints and conjunctural opportunities, but on another level the issue is how the

hybrid authority of political monks give a set of opportunities and constraints in their contact with an audience. James Martin argues:

Discourses ‘recruit’ (rather than trap) subjects, allocating them roles and shaping them in unconscious ways that often evade scrutiny. (...) If ideology gives us script to argue from, then discourses position us on the stage, making us visible (or not) and authorizing us to speak (or not). (Martin 2014: 11)

The unspoken keywords in the phrase of James Martin are that of expectation and/or anticipation. The political actors need to anticipate a given response in the audience, but conjointly, the audience need to expect a given set of behaviour from the political actors. The audience has a constraining effect (Fleming and Darley 1991: 26). This link of expectation/anticipation between the agent and the audience should not be underrated, as it is precisely in these conjunctures constraints and opportunities are negotiated. From its Latin roots *anticipare* initially meant to ‘take (care of) ahead of time,’ literally ‘taking into possession beforehand’ from *ante* ‘before’ and *capere* ‘to take’ or ‘capable.’ The concept of anticipation has many siblings: expectation, prediction, prognosis, hope, intuition, foreknowledge, foreseeing and projection.

Temporal orientation is more than cold rational analysis and involves also desires and anxieties, hopes and fears, angst and expectation. This is the basis for the historian Reinhart Koselleck’s concepts of ‘space of experience’ and ‘horizon of expectation.’ Your horizon of expectations is grounded in your space of experience, by thinking historically one envisages how the future will look. While having received much criticism, I will argue that Lloyd F. Bitzer’s notion of the rhetorical situation (1968) captures the temporality of rhetorical utterances in a good way. Bitzer argues that the rhetorical response is invited, sometimes even required, by the circumstances. The audience has a given expectation. The strength of Bitzer’s argument is that his somewhat rigid understanding of the rhetorical situation enables him to construe a set of patterns of rhetorical response. Such a pattern entails that there is a common understanding of what rhetorical response must be fitting to each situation and that there exists an expectation of a prescribed response to the situation. Again, Bitzer argues that these patterns can have different traits and discusses three types of tensions: simple vs. complex rhetorical situations, highly structured vs. loosely structured and the degree of rhetorical maturity of the situation. I believe

that identifying such patterns of rhetorical response enables us to discuss both trends and nuances in rhetorical communication, at least in my field of religion and politics, where the agents often relate to rigid ‘constraints.’ By identifying such patterns, we can also identify the exceptions.

In order to do a rhetorical political analysis of public spectacles in Sri Lanka, we need to have a clear understanding of the rhetorical context these religio-political groups, such as Bodu Bala Sena, operate within. Political monks in Sri Lanka are both ‘recruited’ and ‘trapped’ within political discourses, and it is the task of a rhetorical political analysis to reveal the roles and repertoires available to such actors. Kevin Michael DeLuca and Jennifer Peebles (2002) argue how the notion of the public screen can further inform the concept of the public sphere, in how it opens new ways to study the relation between rhetoric, politics and activism. The notion of the public screen places the focus on the various forms of screens, the television, computers, front-pages and, perhaps as an extension, public spectacles. The normative values of the public sphere (rationality, conversation, consensus and civility) are contrasted with those of the public screen (dissemination, images, hypermediacy, publicity, distraction and dissent) (DeLuca and Peebles 2002: 125). My aim is not to find a universal definition, but examine how Buddhist activists, in particular monks, are able to create and use public spectacles to generate attraction and repulsion among their audience. Hence, it is my intention to see how the public spectacle is used as a political and rhetorical repertoire among Buddhist activists to increase the reach of their audience. Gerard Hauser and his notion of ‘vernacular rhetoric’ may further elucidate the dynamics between spectacles, audiences and activism:

[Vernacular rhetoric] would accentuate the practical reasoning endemic in the use of symbols to coordinate social action, or *rhetoric*. In addition, it would abandon conceptualizing *the* public as an entity with continuous existence whose function is to legitimize all public matters. Instead, in keeping with the processual character of discursive formations, this model must shift our conceptual focus to the formation of *publics*. (Hauser 1998: 85)

Arguing for the expansion of the public sphere, to contain more than the high-levelled ‘rational’ exchange, Hauser beckons researchers to include the vernacular exchanges in the fold of inquiry. By using the cacophony experienced in a Greek election, he places emphasis to how political repertoires and political culture can take a ‘variety of forms’ in different

contexts. Thus, the challenge is to go beyond the scope of mere institutional actors and unravel ways and methods that are ‘sensitive to and informative of what publics actually think’ (Hauser 1998: 105). This is no easy task, and audience and reception studies are regarded as a ‘critical Achilles heel’ in studies of public address (Houck and Nocasian 2002: 650). When studying the public meeting in Kolonnawa, this means that the composition of the audience of the event should be given just as much interest as the speakers. While historiography can reveal the historical role and development of such events, ethnographic methods are able to shed light on the particular audience, their composition, response, behaviour, indifference and enthusiasm. What was the purpose of the audience in Kolonnawa? The counting of heads at the event bears affirmative witness of the strength of Bodu Bala Sena. When they can call upon numerous public meetings of similar kind, we see that Bodu Bala Sena uses the spectacle to attract people to their meetings with the effect of bolstering their political capital in Sri Lanka. As Hauser argues, ‘numeric count can be a method for determining public opinion’ (Hauser 1998: 103), but by the use of controversial spectacles, organizations such as Bodu Bala Sena can draw a much larger audience to their events, not necessarily out of support, but out of mixed motivations for attendance.

How do such public spectacles shape an audience? An audience is a complex structure, and simplified designation of an audience—active, resistant, disengaged, enthusiastic, ironic—should be used with care. Jens E. Kjeldsen argues that more ink should be spilled on particular audiences and that qualitative studies on audiences are rare (Kjeldsen 2016: 141). During my fieldwork in 2013, the concept of audience emerged as one of the most interesting aspects in how to understand the triadic relations between Buddhist activism, public spectacles and multiple audiences. By introducing the notion of multiple audiences, I wish to stress the fact that this should not be seen as clear-cut ontological boundaries, but simply another way of conceptualizing audience behaviour. My argument is that in contrast to conventional ‘rational’ political actors, a new form religio-political mobilization takes place through the use of spectacles as the main form of political leverage. These groups, such as Bodu Bala Sena, disseminate their message not through a universal audience but through a spectrum of multiple audiences. They are reinventing political rhetoric in how their messages both provoke and attract different audiences at the same time. The novelty is how they are pitting different audience subgroups in opposition to each other, in particular through labelling problems through

public displays of spectacle. By tapping into the markers of identity, their message carries different colouration and reaches different audiences at the same time.

Chantal Mouffe has in the recent decades been one of the main critics in how the political structures itself have opened up for an emphasis on identity politics. Rather than a vibrant clash of conflicting positions and interests, the lack of these conflictual dynamics have rather opened up a new line of political confrontation through non-negotiable moral values and essentialist formations along ethnic, religious and/or nationalist lines (Mouffe 2005: 6). She claims that the way liberalist thinkers, especially Rawls and Habermas, have promoted rational consensus as the prime objective of political pursuits has diminished the function of vibrant political opposition between the left and the right. Thus, the demise of traditional politics has been followed by a new wave of identity politics. In Sri Lanka, we can see that political parties based along ethnic and/or religious lines have increased their influence vis-à-vis the traditional parties in the last decades. From this trend, Mouffe (in a European context) argues: '[I]n these circumstances the conditions are ripe for talented demagogues to articulate popular frustration' (Mouffe 2002: 13). In the extension of this my claim is that the role of the spectacle is to incur a form of identity-based momentum, where the notions of friend-enemy (see Mouffe 1993) are broadcasted universally through particularized messages to multiple audiences.

The problem with identity politics is that the more you have of it, the more entrenched it becomes. Every articulation of these lines of identity reinforces the notion that these lines are sensible ways of ordering the world. Thus, when the spectacles trigger reactions among both the engaged supporters audience subgroup and the engaged opponents audience subgroup, the new dynamics between both of these groups accentuate the public screening of the problem—precisely an identity-based political momentum. Through the public screening, the spectacle is growing, to the effect that the indifferent audiences themselves become divided along the supporter/opponent audience cleavage. James Martin argues how rhetoric may elucidate how political actors 'appropriate' particular situations by reorienting their audiences:

It [rhetorical political analysis] involves employing rhetorical categories to explore how political actors make interventions to control or 'appropriate' particular situations. These interventions can be understood as strategic in

that they are a means to negotiate the opportunities and constraints of any circumstance so as to achieve certain ends. They do this by deploying ideas—or, better, arguments—to reorient audiences in relation to the prevailing situation. Rhetoric helps us understand how political actors try to create agency by resituating an issue in time and space so as to realize their goals. (Martin 2014: 88)

The challenge posed by James Martin looks different from an ethnographic and a historiographic point of view. The strengths of ethnographic research are the proximity to the situations and the informants, the politicking on the ground and, according to Sonia Livingstone (1998: 247), how ‘particular determinants of the complex and situated process of meaning construction cannot be predicted a priori.’ However, ethnography is in constant danger of transforming these everyday conjunctures into spectacular anecdotal significance. David Morley (2006: 106) argues that ethnographic method ‘always runs the danger of descending into anecdotalism.’ Thus, one of the strengths of ethnography, looking at situations and agents with a fresh pair of glasses, may also be one of its weaknesses: The tendency to either underemphasize or, more commonly, overemphasize certain situations. While historiography is unable to predict situations a priori, it can provide a set of rhetorical patterns, which agents have resorted to before. The public meeting in Kolonnawa is interesting because it was insignificant. The position of the Buddhist monks on the stage (and their rhetorical repertoires) was already consented by the audience, something that was unthinkable 30 years ago. In terms of Buddhist activism, we see that it is insufficient to analyse these groups and their activities independently, without placing them in their historical context. The concept of critical-rhetorical ethnography is useful here with its emphasis on place (Hess 2011), and I have myself explored how sacred moments connect to the creation of political spectacles. By analysing the time and place of public spectacles and the reaction of multiple audiences, we see that religio-political mobilization is closely connected to certain historically potent moments, but also to how ethnography offers a valuable opportunity to unravel planning, preparations and expectations among Buddhist activists. In knitting together history and ethnography, this study may provide glimpses of how rhetorical patterns among Buddhist activists both open for repetition and novelty, especially in how they are able to create public spectacles and divide the audience into multiple sub-groups along the way.

NOTES

1. Wesak is the most important full moon day in the Buddhist calendar, usually in the middle of May, celebrated by monks and laypeople alike.

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Pandemic Rhetoric and Public Memory. What People (Don't) Remember from the 2009 Swine Flu

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Pandemics are rare, but potentially very serious, events. The imperative to learn from such episodes is thus both essential and exceedingly difficult. It is essential, because getting it right in response to a pandemic is what makes the difference between a massive and a marginal loss of lives. The Spanish Flu, for instance, claimed somewhere between 20 and 40 million lives worldwide—making it an even more lethal killer than the Great War (Blakely 2015). But because pandemics are so few and far between, the base upon which we formulate “lessons learned” is very sparse, not to mention the fact that changing circumstances constantly threaten to render previous insights dated and inapplicable. These characteristics place pandemics within the sphere of rhetoric, which deals, as Aristotle stated, with “such matters as we deliberate upon without art or systems to guide us ... such as seem to present us with alternative possibilities” (Aristotle/Roberts 1929). Pandemics require deliberation and action, but we possess no blueprint for how to respond. No “art or system” can tell us how to

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react. Instead, we must use what little experience we can amass from past pandemics and on that basis nurture the pragmatic skills of *kairos* and *phronesis* (see Sipiora and Baumlin 2002).

To learn from previous pandemics, we can profitably turn to the latest one on record, the H1N1 (Swine Flu) pandemic of 2009–2010, which offers rhetorical scholars a veritable *smorgasbord* of interesting questions: How and with what rhetorical means was the pandemic defined as such (see Abeyasinghe 2015)? How did the health authorities name and frame the threat (see Vigsø 2010)? What characterized the media coverage and what were its effects (see Vasterman and Ruigrok 2013)? The most important question of all, perhaps, is how the official communication—emanating from the health authorities and disseminated via mass media—was met, interpreted, and used by members of the public. This is our main concern in this chapter. More specifically, we ask: *What memory do members of the public now have about how various actors communicated during the 2009 pandemic?* This includes exploring how they recall the pandemic, in general, how they reconstruct both the media's and the authorities' communication about the event, as well as how they recollect their own reasoning about the flu vaccine.

In short, we find that our informants *misremember* many aspects of the pandemic rhetoric and that they do so in certain patterns. Most notably, they show a clear tendency to blame the communication of the media, while they praise that of the health authorities. Further, they demonstrate a failure to register, understand, or remember certain key recommendations concerning the flu vaccine. We take these findings to suggest that responses to pandemic rhetoric, when reconstructed as memory, depend heavily on the *rhetor's* underlying, preestablished, *ethos*—on the sender's "baseline credibility," as it were. Considering that the credibility of the media is notably lower than that of the authorities, we therefore suggest that the latter have little to lose from communicating outside the media in pandemic situations.

Our research questions signal a shift of emphasis, away from *rhetors* and their creations, toward audience response. The issue of reception is particularly important in the case of pandemics, we believe, since in order for a public health response to be effective, a large part of the population needs to avoid the disease, either by hygienic measures or by a vaccine—or preferably both. In order for that to happen, the advice issued by the authorities must be understood and used in particular ways by (a sufficiently large section of) the public.

The reception of pandemic rhetoric is important not just for practical reasons, however, but also because it responds to recent calls within rhetoric to study the uptake and use of communication, that is, audience response and effects (see inter alia Kjeldsen 2016). Along with a growing number of scholars, we believe that traditional methods of rhetorical criticism—which have comprised various forms of text analysis, occasionally supplemented by an aspect of “context” (see Burghardt 2010 for a sample)—cannot yield useful answers to questions about rhetorical audiences. The problem with rhetorical criticism, as we see it, is that it assumes too willingly that the critic needs only to gauge his own response in order to stipulate that of others. This assumption is sociologically naïve, however, and has—unfortunately—convinced many rhetorical scholars that they have more to say about rhetorical effects than what is actually the case (see Kiewe and Houck 2015).

In the present chapter, we focus on the response of the public to the official rhetoric surrounding the Swine Flu,¹ but in doing so, we ask not what they thought and did at the time of the pandemic but how they reconstruct the memory of the event today, approximately 7 years after the fact. There is an important rationale behind this approach: Precisely because pandemics are so rare, it is equally—if not even more—important to know what people think about the communication after some time. A new pandemic will not strike immediately, so the resources with which the public responds to the next pandemic will presumably be based neither on the public’s *actual* response nor on their *immediate post facto* attitudes, but on their retrospective narrative, on their reconstructed memory of the event. Our starting point is thus that, for a whole host of social, political, and cultural purposes, the patterns of how we remember (and forget) events are just as important as the events themselves—in other words, that *memory* is as important as *history* (Zelizer 1995). Or, as Alan Gross has pointed out, what the official rhetoric actually says may “be the least influential factor in the formation of public opinion. What people remember, misremember, or overhear may be far more important ... [this] may be the real unit of rhetorical analysis” (Gross 1994: 275). On this view, what concerns us are the effects that a particular rhetorical act has on audiences, that is, what reactions—whether in terms of thoughts, feelings, or actions—the audiences display in response to the rhetorical act. And if those audiences’ opinions and actions are formed not by the rhetorical act “as such,” but by their own interpretations and appropriations of it, the latter is what should take center stage.

In what follows our first goal is to explain why a study of reception is crucial to the study of pandemic rhetoric, including why the question of how we remember and forget—memory—is an essential object of study. Thereafter, we sketch a design for our case study, which proceeds by way of what we call *spontaneous interviews*, a method we have adapted to the purposes of rhetorical studies from the field interviews typically done in the ethnographic tradition. We go on to present the results of this study, and end with a few reflections about what our findings mean for future pandemic rhetoric.

AN EMBARRASSING EVASION OF EFFECTS

In recent years, calls to engage new methods to study audience response, reception, and effects have grown ever more frequent within rhetorical studies, as scholars have noted that established modes of rhetorical criticism do not offer real and reliable accounts of these arguably very central phenomena. Rhetoric has of course never been entirely blind to these things, but its historical record of collecting evidence of audience response reveals what we can only think of as an embarrassing evasion of effects (see Kiewe and Houck 2015). This is not to say that “audience” has not been a preoccupation of rhetorical scholars. Indeed, over the last 30 years or so, this very term has been at the center of a great deal of scholarly attention within the discipline. Most of this research has focused on various *conceptions of audience*, however, and not on *actual audiences*. Across the landmark contributions to this area of research, like Edwin Black’s idea of the “second persona” (1970), James Boyd White’s and Maurice Charland’s studies of how communities are “constituted” by rhetoric (White 1985; Charland 1987), Lloyd Bitzer’s inclusion of audience as one of three components in “the rhetorical situation” (Bitzer 1968), as well as the debate about whether audiences are to be seen as “addressed” or “invoked,” found or made (Vatz 1973; Ong 1975; Ede and Lunsford 1984), the absence of actual audiences is indeed conspicuous.

There have of course been exceptions to this rule. A book, say, like Max Atkinson’s *Our Masters’ Voices* (1984) arguably did take the question of audience response seriously. On the whole, however, rhetoric’s resistance to audience has been puzzlingly persistent. Even in the face of a veritable wave within literary studies toward integrating historical or sociological study of readers (Darnton 1982; Machor 1993; Radway 1984), not to mention the wave of “new audience research” within media studies

(Morley 1980; Ang 1985), rhetorical critics have remained largely confined to, well, themselves. Consider, as an example, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's explication of the rhetorical critic's *modus operandi*:

Rhetorical critics attempt to function as surrogates for audiences, both of the past and of the present. Based on their general knowledge of rhetorical literature and criticism, and based on familiarity with the rhetoric of a movement and its historical milieu, critics attempt to show how a rhetorical act has the potential to teach, to delight, to move, to flatter, to alienate, or to hearten. (Campbell 1989: 2)

But as scholars in literary reception study and book history have argued, critics cannot sensibly function as “surrogates for audiences,” simply because there are too many relevant differences between the contemporary critic and the various audiences that were actually, historically, at the receiving end of any particular rhetorical act (Darnton 2007). Many of these differences are necessarily unknown to us, and that is certainly the case of critics who do not take any steps to study them (see also Machor 1993, for a criticism of these assumptions).

Recently, however, attempts to move beyond Campbell's rationale have begun to take on the characteristics of an academic wave. In 1998, Jennifer Stromer-Galley and Edward Schiappa (1998) issued a critical call for rhetorical audience research, arguing that the so-called audience conjectures often made by rhetorical critics were not methodologically justified: “[I]f rhetorical critics make claims concerning the determinate meanings of the text or the effects those texts have on audiences, then the critic should turn to the audience to support those claims” (Stromer-Galley and Schiappa 1998: 31). More recent calls that urge a similar movement toward empirical studies of audiences include Kiewe and Houck (2015), Kjeldsen (2016), as well as the contributions to a special issue of *Cultural Studies↔Critical Methodologies* on rhetorical fieldwork, a movement which is now also referred to as “the participatory turn in rhetorical criticism” (Endres et al. 2016; Dunn 2016; Light 2016; McHendry 2016; McKinnon et al. 2016; Middleton et al. 2016).

Why is this turn to audience research important? Perhaps the weightiest argument in support of studying actual audiences is that fact that audiences often react to rhetorical acts differently than what one—the rhetorical critic—would assume. As Campbell points out, the rhetorical critic can sketch the “potential” of any rhetorical act “to teach, to delight, to move,

to flatter, to alienate, or to hearten.” But we do thereby know whether any of these effects actually materialized. Audiences, as Richard Rorty was fond of saying, tend to “beat the text into a shape” that suits their purposes (Rorty 1982). According to this view, audiences respond neither to the author’s intention, nor to the text as such, nor to the rhetorical critic’s explication of the text, but to far messier constellations—which are made up of memories and reconstructions, selections and forgettings, misunderstandings and “misreadings” (Rorty 1982). If this is so, rhetorical scholars arguably need to devote more of their time to understanding how audiences, as Michel de Certeau said, “poach”—that is, how they take from a rhetorical act what they can use, however they can use it. We need, as book historian Roger Chartier writes, to acknowledge that reception “without fail ... invents, shifts about, distorts” (1994: x), and more importantly, we need to understand *how* that happens.

If we follow through on this—admittedly radical—turn to audience response, the study of *memory* is one particularly useful place to go, since this is precisely where the audience’s appropriation of a rhetorical act or text takes place. As Barbie Zelizer (1995) notes, in her review of memory studies, memory highlights precisely those aspects that Gross points to with his definition of the unit of rhetorical analysis. “[C]ollective memories help us fabricate, rearrange, or omit details from the past as we thought we knew it,” Zelizer writes, which means that, “Issues of historical accuracy and authenticity are pushed aside to accommodate other issues, such as those surrounding the establishment of social identity, authority, solidarity, political affiliation” (1995: 217). Consequently, processes of forgetting—“How memories are erased, forgotten, or willed absent” (1995: 220)—become a central object of study. Zelizer’s understanding of memory harmonizes well with the point we made above, that we cannot know in advance how a particular audience will respond to a rhetorical act. Just as audience response cannot be stipulated by sketching the rhetorical moves made in a text, memory cannot be identified by pointing to criteria of historical reconstruction. As Zelizer points out, memory does not conform to such criteria but is rather “processual,” “unpredictable,” “partial,” and “usable.” Understood in this way, *memory* is a concept that is not only compatible with studies of rhetorical reception but that might even add to it. Seen through the lens of memory, rhetorical effects appear as neither immediate nor stable, but rather as emerging phenomena, which are constantly in the process of being rewritten by audiences.

SPONTANEOUS INTERVIEWS IN RHETORICAL RECEPTION STUDIES

In what follows we have adapted to the purpose of rhetorical reception studies the general outlook on interviewing found in anthropological ethnography, in order to make a new version of the short interview. We have dubbed our approach “spontaneous interviews.” In short, the main characteristics of this method are thus: To interview people in one’s immediate network and/or surroundings, with a mix of convenience sampling and purposive sampling; approaching the interview as one would a normal topic of conversation (using few, and open, questions) as part of a larger, naturally occurring exchange; dividing interviewing (when appropriate) between several interviewers; and inserting transcribed interviews—with desired background data—into a matrix which forms the practical basis of analysis.

We believe this type of interview can be helpful when studying a whole range of rhetorical exchanges. Among the foremost benefits of this method is that it does not require a great deal of training, as its form strives toward that of the normal, everyday conversation. It is hence a *practical* method—one that can be applied by rhetorical scholars who are not already trained in ethnographic methods.

Unlike more formal interviews, spontaneous interviews are not “speech events” (Wolfson 1976: 195) but should rather be more like natural conversations. They typically take place between persons who already know (or are known to) each other, and are done in everyday surroundings—that is, not in a “lab” or other environment associated with research. They are kept relatively short, so as to mimic how one—in informal, everyday contexts—introduces a topic into the conversation. This approach recalls the type of ethnographic interviews done by social anthropologists or ethnomethodologists (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). Instead of isolating variables, removing bias, and standardizing the form of the inquiry, ethnography in this vein tries to take in what is already present in the cultural context, in its “natural state,” as it appears to the researcher who is immersed, for a time, in the same context. The underlying basis of ethnography is participant observation, that is, simply being present as normal life unfolds at a particular site, what anthropologist Clifford Geertz once called “deep hanging out” and also a “walkabout” (Geertz 2000). Our spontaneous interviews are, however, an adaption. They try to capture the spontaneity of the ethnographic tradition in a short, effective form, so that one with a moderate input of effort can collect a rather broad material.

Our spontaneous interviews were done with people in our immediate surroundings. No prior arrangements were made, and the informants had not been prepared in any way. Typically, the interviews took place at dinners or lunches, after meetings, at the office, or in other informal contexts. One notable advantage of such spontaneous interviews is that, since we are somehow familiar with the informants, we save not only time but also—as importantly—the introductions and softening-up questions that typically are required in more formal interview settings. This is an advantage not only in terms of efficiency but also in the way that it provides a “natural” and accommodating context for the interviews. Informants tend to be at ease and in their everyday environments, and the issue of impression management—that is, concerns about how one “comes across”—is not the great disturbance it can be in formal interviews. Of course, the Swine Flu is not a common topic of conversation nowadays, so we did occasionally have to take active steps to introduce the interview into the conversation. In most cases, however, the topic could be introduced quite smoothly as part of a conversation about one’s work.

More concretely, this basic principle of spontaneity was given a practical form by combining it with what Bieling et al. (2014) call *freelisting interviews*—in which the informants are asked, for instance, to list things they remember within a certain category. This method is typically used to gain a broad overview of how a given phenomenon is seen by a particular cultural group. In our case, we were not looking for such a broad overview, but rather for how our informants remembered various aspects of the pandemic rhetoric. Hence, in a semi-structured format, we asked our informants to narrate how they experienced (A) the pandemic itself, (B) the authorities’ communication, (C) the media’s coverage. We also prompted them to recount their own reasoning about (D) the vaccine and (E) a similar situation in the future. This semi-structured scheme allowed informants to associate freely—which meant that we made a broader set of discoveries than we would have otherwise—and also gave us some grounds upon which to compare and juxtapose the interviews in our analysis. The short stories we typically got in response to the structured questions were typically elaborated somewhat, as we followed up on certain things that were said, or played back to them what actually took place, and so on.

Most of the interviews lasted from only a few minutes to a maximum of 15 minutes. We divided the interviewing between three persons, the two authors and an assistant, and did 20 interviews with informants in different cities, of different ages and genders, and with different occupational

and social backgrounds. Our only selection criterion was that we would approach people—typically colleagues, friends, and family—whom we met as part of everyday interaction. The sample that resulted from this procedure was calibrated strategically as we went, to encompass a somewhat larger variation. The convenience sample we started with was thus supplemented by an additional purposive sample, though this did not create a representative sample. In brief, the sample contained 20 people, of which 18 were women and 2 men. The informants were from six different cities/towns and worked in various occupations at various levels—though most were employed in “knowledge work.” The sample has a balanced distribution of age, from 20s to 70s. Some of the interviews were recorded, while in other cases, we took notes, which we typically wrote out immediately after the interview. Transcriptions of the interviews were then entered, along with background data (age, gender, geographical location, level of education) into a matrix of informants’ responses. This matrix formed the basis for our analysis, which tried to identify patterns across responses as well as to get a sense of the range of responses.

There are of course limitations to this approach. For one, we have no numerical—statistical—oversight of how the various reconstructions of the pandemic are distributed in the population as a whole, or how they sort accordingly various social (or other) factors. For that, the number of interviews is simply too small. The purpose of the interviews is, however, qualitative; we want to see how people remember and misremember and begin to understand why that is so. This is interesting in itself, because it can tell us something qualitatively interesting about audience response. At the same time, it is useful also in the way that it begins to map a landscape that in turn can be investigated with quantitative methods. Another limitation is that our method does not allow us to make any firm claims about how the snapshot of memory that we present relates to people’s conception of the pandemic rhetoric at other points in time. Given ideal timing and unlimited resources, a more comprehensive study of the reception of pandemic rhetoric could study the audience response both *during* and at selected intervals *after* the event.

GLIMPSES OF THE OFFICIAL PANDEMIC RHETORIC

The first news about a new flu in Mexico broke on April 25, 2009. Only a few days later, on Monday, April 27, the Norwegian health authorities entered the scene, with a big press conference featuring the Minister of

Health, the Health Director, as well as a senior spokesperson for the Institute of Public Health. According to editors and journalists in the media, this press conference was one important reason why the Swine Flu became such a big news story in Norway (see Bjørkdahl 2015). The authorities' rhetoric was in many ways peculiar; while the representative of the Institute emphasized the uncertain state of the knowledge about the disease, the Health Director launched a dramatic "worst case" scenario where he warned that 1.2 million Norwegians could be contaminated by the disease and that as many as 13,000 Norwegians could die. Accompanying this message were images on a big screen of health workers in protective gear, placing—it seemed—a corps in a coffin. The Minister arguably tried to balance these opposed perspectives, by stating that this was a "very serious situation," but *also* that "we are as well prepared as we can be."

This first press conference illustrates what we have argued elsewhere was a troubling feature of the authorities' communication, namely, that it was characterized by a confusing fluctuation between a rhetoric of *risk* and a rhetoric of *crisis* (see Brekke et al. 2017). The objectives of these two modes were in many ways different; the first was a science-based discourse concerned to monitor and assess the risk associated with the disease, based on what one, at any point, regarded as solid information; the second was a political-organizational discourse oriented toward mobilization, action, and enacting practical measures. While the first constructed the disease as a future event, which was still to happen, the second constructed it as a past event, to which we had now to react. This discrepancy was admittedly far from total, but it was in many ways still endemic. Similar communicative inconsistencies surfaced at various points during the pandemic—not least when it came to launching the official vaccination recommendation, where representatives of the Institute had said there would probably *not* be a mass vaccination scheme, whereupon the Health Directorate later said there *would* be precisely that. Other factors contributed to a similar impression, notably the fact that the authorities invited the media to routine press briefs, even in periods where there were no significant news to report (see Brekke et al. 2017). Much more can obviously be said about how the authorities communicated during this episode, but for what follows, the most important point is that the official rhetoric was at times dramatic and at other times inconstant, if not even confusing.

Case Study: Misremembering the Flu

- I have to try to remember whether the Swine Flu came before or after the Feather Flu...
- The “Feather Flu”?
- Yes....? The Feather Flu.
- You mean the Bird Flu?
- Oh yes, of course, the Bird Flu.
- All right, the Swine Flu was later.
- Oh, OK. Well, I don’t remember much, except they had to emergency slaughter some animals. The issue was whether the flu would transmit to humans, because at that point it would become dangerous. I think, though, that it was not as dangerous as the Bird Flu, which you would get only from having a bird fly over you. So with the Swine Flu, you had to be a farmer to be exposed, to be at risk.

Informant (woman, 49)

The excerpt above is from one of our interviews, and it illustrates the basic point we want to make about our material, namely, that it contains hardly a single piece of memory that matches what actually took place during the 2009 pandemic. Not only does our informant need help in reconstructing the chronology, placing the different flus in proper order, she also misremembers the name of the Bird Flu. Her impression that these two flus were of the same order is also inaccurate, since only the Swine Flu reached a pandemic scale. Furthermore, the Swine Flu did not—at least not in our part of the world—cause emergency slaughter of animals.² In fact, this would have been meaningless, since pigs, like other animals (including humans), get the flu regularly, and since the flu in this case was proven to transmit between humans before one had discovered the source of the disease. This means our informant was wrong about what was really the issue; it was not whether the flu could transmit to humans—that was already the case—but how widely the flu would disperse across the globe and how lethal that spread of disease would turn out to be. In addition, she dramatically overestimates the ease with which one can catch the Bird Flu; given that the Swine Flu became a pandemic while the Bird Flu did not, the former is clearly the more virulent of the two. Finally, she is also wrong with her statement about having to be a farmer to be exposed to

the Swine Flu. In actual fact, during the course of the pandemic, several hundred thousand Norwegians (of a population of 5 million) caught the flu (DSB 2010). Meanwhile, the Bird Flu has yet to be registered in a single Norwegian, whether human or avian.

The basic finding from our interviews is that the response to the 2009 pandemic rhetoric is a prime example of our tendency to *forget*—and in creative ways. This might not seem a particularly weighty point—we are all familiar with forgetfulness as a human capacity—but actually, this fact is acknowledged neither in evaluations of this particular event nor, more generally, in pandemic preparedness work (see DSB 2010). We will get back to the implications of forgetfulness for pandemic preparedness, but in what follows, we will get more specific about what and how our informants forget.

Firstly, many of our respondents explicitly state that they don't remember the episode very well, and they also reveal with their responses the extent of *misremembering*. Despite the seemingly unique character of the event, people have forgotten most of what happened, the specifics of who said and did what, not to mention the chronology of the episode. They have hence forgotten the motivational structure of what happened, that is, why the different actors did what they did, how and when they did it. Interestingly, like the informant above, many of our informants misremember, or are otherwise confused about, the very most basic thing about the Swine Flu, namely, *which flu* we are talking about. Several of our informants explicitly or inadvertently reveal that they are not able to sort the Swine Flu from the Bird Flu and Ebola and SARS, or even the seasonal flu. This is in itself interesting, since we are talking about the only flu to reach pandemic scales in over 40 years.

The role of the media is an issue where our informants display particularly notable instances of misremembering. They take, in general, a rather grim view of the media's contribution to the communication of the Swine Flu. To cite just a few cases, one said that the media "made much ado about nothing, or at any rate about something very small," another that there was a lot of "fuss" in the media. One said that the media was "hysterical" and that this "plays into the impression that they are not on our side when it comes to ensuring a nation's safety. They just want to sell newspapers." Another stated that, "I felt that the swine flu was one big hysteria," and added: "They were saying it was going to be the new Spanish Flu, and so on. And I think the media exaggerated, they created hysteria without having anything tangible. So the media was hysteric, but that is typical, I guess,

and nothing special for this case.” *Hysterical* was a recurring characteristic of the media’s effort during the pandemic. For instance, one informant admitted that she did not really remember the media coverage very well but added that, “as far as I recall, it was somewhat hysterical.” The structure of this response was quite a common feature of our material; several of our informants underlined that they did not remember the episode very well, but still insisted that the media had been hyperbolic and hysterical. Our informants’ reconstructions of the pandemic rhetoric appear to be formed not just by actual, concrete, recollections, but as much by their general views, their preconceptions, about the media. As the informant above said, “that is typical, I guess, and nothing special for this case.” And we do know from other research that people’s perceptions of the media, including their views of the trustworthiness of journalists, are not very generous (Kiouisi 2001; Kohring and Matthes 2007; Newman et al. 2016).

As understood by Zelizer, these responses display memory at play. They are, we could say, not only “partial,” but also “usable,” and the particular use to which the media was put in this case was as a scapegoat. Over time, and particularly after the event, the communication of the Swine Flu gained a reputation for having been overblown, and although the various levels of the health authorities (from WHO to national to local health providers) arguably did contribute to the drama—and were indeed also widely criticized during the event for doing so—our informants, in their reconstructions, place the blame on the media. The informant who blamed the Spanish Flu comparison on the media provides a telling illustration, since this scenario was, as mentioned, launched—and in dramatic fashion—by the health authorities.

A typical response along the same lines was that the media was sensationalist; they “maximized the crisis,” as several of our informants stated. Another informant said: “The way I experienced it, one could not trust the media to provide a good guide to whether one should ... well, to whether there was a crisis or not. The coverage was so sensationalist that it almost made me somewhat apathetic.” Another emphasized a similar point, saying that:

What I do remember, is that the media created an atmosphere of crisis. “Everyone is going to die!” seemed to be what they were saying. “There aren’t enough vaccines!” And then, after a few months, everyone discovered it wasn’t the end of the world after all. And the media did contribute to stir things up. They were probably trying to make it exciting or something like that. I guess it’s just what we can expect from them.

Another topic that came up in many of our interviews was the assumed link between the media coverage and a sensation of fear in the public. This link is not peculiar to our interviews—it is well documented by other research, and was in fact a significant part of the coverage itself (see Bjørkdahl 2015). One said that “the media made it into something extraordinary, and it was quite hysterical—we thought the whole world was about to collapse,” another that “the media made a big deal of it, and scared people.” A third said that “the media blew everything out of proportion, so that it felt scary and dangerous.” Finally, one informant remembers “a lot of media attention around the swine flu” and adds that there were “a lot of threats, or what you would call it. Sort of ‘The End Is Near!’-type messages. It was very intense.”

On the one hand, we can note that this overwhelmingly negative depiction of the media’s communication during the pandemic is strongly at odds with the view among editors and others in the media, and also—in fact—with that of top health officials. In interviews we have done for other publications (Bjørkdahl 2015; Brekke et al. 2017), media representatives generally justified their use of dramatic rhetoric with references either to the authorities’ information or with a need to “mirror” concerns in the public. They pointed out that if they did on occasion use a dramatic form, that was in no way the only thing they did—which we have also found, in our own reading of the material, to be the case. Health officials are also generally pleased with the media’s communication during the pandemic. In a few instances, the health authorities expressed minor irritations with what they felt was the media’s tendency to dramatize, but in response to the question, “Should the media have done anything otherwise?” none of them came up with substantial suggestions.

On the other hand, our informants’ very harsh view of the media can be contrasted to their own views of the health authorities’ communication during the pandemic, which were either neutral or positive. First, the tendency we saw in the case of the media, to land on a negative evaluation in cases where one does not remember, is *not* present in people’s evaluation of the authorities. Rather, when we talked about how the health authorities had tackled the pandemic, our informants were more willing to state simply that they did not remember. In fact, people seem not to have registered very carefully what precisely the authorities did, what their contribution to the communication was. “I don’t remember that much from the authorities’ efforts. I think they started a vaccination program, and that this is now what elderly people get in the seasonal flu shot,” said one. And

another stated: "I don't know how the health authorities handled it; I can't remember." Some of our informants said that they remember the authorities' recommendation to get the flu shot, but not much more: "I remember that they recommended the vaccine, but that's about it," and "I don't remember that much, but I do remember that they health authorities laid down considerable effort to get people vaccinated."

In some cases, our informants land on not just a *neutral*, but even a *positive*, assessment of the authorities when they don't really remember. One informant stated, for instance, that, "I have no idea how the health authorities handled it, but I guess they must have done what they could to inform the public. I am sure the public was sufficiently informed." Another informant said that, "I can't really remember, but my impression is that they were rather more sober [than the media]." And a third said: "I didn't really look into the authorities' information, I didn't look for that, if you see what I mean, but I guess it was more grounded [than the media], and consisting of necessary information." Some of our informants stated with quite some confidence that the health authorities had acted responsibly: "The way I saw it, they had everything in order and they were transparent"; "The health authorities were very clear in their recommendations. There was no hysteria on their part, but they contributed to communicating the appropriate gravity"; "The health authorities acted as one would expect, I believe. They brought information that they wanted people to get the vaccine shot. They conveyed sober information."

Although assessments of the authorities' communicative efforts of course do vary, these responses are still worth noting, given that the authorities arguably did make several peculiar rhetorical choices during the pandemic—not least the "worst case scenario" and the shifting between risk and crisis modes, as mentioned above. But our informants' reconstructions are also interesting considering the fact that the authorities were criticized throughout the entire course of the pandemic by a wide range of different actors, from members of the public, to commentators and others in the media, to a campaign which presented the official health authorities as involved in conspiracy-like plot, to independent-minded (medical) experts. Notably, the independent critiques launched and sustained over some time, by professor of social medicine, Per Fugelli, and professor of bioethics, Jan Helge Solbakk, were quite damning. In several news stories and op-eds, the former stated that the health authorities had "used worst case scenarios instead of communicating sobriety, honest insecurity and calm" and speculated whether this tendency to "cry wolf"

was why many Norwegians were now skeptical of getting the vaccine shot. Given what we knew, this was a mild pandemic, argued the professor in one case, and added: “If the health authorities against this background choose to launch a massive vaccination campaign, one can suspect that they are out to save not only the population, but also themselves” (Fugelli 2009: 36). The latter, meanwhile, repeatedly expressed outrage of the use of resources implied by the vaccination efforts and concluded that the authorities’ handling of the pandemic was “the biggest medical scandal in Norway in recent times” and “one of the biggest medical scandals in the history of Norwegian health authorities” (NRK 2014; Dag og Tid 2013).³

What is interesting to note, however, is that none of this criticism of the authorities, which was raised during and immediately after the main wave of the pandemic, surfaces in our interviews. The closest one gets, in fact, to any trace of the criticism is one informant who said that, “I remember there was something, but not what it was. Was it that they recommended too many to get the shot, and acknowledged later that this was a mistake? Well, no, I remember there was something, but not what.”

The findings referred to so far largely confirm already well-known phenomena—on the one hand, that people tend to be skeptical of the media, on the other, that they (at least in Norway) have quite a high level of trust of the authorities—but they also arguably contribute insight into just how far these patterns can structure people’s memory of an event like the 2009 pandemic. A more genuinely original finding to emanate from our material is that a great number of our informants cannot remember, or even *mis*remember, the recommendations given by the authorities about the vaccine. This is of course a crucial area, since vaccination is the health authorities’—not to say *society’s*—main instrument of epidemiological response. First, many of our informants said that they could not remember who was advised to get the shot, or under what circumstances. (Incidentally, quite a few also admitted that they could not remember whether they took it themselves.) “Did they recommend everyone to get the shot?” asked one informant; “I actually can’t remember.” Another suspected that the authorities had advised “too many” to get the shot, although it is not clear what that means. When asked to elaborate on the recommendation given by the authorities, the same informant said that, “I didn’t see myself as being in one of the groups at particular risk, so getting the shot was not an issue for me. If I am not mixing this up with other epidemics, I believe the recommendation was that if you were in a group at particular risk, you should get the vaccine; otherwise, you should not.” When told that the

official recommendation was in fact that everyone should get the vaccine, this informant expressed great surprise, bordering on disbelief. Another informant revealed a similar confusion. She said: "I got the shot, but only because I have asthma, and as such I was advised to get it. But if I did not have asthma, I would not have gotten it, since in that case, I would rather have saved the dose." When asked to elaborate, she said that: "Well, if I wasn't in a group at particular risk, my dose could rather have been used on elderly people, seeing as there was a lack of vaccine doses." When informed that there was no shortage of vaccine doses, and that Norway in fact had access to more than double the required amount, she expressed quite some confusion, and tried to explain her flawed memory by blaming the media, saying they had probably caused the confusion with their sensationalist coverage. Another informant similarly misremembered, admitting first that she could not really remember whether she got the shot herself but adding that her kids definitely did get it. "They had in any case limited the vaccine to small children, since there was a shortage of vaccines," she said. When informed that this was not the case, she too recontextualized her response, saying that what she remembered might be the long queues at the vaccination office and that maybe she just couldn't be bothered to get in another line, since there were—perhaps?—separate lines for children and adults. Another informant remembered that there was a general recommendation to take the vaccine but referred at the same time to a purported exception for people "in a group that could experience negative effects of the vaccine." When asked to elaborate on what groups these were, he admitted that he could not recall, and when informed that the recommendation to get the vaccine shot was issued without any exceptions, he admitted that he might have confused groups at particular risk of the *disease* with groups of particular risk of the *vaccine*. Possibly, this informant's confusion had been conditioned by events quite a while after the pandemic, when there surfaced several cases of narcolepsy, as a rare side effect of the vaccine.

This case study shows how people forget or misremember an episode like the 2009 pandemic. Our informants make a number of factual errors concerning how the pandemic was communicated, and they also assess the pandemic communication in ways that arguably overlook significant events or tendencies. The importance of this for rhetoric is, first, that we should be willing to expand the scope of rhetorical studies to include studies of reception; had we focused on the *rhetor's* communication exclusively, we would not have had any hints about the public's forgetful tendencies, and

would hence be in a rather poor position when it came to determining whether the *rhetor* was—actually—being persuasive or not. The case study suggests further that we, when studying reception, should consider using methods—like our spontaneous interviews—that try to get at how people actually reacted, over time, to a particular instance of rhetorical discourse.

What Lessons Can Be Learned from Faulty Memories?

In an article about rhetoric, memory, and misremembering, Kendall Phillips (2010) writes that “it is rhetoric that provides the mechanism for instantiating a reified and solid sense of public remembrance and for disciplining subsequent recollections,” but that “it is also rhetoric that provides the resources for challenging the established enthymemes of recollection and opening spaces for remembering differently” (2010: 219). In other words, we use rhetoric both in making and in unmaking the current state of memory, and this insight should, Phillips thinks, motivate our “‘caring for’ the object of remembrance” (2010: 218). Although the present study is probably not what Phillips had in mind, we would like to think that we in the preceding sections have cared for the object of remembrance by collecting retroactive audience responses to the official rhetoric of the 2009 pandemic. In this exercise, we have applied an expanded notion of “rhetoric” and its resources, in which studies of audience, reception, and effects are a key part. We hope in this way to have demonstrated one way of aligning—if not integrating—such studies to the concerns of rhetoric as a discipline, and in particular, we hope to have demonstrated the potential of integrating reception studies with memory studies.

As to our specific findings, the first lesson is that the public easily forgets and that this seems to be the case even for dramatic issues that dominate the media immensely and for quite some time. Among other things, this means that massive media coverage is not in itself enough to affect members of the public, in any significant way, over time. Although our inclination to forget is certainly not news, this finding is still important, because we often forget that we forget. For instance, evaluations of the communication of the 2009 pandemic were typically done either during the event, in the form of public opinion polls, or immediately after, as part of formal evaluations (DSB 2010). Consequently, such evaluations—which, we should note, are a central part of the authorities’ effort to adjust their preparedness schemes—do not factor in that, or how, the public for-

gets what actually happened. This is crucial, because it means that pandemic response plans are written and adjusted on an unrealistic basis. This implication is equally relevant for rhetorical studies: To incorporate studies of effects, it is not enough, we contend, to study how a text or other rhetorical performance impacts on an audience during or immediately after the event. Rather, we need to understand rhetorical effects as emerging phenomena that are continually being rewritten by audiences.

The next lesson is that there appears to be certain patterns of misremembering; in short, people tend to reconstruct the episode in memory according to their preconceptions. This makes sense. If one forgets a particular episode, but is somehow called on to reconstruct it in memory, one's preconceptions about the actors involved—or even about “the world at large”—are necessarily closer at hand than the episode itself. As hermeneutical theory has always emphasized, our preconceptions—prejudice—are a handy thing to have, since they allow us a sense of certainty which we strictly speaking might lack, but which is often necessary in order to act. In our study, an important aspect of this effect is that people seem to evaluate the efforts of various actors (notably, the authorities and the media) according to the level of trust they have in those actors. More concretely, this means they blame the media more and the authorities less, relatively speaking.

This in turn suggests two alternative third lessons: On the one hand, a general lesson can be that both authorities and media have first of all to build trust during a “normal” situation, so that their response when a pandemic situation emerges can appeal to the actor's preformed reputation—to their established baseline of credibility, as it were. Our study suggests that most of the rhetorical work of crisis management should consist in *preparation*—in the anterior groundwork of *ethos* building. The media, of course, have good reason to be concerned about their reputations, not just because the public's skepticism surfaces in times of emergency but because the traditional media have become, in our time, something of an endangered species in the media landscape. To prove themselves as credible sources of information is *the* challenge facing the media in our time.

In the meantime, however, a more specific lesson for the authorities is to incorporate the public's low level of trust in the media into their own communication strategy. Because people blame the media disproportionately, it is risky to communicate via this route, since the public, to put it crudely, starts out with skepticism at whatever the media disseminate. In this particular case, no great harm was done; as we have seen in our inter-

views, the public blame the media for sensationalism, while they for the most part hang onto the idea that the authorities are credible. This, however, is not necessarily more than a lucky coincidence due to the nature of this particular disease. Had the pandemic turned out to be more serious, the vaccination rate in the Norwegian population would have been far too low, and in such a case, it is not at all certain that the public would still have placed the blame on the media. So it appears to us that it would be wise of the authorities to rely more strongly on issuing information through their own channels, by making formal announcements (instead of interviews, etc.) in the media and also by using the primary health-care service—which is trusted by most people—as a communicative window to the population.

NOTES

1. We have previously studied the production of the 2009 pandemic rhetoric, see Brekke et al. (2017), as well as the mediation of the same. See Bjørkdahl (2015).
2. Admittedly, in Egypt, pigs were slaughtered in response to news of the flu. Presumably, the reason was fear of contamination, but a more likely explanation appears to be a desire to target Egypt's Coptic (Christian) population. See Seef and Jeppsson (2013).
3. Incidentally, toward the end of the pandemic, these homegrown critics were accompanied by similar accusations against the WHO (and in turn against the national health authorities) emanating from the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and its outspoken leader, Wolfgang Wodarg.

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Icons, Appropriations, and the Co-production of Meaning

Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites

Iconic photographs activate dominant myths about communication while identifying crucial problems and features of reception. Icons are thought to be singular, transparent, transcendent images communicating universal meanings and having dramatic effects. In the United States, for example, such attributions are applied to photographs of the flag raising on Iwo Jima, a naked Vietnamese girl running from a napalm attack, a man standing before a tank outside Tiananmen Square, and many more recent images that are put forward as potential additions to this pantheon.

Yet even the most widely recognized icons are not known by all and often are identified incorrectly—for example, whether that flag was being raised during WWII or during the Korean or Vietnam wars. Nor do all viewers agree on the meaning or value of the iconic image, and although some viewers are powerfully moved, claims about images “stopping the war” or otherwise changing history are easily debunked. The images do not occupy a special realm above the economies, logics, and cycles of the

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news, while some obviously benefit from corporate promotion. Nor are they even unique: in some cases, there are multiple, slightly different versions of the supposedly single image, and all icons exemplify forms and practices of communication that are distributed widely.

On reflection, one should not be surprised to learn that visual eloquence, like all eloquence, condenses more general features of communication. Iconic photographs provide a particularly apt genre for exploring the relationship between a rhetorical artifact and audience response. Because the iconic photograph depends on wide circulation and audience uptake, and because that uptake often involves reproducing or reworking the image for additional communicative action, the icon becomes a network of images that can be studied to understand the co-production of meaning. To that end, this chapter will outline a method for studying reception through analysis of how iconic photographs are recirculated, modified, quoted, sampled, or otherwise used beyond initial publication. This approach was developed through our study of iconic photographs in the US media system, but we believe it can be adapted for use in other settings (Hariman and Lucaites 2007, 2015a).

We define iconic photographs as those images that are widely recognized and remembered, are thought to represent an important historical event, evoke strong emotional identification or response, and are appropriated across a wide range of media, genres, and topics. This definition is intentionally selective: it is designed to focus on news images and public culture—that is, the culture constituted by the media and other social practices oriented toward collective association and citizenship (Hariman and Lucaites 2007, 27–38; Hariman 2017). A wider definition could include images from popular culture—that is, the media and other social practices organized around entertainment and advertising—or more as well, as with religious imagery. Selectivity depends on scholarly interest, and any definition will have to be adjusted in specific cases to deal with the relevant media environment.

A crucial feature in the study of iconic photographs is tracking how meaning and effect are produced not only by the image itself and through its circulation but also through appropriation into other artifacts (Hariman and Lucaites 2007, 2012; Case 2009; Gries 2015). These appropriations include all instances of image reproduction beyond the initial or conventional contexts of production and circulation, and particularly those that involve alteration of the image. All news images are produced somewhere and circulate more or less widely, but some of them acquire afterlives

through repeated appropriation. The Iwo Jima image, for example, can be seen on stamps, posters, sculptures, editorial cartoons, Christmas ornaments, bank checks, tattoos, beer cans, T-shirts, hats, a corn maze, and much more; it extends across generations, borders, and ideologies, and it is used to promote everything from going green to stopping male circumcision (Marling and Wetenhall 1991; Hariman and Lucaites 2007, 93–136; USNI News 2015). In each case, the image then also moves through additional circuits of spectatorship. This almost carnivalesque profusion leads to a reworking of the basic idea of the iconic image: while appearing to be a singular image, the icon is a visual form maintained through improvisation.

Stated otherwise, the many, diverse, and often astonishing appropriations are *not* examples of how the original image is misused. The value and plasticity of the image that is evident in its appropriations is a primary feature and affordance of iconic imagery. These images travel far from their original context, they are pulled into many different subcultures and into the nooks and crannies of private life, and they are being altered: sometimes scandalously, often for obvious strategic intent, typically in a manner that reproduces the same few artistic features of the image while treating other features as remarkably malleable. Because these are actual practices of engagement with the image, they provide a record of audience uptake and a basis for identifying additional or more segmented audiences.

To understand these extensions of the image, one has to consider how meaning is cocreated across networks of artists and audiences, through decontextualization and recontextualization, on behalf of many different interests. Thus, the study of image appropriations addresses what we believe is one of the fundamental challenges of rhetorical scholarship: understanding how public media, texts, images, and other related practices are used as “equipment for living,” individually and collectively (Burke 1973). Because that is so, techniques for the study of iconic appropriations can double as a method for tracking other artifacts and cultural articulation more generally.

The study of iconic appropriation has developed on behalf of three purposes: establishing iconic status, charting circulation and interpretive tendencies, and analyzing public culture. We shall discuss each of these in turn, outline some methodological protocols in respect to a representative case, and discuss several concerns about and implications of this program of inquiry.

THREE MODALITIES OF ICONIC APPROPRIATION

The first task in studying icons is to decide which images actually are iconic. Unlike religious icons, iconic photographs cannot be identified by formal or historical criteria, for example, having iconographic motifs and being produced in a specific workshop or placed in a specific church. The question then arises whether any selection of iconic images is determined by the scholar's personal preferences, or by promotional campaigns of news organizations, or by overuse of the term "icon" by the press.

For example, when the Huffington Post (2012) publishes a slide show on "The Most Iconic Photographs of Obama's First Term (So Far)," one rightly suspects that most of the 45 images (much less the other "iconic" photos that didn't make the "most iconic" list) will not in fact become iconic. What is an obvious bid for viewer clicks is a long way from scholarly research, but it also is part of the discourse shaping the public definition of "iconic." How, then, might one determine how the list actually is being sorted through collective response? One measure certainly is circulation: most of the photos haven't been seen much and are dropping rapidly into the deep trench of public amnesia. Some will circulate widely, but are they iconic or merely part of the wallpaper of contemporary public culture? That is where the appropriations become important. If, for example, the photograph of President Obama with his national security staff in the White House "situation room" becomes a template for political commentary, subcultural celebrations, and visual playfulness across a range of media, genres, and topics, then a case can be made that this image is working in more registers than the others and therefore achieving iconic status (Kennedy 2015).

Circulation is evidence of circulation, which then can be a precondition for other effects, but appropriation is evidence of uptake that involves artistic engagement with the image on behalf of new communication action. Circulation creates the opportunity for spectatorship, but appropriation is an active form of spectatorship, one that exemplifies how meaning is relayed and reworked, augmented, and thus cocreated through reception. Through the appropriations, one can discern how features of the original image have been selected, ignored, rejected, amplified, inflected, and otherwise loaded with intentions, ideas, emotions, aspirations, strategies, and other elements of public discourse. And how these in turn are addressed and circulated to additional audiences.

As the archive accumulates, one can track not only the level and range of iconicity but also more specific features of iconic circulation and interpretative uptake. Some of these features may apply to all iconic photographs, but that can come only from comparison with other icons. Our inquiry has been directed first toward identifying what seems to be distinctive about the particular icon. By tracking the range of appropriations, one will discover the obvious—that the Iwo Jima photograph is a favorite of US Marine veterans—and also the surprising—that the same image is used to promote wind farms. By identifying a range of appropriations, one begins to sense both the familiarity and the plasticity of the icon: the extent to which it is assumed to be recognized somewhat independent of its original setting (say, as a WWII photo) and the extent to which it can be adapted to other issues and audiences.

More important for rhetorical analysis, it becomes clear what are the most distinctive design features of the image: the race, gender, age, and much more can change in the appropriations of Alfred Eisenstaedt's photograph of a sailor kissing a nurse in Times Square on V-J day, but the unusual positioning of one of the sailor's hands is often reproduced. The same is true of the Migrant Mother photograph taken by Dorothea Lange at a California pea-pickers' camp in 1936: taken through a long run of transformations, the gesture of one hand recurs again and again. The reasons given may vary, but it seems fair to conclude that the compositional element is important: at least for image recognition and perhaps for more complex patterns of interpretation. And the range of interpretations begins to acquire its own topography as well. If the photograph of the man standing before the tank near Tiananmen Square in 1989 appears on posters in both English and Chinese about digital technologies, one can ask why that particular inflection is occurring, and perhaps how it (now) captures the tension between democratic and authoritarian affordances of the Internet. If the fiery image of the *Hindenburg* dirigible exploding in 1937 continually reappears in respect to both technological disasters and bad decision-making, then one can ask whether it may be channeling concerns about the role of prudential judgment in a technologically intensive society. These suppositions do not rule out the circumstantial and contingent nature of circulation, as when viral success may depend on a series of happy accidents. They do provide a basis for considering what else is happening to shape response, and particularly as images recur across multiple media contexts.

So it is that study of image appropriation can serve what we believe is its most important function: providing a basis for the analysis of public culture. The icon is a recurrent visual artifact within a dynamic media system having incredible volume and forward impetus. Amid continual variability in news, fashion, and every other area of modern media experience, and while much of that media content is consumed via individualized devices or in private settings, icons become a means for hailing a self-consciously public audience. Iconic photographs are explicitly denominated as public images—that is, as images about public events that are seen and shared by a wide range of spectators. By tracking how collective interpretation develops from the single image through proliferating paths and appropriations over time, one is pulled into the practices of “repurposing” that are a constitutive feature of the public sphere. Even in the Habermasian model, it was not the news itself but how it was processed in public conversation that provided the public with its constitutive identity and influence (Habermas 1989). By tracking appropriations, one sees how image consumers become producers of additional extensions of the image. As they do so, one then can track patterns of collective memory, controversy, and critique: for example, when the icon from one war is used to promote or criticize a later war. A public culture should not be identified solely by its iconic images, but they do provide some measure of its recurrent tensions and its persuasive norms and techniques. They also can be used to chart changes at a relatively deep level of social organization: for example, as a liberal-democratic polity has shifted from being predominately democratic to predominately liberal (Hariman and Lucaites 2007).

Collecting and analyzing iconic appropriations also contributes to comparative and transnational studies of media circulation and public culture. Nations vary in the extent to which they have iconic photographs (some do without), how they use what they do have, and what they mean. Comparative analysis that focuses only on the original images can identify key features of iconicity and salient differences between the respective cultures, but the full value of the icon for cultural study comes through studying the appropriations. In the study of transnational media cultures, the appropriations probably should move to the forefront. Here the focus is on seeing how a relatively global media system is being adapted locally: the raw circulation of the icons identifies the scope of the media system, while the process of reworking icons for local audiences can reveal how it actually functions through continual adaptation of common signs and conventions.

PROTOCOLS

What should be the metric for assessing reception of a photograph: Identification of the literal circumstances of the photographed event? Empathetic response to the social relationships within the photo and its viewing? Imaginative extension of the scene into tableaux of moral danger or duty? Creative alteration or placement of the image to communicate with others? The answer, we believe, is any or all of the above—depending on the investigative task. The primacy given to specific criteria needs to vary accordingly. In some cases, the producers' intentions should matter most, in other cases, the audience's sense of context; in some cases, one might feature the formal designs of the artifact as they mediate between intention and reception, in other cases, the affordances and constraints of the medium where an appropriation is being created and shared.

The same holds for the choice of method. If assessing the scope of circulation or cultural literacy—whether an image is recognized or remembered, and whether the audience can identify the event correctly—then surveys and focus groups should fit the bill. Focus groups or interviews could help dig into image uptake and understanding if they worked with those who created the appropriations. Interpretive image analysis—more accurately, image text analysis—works well for identifying formal and semiotic codes likely to structure response. What must be recognized, however, is that these and other methods each have trade-offs of empirical reliability and interpretive or theoretical power. Our approach features interpretive analysis of the original image, as those claims can be tested, qualified, and extended through extension across a range of appropriations. In any case, any method should be buttressed by other evidence of audience response from the archive or data set: letters to the editor, time looking at the image, and so on.

The study of appropriations will not work well for determining cultural literacy or other epistemological questions. Indeed, icons are likely to demonstrate that to the extent that spectators are relatively passive, they can be astonishingly ignorant. What our research has taught us, however, is that literal reference to the specific circumstances of the photographed event is the most minimal and dispensable feature of iconic meaning and use. In fact, persistent misrecognition is evidence not of a failed icon, but that an image is an icon. By contrast, if spectators are found where they are being relatively active, becoming secondary media producers by repositioning, altering, and sharing images, it becomes possible to discern how images operate as a means for the co-production of meaning.

A focus on appropriation need not displace attention to the original image and context. One should still begin by focusing on the production and design features of the image and their relationship to a relatively homogenous audience: that is, to look for image-specific form-function relationships that were legible within the public media featuring those images. As is typically the case, viewer responses would then be inferred from the conventions and historical experience that made up that media system: technological affordances and constraints; media markets and institutional agendas; artistic genres and techniques; the settings and customs of spectatorship; public rituals and controversies; audience metrics; vernacular and critical commentary; and, as pertinent, one's own reactions as a member of that culture or outside observer.

Our analysis of appropriations follows the basic protocols that we established for analyzing the original image: We attend to *aesthetic familiarity* (i.e., the conventions of the mainstream news media), as these operate as means for *civic performance* (and not merely indexical representation), through the interplay of multiple *semiotic transcriptions* and *emotional scenarios*, to *mediate constitutive contradictions* in the public culture (Hariman and Lucaites 2007, 25–48; 2015a). The focus on conventional artistic habits and popular taste moves beyond disparagement of kitsch, sentimentalism, predictability, and the like to consider how these dispositions do the work of public culture. Portraiture, representational realism, norms of decorum, and related elements of appeal provide rhetorical resources for maintaining audiences and persuading them. These outcomes occur because public media go beyond representation to performative engagement. Performances are aesthetically marked, situated, reflexive examples of restored behavior presented to an audience (Bauman 1989; Hariman and Lucaites 2007, 30–34). Photographs frame events, reflexively display the repertoires of everyday life, provide additional iterations of those repertoires, and otherwise work performatively to articulate relationships for the co-production of meaning.

The many analytical techniques provided by the first two protocols are extended further by seeing the iconic photograph as a particularly dense or adept coordination of the semiotic codes that can be interwoven in and across the historical event. These codes include the many social ascriptions of gender, race, class, age, and the like, as well as political discourses, arts, fashion, and more, including the image being coded as a photograph. Additional complexity and engagement is provided by the emotional dimension of the photograph: the image presents a complex emotional

scenario that can include embodied experience, affective cues and relays, stock sentiments, structures of feeling, and collective resonance. By identifying how transcriptions and emotions become intertwined into iconic tableaux, one can consider how the image is contributing to public judgment. Those judgments are most consequential when the image is mediating constitutive contradictions or recurrent crises in the polity. Such structural tensions will inflect a broad field of cultural expression, but images may achieve iconic status because they offer strong enactments or provisional resolutions of deep problems.

This approach also explicates some of the adaptability of the icon: because no one of the codes is always primary in visual space, and performance requires plurality to become reflexive, and emotions are necessarily variable, and constitutive problems persist, one can discern how contradictory interpretations (progressive and conservative, imperial and anti-colonial, etc.) can be supported by the image, which then acquires the plasticity without loss of significance that is less available in many other images and texts. Stated otherwise, although public images always depend on layered actions of contextualization, decontextualization, and recontextualization to be useful over time, iconic appropriations demonstrate how important those processes are to the normal operation of the public sphere (Hariman and Lucaites 2016, 1–56).

CASE STUDY: RAISING THE FLAG ON IWO JIMA

The photograph of five Marines and a Navy corpsman raising the flag on Iwo Jima's Mt. Suribachi is more than 70 years old, and it remains one of the most reproduced and parodied images ever (USNI 2015). Upon its initial publication public reception was immediate and resounding. Newspapers were inundated with requests for reprints as families began to hang it on their living room and dining room walls. Within months it had been appropriated as the symbol of the Seventh War Loan Drive, reproduced on over 15,000 billboards, issued as a US postage stamp, and proposed as a monument. Subsequently and over the years it has adorned inspirational posters, commemorative plates, woodcuttings, key chains, cigarette lighters, condom packages, matchbook covers, beer steins, lunch boxes, calendars, puzzles, trading cards—and the list goes on. References to it have become common in public argument while it continues to be featured in popular appeals to patriotism and as a vehicle for ironic commentary in editorial cartoons (Hariman and Lucaites 2007, 93–136). The

question is, what does this history of appropriation tell us about the public culture in which the image circulates?

To address this question we begin with the formal composition of the image. The scene is altogether barren. There are no trees, only the 20-foot pole. There are no mountains, only a blank visual field of featureless lowlands and overcast sky. The foreground is a low tangle of shattered wood, rock, and debris, the underbrush of war's devastation. The blasted, empty terrain allows the figural composition to project powerfully into the mind's eye. It also presents an idealized model of the modern battlefield. The island is as featureless as the sea, while the flagraisers are the only soldiers left on the field, struggling against impersonal forces rather than against other men. The barren stage cues the photograph's conjunction of aesthetic design and political representation. The icon's transcendental aura is secured by a particular illusion of transparency because the actors are not behaving as if they are self-consciously affirming a cause. Even though they are engaged in an act of display, there is no hint that they are performing for the camera—notwithstanding false claims that are regularly repeated that the photograph was posed for the photographer.

Three characteristics anchor the image's broad appeal: the men are anonymous while working together, the flag raising symbolizes the nation's sacrifice toward victory in World War II, and the photo as a whole has the aesthetic quality of a sculpture (Hariman and Lucaites 2007, 95–104). These features identify three codes of US public culture that define a prevailing conception of civic piety and that are eloquently coordinated and performed in the photograph: egalitarianism, nationalism, and civic republicanism. Because of their joint articulation, each has a slightly different inflection than might be expected. By identifying each briefly in turn one can begin to account for the icon's compositional richness, which proves to be a creative resource for a wide range of appropriations.

As Paul Fussell (1979, 77) notes, "The photograph is not about facial expression but about body expressions, suggesting in a way bourgeois faces can never do, powerful and simple communal purpose." Indeed, they are a community of equals. They wear identical uniforms that display no indication of rank. They are ordinary men in common labor for a common goal. Their pants and field jackets cling to their bodies from long use, and the dark tones suggest the sweat of honest labor. It is in some measure a generic portrait of the working class: equal to the task because they are equal alongside one another, just as they are prepared to labor on for the military without regard for their personal safety until all are equal in death.

This egalitarian ethos receives its most vivid enactment through the Marine's physical entrainment: a performative embodiment of collective discipline, the photograph becomes a relay between the Marine's military training and a civilian population mobilized for war. Equality becomes something that one can see in action.

Equality, of course, is an ideal with radical implications. In this photograph, however, those implications are managed by locating the egalitarian norm within two larger patterns of motivation: the rhetorical appeal to nationalism and a civic republican political style. The nationalist appeal to the photograph is obvious. As was remarked much later, "You think of that pipe. If it was being put in the ground for any other reason ... Just because there was a flag on it, that made the difference" (Bradley 2000, 341). Without the flag, the Marines are merely completing another of an endless series of instrumental tasks on behalf of unstated objectives; with the flag, all of the actions of the campaign from strategic planning to the awful work of hand-to-hand combat are folded into the symbol of national unity. From the beginning, captions to the photograph placed the battle for Iwo Jima in line with other great battles beginning in the Revolutionary War and moving forward, thus framing the purpose of the war as nation building.

The nation's acceptance of private sacrifice for the public good invokes a traditional sense of civic virtue that conforms to the political style of civic republicanism, an aesthetic that "favors figural representation of the civic culture and artistic definition of its public space" (Hariman 1995, 128). This style is manifest in statuesque representations of political and military leaders, their bodies whole and clothed and encoded within standard typifications of gender. The photograph is a model of this aesthetic performance as it is evoked by uniforms, labor, and subordination to national unity. Stopped in a split second of time, they are monumentalized as if cut from stone, powerful yet immobile. It is little wonder that the photograph quickly became the model for the Iwo Jima Memorial that stands in Arlington National Cemetery.

This elegant transcription of egalitarianism, nationalism, and civic republicanism helps to account for the photograph's subsequent usage and appropriations. In some cases they align powerfully on behalf of a specific cause; in others, their internal tensions can be exploited, as when a poster condemns state action that is at the expense of the people. Following its immediate production and dissemination the photograph became the undisputed icon for victory in World War II. Thereafter it

became the leading example of the “uncommon valor” and “common virtue” that defined the “greatest generation” as it faced the Cold War (Marling and Wetenhall 1991; Bradley 2000). Those sure alignments become complicated over time, however. Examples include clear statements of dissent against the US war machine (with the Marines hoisting a flower or a peace symbol), or more oblique performances of alternative perspectives (replacing the flag and the pole with a stone monolith or advertising blue jeans in a scene in which teenagers raise a flag that now bears the product name). Note also that this variability does not dilute an original meaning; instead, it increases the value of the image, making it especially well suited for the co-production of democratic public culture.

Commercial usage of the icon has spread across a remarkable range of social settings including the Iwo Jima Motel, movies and movie posters, toys, war and science fiction comics, book covers across the political spectrum, personal checks, a Book of the Month Club ad, a virtual postcard, funk and hip-hop CD covers, and much more. An Allstate Insurance ad at the time of the 2002 Winter Olympic Games provides a highly inventive appropriation that demonstrates how iconic imagery can function as an ideological relay while also transforming the values that are being celebrated. The flagpole and flag are converted into a hockey stick painted in stars and stripes (inviting memory of the stunning US victory in ice hockey over the Soviet team during the Cold War), and the Marines have been replaced by the bare, strong arms of anonymous athletes. As allusion to past military and Olympic victories portends future success, the caption says “The Right Hands Make All the Difference.” Hands reaching upward in continued effort and aspiration was a minor yet distinctive element of the iconic photograph that is artfully replicated in the ad, while the caption extends the image into the commercial present of the insurance company’s well-known slogan, “You’re in good hands with Allstate.” As the ad traverses historical time from World War II to the Cold War to the present, the referent for the image shifts from military action to athletic prowess to financial protection. These transpositions are modeled by the image itself, which is a complete fabrication involving no part of the original image except carefully selected elements of design such as the stars and stripes, the line of the pole, the entrained bodies, and the sense of movement captured with a still medium. While the background reproduces the tonality of the iconic photograph’s horizon, equality, civic virtue, and national identity are melded with sport, masculinity is highlighted, and patriotism is condensed to the red, white, and blue motif of fashion design. The for-

mal allusions and alterations in emphasis create a seamless suturing of the discourses of war, sports, and commerce—and on behalf of commerce.

The full range of appropriations includes a great deal of vernacular usage, including reenactment photos by Boy Scouts, weekend warrior athletes, and attendees at a Star Wars convention. Indeed, terms such as “commercial,” “official,” “vernacular,” and “political” become blurred in many cases involving T-shirts, coffee mugs, and other paraphernalia that celebrate everything from patriotic sacrifice to going fishing. These examples support an argument about the nature of mass-mediated cohesion in liberal democracies: the iconic image can foster social connectedness, political identity, and cultural continuity not because it has a fixed meaning apprehended by all spectators, but because it seems to provide that meaning while allowing more situated identification across a wide range of subcultures.

Those identifications include artistic reworking to reaffirm, contest, and negotiate individual attitudes toward collective experience. In the case of the Iwo Jima appropriations, the attitudes run from civic piety to irony to nostalgia to cynicism. Examples include the various media used by the war bond drive, later editorial cartoons faulting political and military policy, commemorative reproductions, and relatively extreme comedic and commercial alterations. This attitudinal interplay via image appropriation may be one of the fundamental dimensions of US public culture.

The use of the icon to evoke civic piety has been shown above, and it continues unabated, though not uninflected by both partisan and more complicated positioning of the image. Almost as common now are ironic inflections of the icon, as in editorial cartoons (Edwards and Winkler 1997; Hariman and Lucaites 2007, 115–128). A common technique is to alter the flag, as when it is upside down or replaced by a white flag or rainbow flag. A related variant is to substitute some token of policy or social convention for the flagpole, for example, an evergreen tree, oil derrick, or gas pump.

Visual irony condemns behavior that fails to live up to the ideals embodied in the original image—virtuous public policy, selfless public figures, commitment to the public good, and so on. Even so, irony and the liberal, media-savvy society it represents don’t sit well with more conservative visions of social order. And so one result is a reworking of major symbols as objects for nostalgia. Following the 50th anniversary of World War II in particular, nostalgic reproductions of the image were rampant, especially as the generation that fought the war was passing away. It continues to be

featured in nostalgia stores where it is available as a poster, stick-on tattoo, postcard, GI Joe doll, and more. The patriotism is always there, of course, but also set in the past as an object of memory.

Just as piety creates a backlash with irony, so does nostalgia provoke a corresponding cynicism. The demarcation from irony might be hard to discern, as when an editorial cartoon features presidential candidates muscling each other aside under the caption “Ego Jima.” The shift is more obvious when Homer Simpson sees a potato chip in the shape of the icon, pauses and says “Uh-oh,” and then eats it (*The Simpsons* 1993). The sacred symbol has been profaned by consumer culture and then given the coup de grâce by its representative figure of someone unable to resist his desires even when he knows better. The symbol is still there, but only to mark a profound disconnection between intention and response.

That gap marks the complex relationship between icons and their appropriations. Note how the range of attitudes evident in the Iwo Jima appropriations is not evident in the iconic image itself. Piety would seem to be there, but there was no hint of irony at the time of its initial publication and uptake during the war. Nor was it nostalgic: the image was news about a war happening at that time, and the hilltop in the Pacific was a long way from the European trenches of World War I. And cynicism? Perhaps under the breath as part of the familiar griping among the troops, or by some who resented the damage done to their lives by the war, but it was not part of the public discourse about the image. The attitudes emerge clearly—empirically—over time as the image is reworked into other communicative artifacts. Once identified, that spectrum then provides a basis for inquiring and perhaps generalizing about other images and other settings.

CONCERNS

Any study of appropriations is likely to raise several stock questions regarding validity. The concerns apply to the selection of the appropriations, the fact that analysis remains grounded in interpretation rather than a transcription of viewer responses, and the obvious decontextualization that pervades both appropriation and our account of how the images function in public culture.

Our selection has not been rigorous in respect to protocols of social scientific sampling. Eventually image recognition algorithms may be adequate for that task, but until then one has to depend on time spent in

virtual and material archives, the flows of social media, and luck. The study of appropriations is not survey research but rather a type of archival research, and with less indexing. That said, the appropriations follow a logic similar to that of the icon itself: the amount and breadth of circulation is one indication of uptake. The same holds for the number and variety of subcultures that may be evident through a range of appropriations. The more that people have seen it and shared it, the more likely you are to find it. Wide circulation is not *prima facie* evidence of meaning or significance, but it does suggest that the investigator is not being idiosyncratic.

The reliance on interpretation is harder for some to accept (Hasian 2008, 11–15; Morris 2011). There is no doubt that our work involves analysis of the new images or placements themselves, sometimes without knowledge of those who were involved in reworking or resituating the icon, and usually without controlled study of how other spectators respond. To be fair, one should not imagine that a clearly superior alternative is available. Surveys, interviews, and focus groups each have extensive limitations. Indeed, identifying their likely or actual errors can be a good way to catalog some features of iconicity. More important, as both vernacular practices and research methods shift their center of gravity from production to reception, there may be transference of something like the analog era's reliance on captions to ascertain visual meaning. Now that the image is born digital and further alterable at every step of its circulation, and as the roles of the photographer and editor become occluded or confounded, it may be tempting to anchor meaning in the testimony of the spectator. That testimony can be a direct corrective to false claims of fact about reception, and it can supply additional evidence of specific modalities and meanings (Stromer-Galley and Schiappa 1998). It is not, however, a transparent account of how the individual viewer understood the image or of its influence. Nor is it by itself much of a basis for generalization. To test our claims here, all one has to do is reflect candidly on one's own experience as a reader or spectator; if that doesn't work, there is plenty of evidence that reading and viewing are variable experiences and that self-report data is especially susceptible to error. Like it or not, extended interpretation remains essential to image analysis (Hariman and Lucaites 2016, 29–56).

A more specific concern about the interpretation of icons and their appropriations is that valuing the genre makes one susceptible to civic piety, rather than tracking how it serves dominant interests (Hasian 2008). By featuring iconic appropriations, one is likely to reproduce the domi-

nant culture's hierarchies of class, race, and gender. Without attention to the material conditions of production and reception, and the corrective of local testimony, interpretation will be captured by forces it should expose. These charges identify real risks as they rehearse a long history of debate, and we have addressed them directly and at some length (Hariman and Lucaites 2008, 2016). What should be noted here is that the appropriations themselves often directly confront such biases. One certainly can find imitation on behalf of hegemony, but in many cases the archive runs in different and often directly oppositional directions. More to the point, careful attention to iconic appropriation unhinges critical assumptions about the supposed unidirectionality of influence through the technological reproduction of visual forms. Resistance becomes evident, as well as a wider range of deflections, redirections, and artistry. Instead of critique, a now conventional hermeneutic of suspicion is more likely to lead to misrecognition of what is distinctively public about the public image (Hariman and Lucaites 2007, 39–48, 296–298; 2016). If that is so, critical commentary is likely to fail to identify key factors regarding influence.

These several concerns about iconic appropriation converge on the concept of decontextualization. Icons acquire their status by circulating far beyond their original source. Image appropriation by definition involves a shift in context. A method of analysis that minimizes the cost of these changes might seem to be irresponsible. Thus, the critical assessment of the appropriation often will turn on one's conception of the relationship between image and context.

Some insist that the meaning of a photograph has to be tethered to the original event and context of its production; anything else is an affront to the subjects in the photograph and a license for misunderstanding. Eddie Adams strenuously objected to his iconic photograph from the Tet Offensive in Vietnam being used as an antiwar image; he did not oppose the war, and he believed the killing of the bound prisoner was justified (Hariman and Lucaites 2015b, 91–93). Susan Meiselas sued over appropriation of her photograph of a resistance fighter in Nicaragua being used in an artist's "Riot" series; despite what others saw, Meiselas insisted that she did not take a photograph of a riot (Garnett and Meiselas 2007). From this perspective, the study of iconic appropriations becomes part of the larger account of how the image world becomes a continuous distortion of reality.

That said, others point out that no media work according to such a simple logic, not even photography. The communicative capacity of the image depends instead on a plurality of meanings, while its use requires

continual decontextualization and recontextualization. Susan Buck-Morss (2011, 228–229) provides the direct statement that is needed on this point:

The complaint that images are taken out of context (cultural context, artistic intention, previous contexts of any sort) is not valid. To struggle to bind them again to their source is not only impossible (as it actually produces a new meaning); it is to miss what is powerful about them, their capacity to generate meaning, and not merely to transmit it...

Meaning will not stick to the image. It will depend on its deployment, not its source. Hermeneutics shifts its orientation away from historical or cultural or authorial/artistic intent, and toward the image event, the constantly moving perception.

One should add that often even the “original” meanings are contested: enemy assassin or prisoner of war? Freedom fighter or traitor? Awareness of such ambiguities does not license misunderstanding, but it should caution against relying on inappropriate criteria for judgment of public media. Consider how textual meaning (say, in scholarly writing) is routinely taken across languages, national cultures, institutional settings, and similar borders without constant attention to those shifts in context. Of course, for some purposes attention to these changes is required, often at great labor, but it is rightly suspended for many others. Most important, creativity and moral reflection, and even the concepts of art and the image world, all depend on being able to take images out of their original contexts (Mitchell 2006; Campbell 2013, 26–67). Thus, to the extent that communication depends on shifts in context, the study of iconic appropriations provides a useful basis for seeing how that process works. Even if the presentation and circulation of the icon is directed somewhat intentionally by media institutions, the appropriations demonstrate how the co-production, and expansion, of meaning occurs through the emergence of other standpoints and means for control, not least those by spectators who then became secondary media producers.

IMPLICATIONS

The study of image appropriations is one way to study what people *do* with images, and particularly as they use them to make a public statement. It gauges reception by observing how it is converted into production. As such it addresses one of the fundamental ambiguities in rhetorical study.

Since at least Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, it has been unclear whether the knowledge of persuasion was intended primarily to equip speakers or audiences, producers or consumers of discourse (Garver 1994). Are these techniques best employed in crafting assent or in warding off manipulation? The short answer is both, but that is unsatisfying as it leaves the basic problems hanging. An intermediate consideration is to look for those moments when consumers become producers. As discourse and images are reproduced, relayed, refashioned, and otherwise extended by additional rhetors, the most productive linkages between the various positions in the communicative process are highlighted. As an image is reused, one can track what features of the original communicative act were or were not reproduced, what intentions were or were not relayed, and what has been added. One has to account as well for lines of organizational control and professional norms and other habits, but one virtue of appropriations (and particularly in the digital media environment) is that they usually occur both within and well outside of institutional channels.

Although production and consumption are mixed together, the reworking of media forms and content brings to the fore what extends across the communicative transaction and what is emergent in any particular case. Of course, reuse was already the condition of production: as the *Rhetoric* made clear and has been reemphasized in our own time, all communicators work with and are shaped by the symbolic materials that they inherit as members of a culture. Only when the commonalities are known can differences be tracked, and so it is with image appropriations, music sampling, textual quotations, and similar compositional practices: by tracking the moments of refashioning, one can discern where differences are being articulated. When looking at publications and aggregate audience metrics, research becomes subject to assuming continuity in message understanding and then learning from more granulated study that it is in fact patchy at best. The study of appropriations, by contrast, has to contend with patchiness in its archival selection, but does collate circulatory patterns with more specific analyses of how particular features of messaging and interpretation are working. Instead of assuming, for example, that the kiss in Times Square is always romantic, and then learning that some now see it as a sexual assault, one can track where various inflections have occurred; when and why the assault interpretation emerged and how the image now is used, for example, in advocacy on behalf of women's safety; and perhaps how new appropriations are fashioned to work in spite of that recent controversy. As an important aside, the focus on appropriations also can

reshape assumptions about the supposed passivity of spectatorship. By seeing how spectators reuse images, one gets a sense not of serial processes but rather of two phases of an interpretive process that is continuously active.

The study of appropriations acquires additional value as research shifts from national to comparative and transnational contexts. There is no doubt that one can find American popular culture signage anywhere on the planet: the logos for Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Nike, et alia are ubiquitous. Although one should not conclude that they provide a universal experience, it also is difficult to track their situated meanings. The variability of meaning and significance within global circulation is more evident for more complex images such as photographs. Appropriations can support a series of claims about the relationships that develop within transnational media networks: these include the fact of local uptake; specific differences between national cultures; varied uses by government, opposition, community, and commercial organizations in different settings; advocacy and advertising campaigns across borders; patterns of identification in recurrent situations; shifts in meaning over time; and other variations in use as well (Casey 2009). Most important, such research can begin to make some headway against a basic dilemma of transnational study, which is discerning where and how media experience can converge, diverge, or shift back and forth between relatively global and relatively local meanings. Thus, appropriations of familiar images (and texts) can become part of the infrastructure of a global civic society, just as communication and transportation technologies and other features of the built environment are articulated as familiar structures having specific adaptations that can be more or less consequential depending on the situation.

This approach also helps to refine the sense of iconicity in that global environment. On the one hand, the study of appropriations can correct for the hyperinflation of the concept of iconicity. The reason for deeming virtually anything and everything iconic probably is a response to the incredible expansion, acceleration, and decontextualization endemic to contemporary media experience. When nothing is anchored, one needs anchors. When media institutions are themselves caught in the undertow of creative destruction, stability would seem to have to come from the images themselves. So it is that "iconic" suggests a stable fixture, a familiar setting, an enduring connection to something beyond endless churn and change. The problem, of course, is that the term itself is soon devalued, leaving the public more adrift than before. Iconic quickly becomes "iconic"

and then simply an occasion for parody. (The spectrum of public attitudes from piety to cynicism applies to more than one icon.) One counter to this tendency is attention to those parodic appropriations and many others as well. By focusing on how the image is adapted for additional communicative action, one can determine degrees of iconic significance. By seeing which images do become iconic in this material sense (rather than merely being labeled as such), one then can see how specific cultures are negotiating basic tensions within their media processes and others as well.

At the same time that ascriptions of iconicity could be reined in, the theoretical concept also could be expanded for other reasons. The first adjustment could be to see icons as image clusters, as Karen Becker (2017) has suggested. Such clusters could include a set of news images from an event, or a set of similar images from different events, or images plus their appropriations, or perhaps other configurations as well. With some iconic photographs, several different shots are interchangeable—as with Tiananmen Square and the Challenger explosion—and perhaps some clusters operate as icons without having a primary image, as with photographs of the civil rights movement in the United States. Tracking circulation and appropriation of any one of the photos suggests as much: for example, as all are used and any one often seems to stand in for or evoke the others.

A similar adjustment comes from considering how icons and their appropriations are strong examples of the “networked images” that Fred Ritchin (2009, 73–75), Paul Frosh (2015), and others suggest exemplify emergent new media practices. As they generate networks or serve as nodal points in networks, icons will flare and fade and flare again, channel meaning one way and then another and then another, and otherwise demonstrate how assumptions of stability and universality are misrecognitions of more dynamic processes of communicative exchange and social organization. By identifying complex and sometimes subtle patterns of rhetorical uptake, and especially as they cross distinctions such as those between producers and spectators, news and entertainment, local settings and global networks, or publics and counterpublics, the study of iconic image appropriations can become a topography of public culture.

So it is that icons once again stand in for features of communication that are more widely distributed. As the icon expands into a network of images, and as production and reception become alternating phases of an ongoing transaction, it becomes easier to reconsider audience as a theoretical concept. Certainly the “mass” audience is now an antique term from another era of media technologies and institutions, while many

attempts are being made to conceptualize the new media and social media networks that have displaced it. That shift has not displaced large-scale audience metrics, however: just the opposite, as big data analytics now have both more scale and more granularity than before. Rhetorical study has made some use of this methodology of reception study, but situated methods such as focus groups and ethnographic observation are preferred. Although balancing the abstraction endemic to data analysis, they also reinforce a concept of the audience as a situated phenomenon. The study of iconic appropriations allows for situated uptake, but it also calls that idea—and ideal—into question.

Reconsideration might begin by asking whether audiences might be somewhat hypothetical. A critic's conjecture during interpretation of a text or image mirrors what is always happening: each "audience" is but a snapshot of processes that are continually forming, dissolving, and reforming in real time due to contingent circumstances. Presence, attention, and response are distinct factors that will be modulating continuously and in respect to each other. Audiences and their responses are not fixed and reported out later, but continually changing as the reporting continues—whether within a focus group or the public media—and in part due to the reporting. One key to that process of attention formation might be those moments of transformation from reception to reproduction and commentary. One listens to a speech or looks at a photograph, but engagement becomes evident in—because it is in fact occurring through—those moments when the first communicative act is converted into another.

Questioning the idea also applies to the ideal: the situated audience does exist, but it may be overrated. It may be a relatively anomalous or incomplete form of public media reception, or the lesser practice in the ongoing constitution of public culture. Of course, we have all experienced dramatic face-to-face public debates and perhaps marveled at the rhetorical effects that can occur there, but consider the predominance of media that operate through vast and indeterminate networks of circulation and recirculation. By grounding rhetorical analysis in "the particularity of occasions; specific audiences, with specific codes or knowledges, addressed by specific programs and episodes" (Condit 2013, 654), one is committing to—and perhaps fabricating—an audience that may be but a small precipitate of more extensive, complex, and influential interactions of media production and response. The circulation and uptake of iconic photographs, and particularly as constituted through appropriations of the image, suggest that an expansive and fluid conception of audience is

needed to adequately capture rhetorical experience and effectiveness. In place of the direct encounter, such audiences can be maddeningly elusive, but that is nothing new: as Michael Warner has noted (Warner 2002, 67–74, 87–89), it is one sure characteristic of the public.

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The Rhetorical Power of News Photographs: A Triangulatory Reception Approach to the Alan Kurdi Images

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INTRODUCTION

What is the power of news photographs? How can we establish such power? Rhetorically, power is something that utterances exercise, but it is also something that audiences bestow on utterances. This chapter examines the question of the power of photographs through reception-oriented analyses of the photographs of the dead Syrian toddler Alan Kurdi, who was found drowned on a Turkish beach September 2, 2015. The images were immediately described as powerful and iconic. However, our analyses demonstrate that their visual power is more complicated and complex than often assumed. We also suggest that the power of the images can be

The images were first circulated and identified with the name Aylan. The correct Kurdish spelling of the boy's name, however, is Alan. We therefore use this spelling.

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divided into three temporal phases: (1) *Evoking*, first they exercise a power of emotional presence and immediacy that create attention and emotion; (2) *Fading*, then they are challenged, more general discussion ensues, the public moves on, and attention fades; and (3) *Iconic renaissance*, finally, because they are established and remembered as symbols for a specific event, people return to them when discussing this event.

RESEARCHING RHETORICAL POWER

The notion of rhetoric as a study of effect and power goes back to Herbert Wichelns' statement that rhetoric is not "concerned with permanence, nor yet with beauty. It is concerned with effect" (Wichelns 1925, 209). In the tradition of neo-Aristotelianism that followed, the critic would establish the quality and power of a speech by examining the situation, paying close attention to the elements of the speech, and relating to traditional rhetorical insights. The method was criticized for being anachronistic, mechanical, and overly rational, but in general *rhetorical criticism* still stayed true to the text-centred, close analysis of discourse in its historical and performative context. Assumptions about the way a discourse influenced an audience were still done by examining texts and explaining their appeals (cf. Stromer-Galley and Schiappa, Chap. 2 in this volume).

In the fields of *persuasion*, *social psychology*, and *media research* textual analysis is very rare when studying power and rhetorical effects. These traditions mostly use experiments where one factor is isolated in order to determine the power it holds (Petty and Cacioppo 1996). This may be the use of fear appeals or the organization of argumentation (Hovland et al. 1953), emotional appeals in campaign ads (Brader 2006), or the effect of the use of visual tropes and figures in advertising (McQuarrie and Mick 2003). While studies of power in social psychology and media research attempt to understand causality and effect, *postmodern* scholarship tends to challenge the traditional notions of causality and effect (e.g. Biesecker 1989), because power is everywhere, and the subject is decentred, shifting, and unstable (Foucault 1982). The rhetorical situation is not viewed as structured "by a logic of influence but by a logic of articulation" (Biesecker 1989, 126). Power is always in the making, so are identities, meanings, and positions; thus the notions of intention and effect become ambiguous and transitory. In such a view the traditional "transmission model" of rhetorical communication necessarily must be deconstructed (DeLuca 1999, 128ff.).

Between the paradigms of text-focused criticism, experimental causality, and philosophical deconstruction, *reception-oriented approaches* offer a way for rhetorical studies of power and effect that acknowledges the impact of rhetorical discourse, that addresses it with respect to situation, and that simultaneously adheres to an understanding of “meaning as a temporary fixing of the negotiations among the text, subjects and social discourses” (DeLuca 1999, 128). Rhetorical reception studies acknowledge that rhetoric has the power to do something to audiences but also that audiences have the power to do something to the rhetoric they encounter. The aim is not to establish a single source effect and connect this to the discourse or sender, or to establish strict, causal links between rhetorical utterances and changes in opinions or behaviour. The aim is to understand the complex interaction between the rhetorical situation, the characteristics of the utterances, and the audience uptake and its negotiation of the rhetoric.

THE POWER OF IMAGES

Since the ancient rhetoricians the visual and vivid have been assumed to have an extraordinary effect on the emotions and memory of humans. These assumptions have led to iconophobia, iconoclasm, and myths about the special power of images (Finnegan and Kang 2004; Hariman and Lucaites 2016). First, imagery is thought to have power over other forms of expression, in the sense that the visual in multimodal communication will dominate the other forms of expression: “In the contest between evocative pictures and spoken words, pictures usually win” (Jamieson 1992, 103). Second, imagery is thought to influence in a stronger way than other forms of expression. A picture is perceived to be more powerful than a text. In social psychology, the *ividness hypothesis* suggests that our “inferences and behaviour are so much more influenced by vivid, concrete information, than by pallid and abstract propositions of substantially greater probative and evidential value” (Nisbett and Ross 1980, 44).

This is in line with much rhetorical thinking; however, studies of vivid and pallid news segments “found no support for the vividness hypothesis” (Iyengar and Kinder 1987, 46). Actually, these studies suggest that vividly portrayed cases may even undermine agenda setting, especially if audiences do not accept the vivid case as a fitting or representative example of the discussed issue. Still, both research and public opinion are dominated by claims that pictures are extraordinarily powerful, and that rhetorical

imagery bypasses normal channels of political decision-making, is considered to document the truth, strikes emotional responses in viewers that overrides reason, and changes beliefs and drives policy (Perlmutter 1998, Iff., Domke et al. 2002, 133ff.). Television's visual and multimodal form of expression, for instance, has been said to have a visceral, enthymematic appeal with "Svengalian powers" that invites false inferences and makes analytical processing impossible (Jamieson 1992, 9f., 59, 93ff.). However, since the images examined are part of a multifaceted public debate, research are rarely able to establish any direct connection between images and action, at least not one that isolates the action to the images alone.

Recent research provides a more sceptical view of the monolithic power of images, suggesting that viewers will reject the emotions and propositions of news photographs when disagreeing with the rhetoric of an image (Kjeldsen 2015c, 2017). Instead, the power of images seems to lie especially in the "pre-existing values, cognitions and feelings" of the audience (Domke et al. 2002, 147). If this is the case, then the rhetoric of images should not primarily be connected to the ability to persuade, but to the ability to prime and trigger already existing cognitive and affective dimensions (Domke et al. 2002; Perlmutter 1998).

Acknowledging the active role of interpretative audiences should not lead to the misunderstanding that images have no power, that the form of expression is unimportant, or that communicating with images makes no rhetorical difference compared to, for instance, communicating in writing. Drawing on Kjeldsen (2012, 2015a, 2016) we suggest that the power of photographic images can be found in five rhetorical potentials residing in this form of expression, and our analyses of the Kurdi photographs are based on these.

First, *presence*: Representational pictures have the power to actually present things before the eyes of the audience. In doing so, they do not as much transmit information as they present a *visual event*, creating *sensual immediacy* (Mirzoeff 1999, 15). The persuasiveness of such presence and closeness is linked to urgency and importance, because the closer something is, the more salient, important, and urgent it seems.

Second, *realism and documentation*: The ability to create presence simultaneously supports and is supported by the second rhetorical quality of pictures—their potential for realism. Realism, of course, is a contested concept in aesthetic theory; however, here we are simply referring to the ability of photographic pictures to present something as though it is reality itself. This understanding sees photographs as a way of bearing witness to

situations. We see realism in the light of the ancient rhetorical concepts of *mimesis* and *imitatio*: that which appears real. Realism is not created by capturing reality itself but by creating an expression that influences the viewer because it offers an impression of reality.

Third, *immediacy in perception*. This trait distinguishes the reception of pictures from the reception of text and talk. While listening or reading requires a temporal reception, pictures may be perceived and understood in a brief instant.

Fourth, *visual aesthetic salience*. The visual mode of presentation allows for distinct perceptual configurations. This includes the use of colour, depth, relation between elements, balance, and other forms of visual organization that attracts attention, invites comparison and evokes an intertextual web of visual connections, and impresses itself on memory.

Fifth, *symbolic condensation*, which can be both emotional and rational (Kjeldsen 2016). Emotional condensation means that an image is capable of eliciting an extensive emotional response. A central persuasive power of a pictorial representation is its ability to recreate visual cues, which in the real world are connected to specific emotional responses (Messaris 1997; Chap. 1). When we see a small child in real life, our nurturing instincts can be evoked. A picture of the same invites a similar response. Both theoretical and empirical research document that “there is considerable continuity between picture perception and everyday, real-life vision” (Messaris 1994, 13). Rational symbolic condensation is, we suggest, the capability of pictures to cue standpoints, premises, and conclusions [for an overview of visual research in argumentation, see Kjeldsen (2015b)].

Together these five potentials form a more general rhetorical power that is specific for representational images: the ability to function both as *event and language*. We argue that power of pictorial rhetoric is precisely that it may work both as event and language systems.

In general, theories of visual communication can be divided into two main strands: a phenomenological influenced tradition regarding pictures as aesthetic event and a semiotically influenced view regarding pictures as a codified language system. As pointed out by semiotics visuals signify by conventions as symbolic systems in a way that makes pictures more than mirrors of reality (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006; Scott 1994). There are semiotic rules for both coding and decoding.

At the same time pictures offer something more and something different from a language being decoded as a message. For a viewer pictures may appear as coherent sensuous phenomena: aesthetic events that we

sense and experience (Langer 1942, 77) through their “sensual immediacy” (Mirzoeff 1999, 15). The concept expresses “the very element that makes visual imagery of all kinds distinct from texts”, and Mirzoeff used it to reject what he considers to be the structural semiotics exclusive concern with linguistic meaning. This phenomenological view of pictures as event and aesthetics helps us understand how they may evoke emotions and affect. It also helps us see that pictures can perform an aesthetically thick representation that offers a special kind of epistemology (Kjeldsen 2015a).

Viewing pictures as event, however, should not lead us to overlook their ability to function as language and being able to form both utterances and argumentation. If we only consider pictures as mirrors of reality, we will miss the fact that pictures are used rhetorically, that the style of a picture, its naturalness and appearance, is a rhetorical construction created conventionally. Because pictures function as both language and event, they have the possibility to unite the general with the specific, the rational with the sensate, *noesis* with *aestheis*. Pictures always show something concrete. However, as viewers and members of visual cultures, we know that images not only depict something concrete but are also being used to utter something more than what we see. We know that specific pictures not only show something iconically but also represent something conventionally.

The full rhetorical potential of pictures is thus exercised when their discursive ability to create utterances, propositions, and arguments is united with their aesthetic materiality and sensual immediacy. This can be said to be valid for multimodal communication in general: It is the ability to be both discursive and non-discursive (Langer 1942), to function both as language and as event and aesthetic materiality that establish rhetorical power.

CASE STUDY: THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF ALAN KURDI

During the spring of 2015, the number of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe increased dramatically. In less than a year, one million refugees and migrants crossed into Europe; 710,000 came during the first 9 months of the year (Frontex 2015). Most crossed the Mediterranean in unsafe boats. In 2015 alone, 3771 died in their attempt to reach Europe.

In the beginning of September, the images of the 3-year-old Syrian toddler, Alan Kurdi, caused international outrage. He and two family members drowned when their boat capsized outside Bodrum. The photos,

taken by the journalist Nilüfer Demir, were first published by the Turkish news agency Dogan Haber Ajansi early on September 2, 2015. Within 12 hours, the photos had been shown on 20 million screens all around the world (Vis and Goriunova 2015, 10).

The photos are often referred to as *the* photo of Alan Kurdi, but several different photos were published. One showed a Turkish police officer looking down at the toddler lying face down in the water's edge (Fig. 12.1a). Another showed the officer carrying the body away from the water (Fig. 12.1b). Two close-ups show only the boy lying on the beach. One with his face turned towards the viewer (Fig. 12.1c). Another is taken from behind the boy. Here his face is turned away from the viewer (Fig. 12.1d).

There was general agreement in the press, the public as a whole, and on social media in particular that the images were exceptionally powerful. Research findings seem to suggest the same. One quantitative study argues



Fig. 12.1 (a) A Turkish police officer looking down at the body of Alan Kurdi. All rights: Nilüfer Demir/Dogan Haber Ajansi. (b) A Turkish police officer carries the body of Alan Kurdi away. All rights: Nilüfer Demir/Dogan Haber Ajansi. (c) The body of Alan Kurdi lying on the beach seen from front. All rights: Nilüfer Demir/Dogan Haber Ajansi. (d) The body of Alan Kurdi away lying on the beach seen from the back. All rights: Nilüfer Demir/Dogan Haber Ajansi

that Western European newspapers became “significantly more sympathetic towards migrants and refugees immediately after” the publishing of the pictures (European Journalism Observatory 2015). The increase, however, was short-lived. Only a little more than 2 weeks later, the gained sympathy had disappeared. Another study claims that “an iconic photo of a single child had more impact than statistical reports of hundreds of thousands of deaths” (Slovic et al. 2017, 640). However, this study also suggested that the effect was short-lived: the victim response diminished “rapidly as the image fades from memory and the media lose interest” (641). A third study points in the same direction: the images created an instantaneous, global response with unprecedented numbers of sharing, searching and commenting in social media, and heavy coverage in the press (Vis and Goriunova 2015). However, attention and activity disappeared after a few weeks.

An interview study suggested that the photographs evoked affective resonance and created immediate public response (Prøitz 2017). A study of the comments to the photos on Reddit (Mortensen and Trenz 2016) showed that social media users were not just passive recipients but active respondents to the images, who participated in a “collective process of generating meaning, constructing causal chains and calling for action” (344). This active attitude towards the images was also found in a study of the journalistic use of and comments on the photographs in British newspapers. The study demonstrated how the images functioned as deliberation and argumentation, and showed how the argumentative potential was both perceived, celebrated, and argued against by commentators, reporters, as well as through appropriations (Kjeldsen 2017).

These studies point to a temporal differentiation of the power of the images, which our reception-oriented analyses both support and provide a more substantial understanding of. They appear to have a strong initial power, but the power seems to *fade* (phase 2) after the immediate *evoking* of emotions (phase 1) diminishes.

Triangulating Reception

We use a triangular method of reception research. The aim is to study the rhetorical power of images through an examination of media presentation, audience responses to, and appropriations of the Alan Kurdi photographs. Triangulation allows us to see which rhetorical potentials and impacts surface in different uses and situations of reception, providing more reliable answers to which kind of power the images may hold. In order to achieve this, we have carried out five forms of analyses:

1. *Analysis of newspaper presentation.* Many of the responses to the Alan Kurdi images are grounded in newspaper presentation of the images. We have therefore carried out analyses of the reporting on the images in the printed and the online version of three dominant newspapers of, respectively, Denmark (*Ekstra Bladet*, *Jyllands-Posten*, *Berlingske*), Sweden (*Aftonbladet*, *Expressen*, *Dagens Nyheter*), and Norway (*Aftenposten*, *Dagbladet*, *VG*) from September 2 to 8, 2015. This allows us to see how newspapers wrote about the images *and* invited audiences to respond.
2. *Textual reception analysis of comment sections.* We analysed commentary sections from the Facebook pages of the studied newspapers. Whereas qualitative interviews and focus group conversations are artificial and constructed research situations, the responses in the commentary sections occur in real time and without the influence of researchers. Thus, the comment sections provide us with access to the more immediate real-life reactions the photos evoked. The material includes the comments posted to the articles showing the photos of Alan Kurdi from September 2 to 8, 2015.
3. *Individual research interviews.* One year after the images were published (January and February 2017), we carried out three interviews with participants from the commentary sections. The informants are Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish, and all participated actively in comment sections on the news articles in which the photos of Alan Kurdi were shown. The informants were recruited through social media and the interviews were carried out through Skype. First, the informants were asked to talk about how they remembered the images. Then, they were shown: (1) the four different versions of the images, (2) the images in a mediatized context, and (3) appropriations of the images (Fig. 12.2 and 12.3, cf. endnote 1), and asked to talk about the content, what they felt when they saw the images, the newspapers' framing, and the appropriations.
4. *Focus group conversations.* In April 2016 we carried out seven focus group studies with the help of assistants. The assistants were master students in a course on visual rhetoric and reception at the University of Bergen, Norway. The informants were shown six different press photographs, with the photograph of Alan Kurdi facing the camera as the last. Here we only deal with the response to this image. Before the focus group conversation began, each informant was asked to write down five to ten thoughts that came to mind when seeing the photograph. This was done to secure that all informants in the discussion would be able to take their departure point for the discussion in their own initial impressions and thoughts. These notes were also kept for

support in our analyses. We sought to establish groups that secured difference in age, demographics, and national origin. The seven focus groups were as follows: *Group 1*: Five male students, ages 22–27. *Group 2*: Four Syrian male immigrants attending adult education for immigrants, ages 24–30. *Group 3*: Six foreign exchange students, from Europe, Asia, and Oceania, ages 21–23. *Group 4*: Six teenagers from different parts of Norway. *Group 5*: Five Spanish citizens, ages 20–32. *Group 6*: Seven senior citizens from a retirement home, ages 75–87. *Group 7*: Five editors of the student newspaper *Studvest*.

5. *Analysis of appropriations.* As illustrated in Chap. 11 in this volume (cf. Hariman and Lucaites 2007), appropriation is a form of reception. The appropriations of the Kurdi images we examined were a collection on the website boredpanda.com,¹ where users could score the submissions (see examples in Fig. 12.2 and 12.3). Many of these were tweeted under the hashtag #HumanityWashedAshore or its Turkish original #KiyiyaVuranInsanlik. Analysing the artistic reuse of an image or of its salient forms in other expressions points simultaneously to what a user (an audience) finds salient in the image and to the rhetorical potentials that made the user choose the form of the appropriation. To locate



Fig. 12.2 Appropriation of the photograph of Alan Kurdi, depicting the boy sleeping in a bed



Fig. 12.3 Appropriation of the photograph of Alan Kurdi, depicting the boy lying in the middle of a parliament

these potentials we first coded the appropriations in order to find dominant categories. We then carried out close readings of selected appropriations that belonged to dominant categories, especially those that received a score of 100 points or more.

After having gathered all the empirical material, we analysed it in two ways: First, we looked for any kind of response, thoughts, and emotions that could be traced back to the pictures. Second, we looked specifically for the five rhetorical potentials. We were especially interested in responses or traces of the images and their impact that could be uncovered in different types of the empirical material, since that would be a more reliable sign of an effect caused primarily by the images. Categorizing and coding was first done in longhand on the printed-out comments and the transcribed interviews. We then compared the categories in the different kinds of material, before going through it all again to locate and consolidate the most dominant and salient categories of response across all the material.

Doing triangulation is time consuming and requires much space to analyse and explain. In a chapter of this length, however, we are restricted to a concise presentation of our findings.

Below, we first explain how newspapers presented the images, and thus how readers were invited to respond. We then present the most salient rhetorical powers of the photographs. The first is the power to evoke emotional immediacy. This power, however, is circumscribed by evoking primarily private emotions. We then present the power of the images to present reality and bear witness, and to provide urgency and understanding. After this, we point to the aesthetic qualities of the images that contribute to the mentioned powers, which we primarily found through analysis of appropriations. Finally, we explain the power of the images to rhetorically fuse the general and the specific.

Newspaper Presentation

The majority of the newspapers in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark chose to publish the photos of Alan Kurdi. The images first appeared in the online version of the papers September 2nd and 3rd. In the Norwegian and Swedish print press, the images also appeared on most front pages during September 3 and 4. In the Danish press, however, the images were usually not shown on the front pages of the print edition. One of the papers, *Berlingske* (Sep. 4, 12), chose to hide the dead boy behind a black circle. In the following week, the photos were printed several times, often appearing more than once in one issue of the paper. The images appeared in articles

urging people to “wake up”, articles about Alan Kurdi’s background, the flight and the funeral, as well as articles discussing iconic images and their rhetorical power. Although the images received less attention in the Danish media, the media coverage was immense in all three countries.

The decision to publish the images was often explained in an editorial piece, arguing that it was necessary to show the photos because they could open people’s eyes and make them understand the urgency of the situation. Furthermore, the images were seen as an essential documentation of reality.

The newspapers invited audiences to respond emotionally and used headlines emphasizing the shock effect of the images such as: “The image that shocks the world” (*Jyllands-Posten.dk*, Sep. 4, 14; *Dagbladet*, Sep. 3, 1; *Aftonbladet*, Sep. 5, 20) or “Unbearable” (*Berlingske*, Sep. 4, 12). Journalists assumed that their audiences would find the images shocking and unbearable.

In general, newspapers ascribed the images with persuasive power and treated them as evidence for the urgency of the situation. Headlines framed the images as a wake-up call and suggested the images had the potential to change attitudes, policies, and history. Citizens and politicians were told to “wake up” and deal with the crisis” (*Dagens Nyheter.se*, Sep. 4; *Dagens Nyheter*, Sep. 5, 1; *Ekstra Bladet*, Sep. 5; last page). The Swedish reporting stood out with an emphasis on what “ordinary” citizens could do to help. All three examined papers provided lists of aid organizations to guide the readers on how they could help (*Expressen* Sep. 3, 8–9; *Aftonbladet*, Sep. 4, 1; *Dagens Nyheter*, Sep. 5, 8–9). Citizens who had decided to help after seeing the images were interviewed (*Expressen*, Sep. 6, 14–15; *Aftonbladet.se*, Sep. 4).

In all three countries, the images were treated as symbols of the refugee crisis and referred to as iconic. “The strong, shocking images have, for many become a symbol of the tragic refugee crisis that is taking place in Europe” (*VG*, Sep. 4, 6–7). Only a few days after the first publication news articles the Kurdi images appeared with other iconic images, most of all Nick Ut’s *Napalm girl* (*Dagbladet*, Sep. 5, 44–45; *Aftonbladet*, Sep. 4, 11; *Jyllands-Posten*, Sep. 4, 14). Here—as many times before—Ut’s famous photograph functions in a way that is disconnected to its original situation. It has acquired an *icon renaissance* as reference point to the general category of children as suffering victims of crises. The comparison of the two images is the first step towards a similar renaissance for the Kurdi images.

Our analysis of the newspapers showed that the images were framed as powerful, disturbing, and problematic to publish. Almost all the newspapers examined published an editorial piece explaining why they had chosen to publish the images. In these articles the journalist’s view on the

power of these photos was explicitly expressed. The newspaper framings, thus, emphasized the potentials of presence, realism, and symbolic condensation, and underscore the workings of the images as both language and event, urging people to take action.

The Power of Emotional Immediacy

As suggested by our analyses of newspaper presentation, the images of Alan Kurdi have *power of emotional immediacy*, which is a power characteristic of the phase of *evoking*. The images create an instantaneous impact of an involuntary kind (cf. Kock, Chap. 7 in this volume): a visceral affect. Most of our informants reacted instinctively to the images. In the focus groups, informants uttered affective sounds and interjections at the sight of the images. They sighed (FG 1, 15, 5 [denoting focus group 1, page 15, informant 5]) and said: “Ugh, what should one say about this” (FG 6, 3, C), “Uh, I get so upset, when I see this, Why??” (FG 6, 3, F), “I get a little nauseous looking at ... [followed by silence]” (FG 4, 9, C), “Poor thing” (FG 6, 4, C). The image was experienced as “a wake-up call, like a punch in the face” (FG 3, 12, Y). When asked how the image made them feel, one of the Syrian immigrants declared that he felt “angry. I cried a lot when I saw this picture for the first time” (FG 2, 10, 3).

The emotional immediacy of the photos was also evident in the comment sections. A great share of the responses in the comment sections to the Kurdi photos consisted of emotional outbursts of how the images had made the spectator feel: “I’m crying” (CS Expressen, Sep. 3; Dagbladet, Sep. 3; Jyllands-Posten, Sep. 3 [denoting comment section, forum, date]), “it hurts to see these photos” (CS Aftenposten, Sep. 3; Expressen, Sep. 3), and “heartbreaking” (CS Aftonbladet, Sep. 3; VG, Sep. 2; Dagbladet, Sep. 2). Many reported a feeling of helplessness, expressing that they did not know what to do. In the interviews the emotional immediacy of the photos were not equally prominent, since the interviews were carried out more than a year after the images were first published. Even though we showed them the images, they primarily thought back on how the images had made them feel when the first saw them. They remembered being: “sad” and “angry” (N, 3 [denoting Norwegian informant, page 3]), and one said: “To be honest I cried” (S, 1). Seemingly, the power of the emotional immediacy of the images had faded over time. The informants also explicitly formulated this: “I guess it is kind of an image shock when you see things for the first time, and the more you see them, it is less and less” (S, 2). Nevertheless, when seeing images again, one of the informants did say “I notice now, that they still do [have an emotional impact on me]” (D, 3).

The emotional and visceral affect evoked in our informants and commented on in newspapers has been pointed out by other studies (Prøitz 2017, 9f.). However, not everybody accepted the invitation to respond in an emotional manner. In the comment sections, some viewed the images as partisan visual arguments—and thus they argued back (cf. Kjeldsen 2016, 2017). “Emotional-porn” (Danish: “Følelseporno”) was a word that appeared in many of the Danish debates (CS Berlingske, Sep. 3; Jyllands-Posten, Sep. 3; Ekstra Bladet, Sep. 3). The word expressed the claim that the images were used to bring about instinctual feelings in a way that undercuts reasoning. This illustrates that the images did not have monolithic power of direct influence, because people reject and argue back, when images express something or are presented in a way with which the viewer disagrees. Furthermore, the evoked emotions may be powerless.

Thus, the analysis of the comment sections was valuable in providing insights into immediate reactions to the photos, and especially into critical audience reactions to the photographs, which were mostly absent in the other forms of material. The images evoked strong emotions the first time people encountered them, but this power was challenged already few days later. Immediately after publication the comments contained a great amount of expressions of sorrow and anger. In the days that followed, an increasing amount of comments began to question the veracity and representativeness of the photos, and others expressed feelings of fatigue (cf. Højjer 2004) from being constantly exposed to these photos. Furthermore, people responded not only to the images but also to the news framing of the images. While most accepted and adopted the newspaper’s ways of framing the images as a necessary eye-opener, many opposed the call for action. This tendency to a shift in the reception from emotional immediacy to critical opposition was supported in our interviews. The informants remembered how they had felt initially, but the images clearly did not have the same power of emotional immediacy one and a half year later. Rather than an immediate emotional reaction, the informants spoke about the images as “iconic” (D, 1, 4), “a symbol” (N, 1, 7), and as “part of history” (S, 2). In this way the different empirical material suggests that the power of the images move from an immediate emotional influence, followed by engagement that involves challenging the framing and proposed meaning, and finally functioning as general cognitive point of reference when speaking and thinking about the refugee crisis.

Evoking of Private Emotions

Both newspapers and informants referred to the images as very powerful. However, such ascribing of power does not necessarily mean that the pictures actually performed power. Still, our focus groups and interviews revealed that the images clearly had an immediate emotional impact on the audiences. At the same time, this power of evoking seems to be circumscribed in different ways. The informants were upset and distressed when seeing the images; however, they rarely expressed anything about acting upon that feeling. The emotions were more of a private character, than of a deliberative. The informants generally attended to the emotive function of language and rarely to the conative function (Jakobson 1960): They felt something but did not appear to direct that towards any specific action that would change the situation. When a wish or demand to act was actually put forward—which was rarely done by our informants—it was formulated in general terms. This was exactly what we saw in the headlines of the newspapers and in many of the appropriations. The exception was the Swedish papers, which provided specific guidelines to how readers could help by, for instance, donating to the *Red Cross*. We find additional evidence of this circumscription of power in the kind of feelings that the informants reported. A general emotional pattern was a movement from initial *distress* to a feeling of *hopelessness*, as in this example: “The photo has stirred up really strong emotions in me. I want to help but I do not know how” (CS Aftonbladet, Sep. 3). The informants reported that they felt: “Helpless” (FG 3, 13, Z), and felt a “Lack of hope” (FG 9, 4, D). One said: “You feel guilty, but you think: what can I do? You can’t do anything that’s the reality” (FG 5, 11, 5). Another: “People see it, people think it is sad, but what is one supposed to do?” (N, 4). While the Swedish informant seemed to believe that the images had produced actual change in the world (S, 3), and in the future would be referred to as “the turning point to fix the problem” (S, 2), we found no evidence in the comment section that the Swedish paper’s concrete advices on how to help made Swedes in general more hopeful with regard to the situation.

The emotional immediacy and the feelings of distress and hopelessness were generally connected to non-political, personal, and private spheres of emotions. Both the responses from our informants and the news reporting were dominated by emotions connected to innocence, childhood, and playing. The papers would use headlines such as “Imagine this was your child” (*Dagbladet*, Sep. 3, 4; *Aftonbladet.se*, Sep. 3) or pointing out “the

red shirt and the small shoes” (*Aftenposten*, Sep. 3, 3). The photos primarily evoked emotions of family, parenthood, and nurturing: “it could have been one of my nieces” (FG 4, 9, C). One informant was a father himself: “I have a little boy of the same age, so the first thing I thought of was him” (S, 1). Also, the participants in the comment sections related to their own experiences as parents. One wrote: “As a mother of two it is terribly, terribly painful to see this. I have been thinking about the little family all day, particularly about the father who is left alone after losing his entire family under the most horrible circumstances” (CS *Aftenposten*, Sep. 3).

Presenting Reality and Bearing Witness

A significant rhetorical power of the Kurdi images in our material was their ability to appear as a direct view to reality. Without any qualifications whatsoever all the newspapers we examined treated the images as documentary photographs visually putting forward a part of reality. They would often point to the documentary character when explaining their decisions to publish the photos. In spite of ethical challenges, the reasons given were mostly that the photos were documentations of reality, and it is the job of the press to present reality. The chief editor of *Jyllands-Posten* wrote that the paper had published the images to “document this humanitarian tragedy” (*Jyllands-Posten.dk*, Sep. 3). A commentator in *Aftenposten* wrote that the most important argument for publishing the photos was that they could “elucidate an important event” (Sep. 3, 3). *Berlingske* (Sep. 4, 12–13) used the headline: “An unbearable image of the consequences of war”, and supported the decision to publish the photographs because they “document reality in all its horror (Sep. 4, 15). *Aftenposten* (Sep. 3, 3) called it “An image of reality”. Our informants as well perceived the images as representing reality: “It was intense seeing a child lying there, knowing it wasn’t just a film or something, it was reality” (D, 1). The Norwegian informant said that “there is nothing fake about it. This is what it is like. A photo has been taken... A journalist has taken a photo out of the blue, or no, not out of the blue, but of something concrete that happens. And either you like it or not, this is how the world is” (N, 3). He thought of the photo as “a reflection of reality” (N, 2): “I think that when this first has happened, then it is a good thing that the image is shared, so that the world can see how things actually are” (N, 4). Even when reflecting about whether or not the photographs were staged, informants still considered it a picture of reality “anyway it doesn’t really matter whether

or not the picture is “staged” or not, because it is a dead child lying on the beach” (FG 1, 15, 5).

In the comment sections, however, This understanding sees photographs as a way of bearing witness to situations. While most viewed the photos as representations of reality, some immediately questioned if not “the photo is a carefully orchestrated propaganda stunt” (CS *Aftenposten*, Sep. 3). Quite a few reacted to the way the dead toddler was framed as a refugee. Within a few days after the images first appeared, claims that the family were not refugees but had left Turkey because the father wanted new teeth were widely circulated in the comment sections. Here, the power of the images was challenged by conflicting narratives about what really happened. First by a few people, then by an increasing number. The reception moves towards a phase of challenging and fading power.

Power to Provide Urgency and Understanding

As described in our account of the newspaper reporting, the photographs were generally seen and treated as an emotional wake-up call. This is in line with the view that visual argumentation is especially effective and suited to arguing for the urgency of a critical situation (Kjeldsen 2015a).

In the comment sections we find the same understanding of the images as an abrupt realization: “We have to wake up!” (CS *Aftenposten*, Sep. 3). “It is about time that all countries take on their responsibility and put an end to the tumults in the Middle East so that people do not have to flee” (CS *Aftonbladet*, Sep. 3). “I hope Europe soon awakens from its dreamy sleep and starts relating to reality” (CS *Berlingske*, Sep. 3).

We have suggested above that images may offer a thick representation providing a fuller sense of the issue and its consequences in order to make a deliberation or a choice (Kjeldsen 2015a). We find evidence of this in all parts of our material. The chief editor of the Danish tabloid *Ekstra Bladet* put it this way: “The corpse that makes us understand” (Sep. 5, last page). The Swedish informant said: “I do not know if it was intended to have a message, but I understand it as a message: We need to start fixing the problems quickly” (S, 2).

In general, the photos were believed to have the power to raise awareness and produce change. They were often viewed as an “eye-opener” or “wake-up call” that would make people aware of the gravity of the situation. The photos were also seen as “proof” that could effectively “correct” the wrong impression many had of the refugees as welfare immigrants: “It

puts the act of fleeing in perspective” (CS Jyllands-Posten, Sep. 3). The special visual understanding provided by the images were thought to have an impact on individual attitudes:

If I had not seen the photo, I might not have given so much thought to boat refugees today. And I might not have decided to try and do what I can to help. We need to be woken up, and this photo has probably awakened many. (CS Aftenposten, Sep. 3)

In newspapers, comment sections, and interviews we found variations of the phrase: “Images speak louder than words”. There was a general understanding that the images offered something that could not be expressed in words—a belief that we have to *see* in order to fully understand, and that visuals are more powerful than text. As expressed by some informants: “It was like it was necessary to get reality up close instead of it being just numbers and statistics” (D, 1). “You need someone to kind of to attach the issue to. And that person happened to be Alan” (S, 3). “It gave the problem a face” (S, 3).

One person in the comment section expressed the power to provide urgency and understanding in this way:

I way too often choose not to be affected by many of the bad things that happen in the world. In Norway it is, in my opinion, simply too easy to turn away from them. So thank you for throwing something (completely awful) in people’s faces, which is the reality. Visuality does a lot. Once you have seen something horrible, it is not that easy to ignore it. Not only did you do your job, you made it a whole lot harder to distance oneself, not to care, not to engage. Right now I think Norway needed just that. (CS Aftenposten, Sep. 3)

In the interviews we see that the images’ power to provide urgency faded after a while. Two of the informants commented on the way the images after a while lost people’s attention. One said that he believed the images had provided people with a better understanding of the refugee crisis, and that it had changed the debate in Denmark but “only for a couple of months, then it is like daily life returned” (D, 4). Another said: “Many probably think, when they see the image: ‘oy, this is horrible’, and then they go on with their lives as if nothing had happened” (N, 3).

Power of Aesthetic Salience

The forms of audience analysis mentioned above have been carried out through the medium of verbal language, making it difficult to capture the power of visual form and aesthetic salience. The comment sections and informants are efficient in finding out how audiences think and feel, but not as efficient in pointing to the salient visual traits that evokes the emotions. Appropriations, however, point explicitly to the formal traits that artists found captivating and that are easily remembered and reproduced. Because of their condensed visual format, appropriations also point to the most salient and dominant connotations. In our material of 92 appropriations, the picture of Kurdi in the sand seen from the front (Fig. 12.1c) was the one most appropriated. In 57 instances this picture was appropriated directly, and in six instances through transformations (e.g. shown as a Lego-figure). The picture of Kurdi from the back was appropriated 12 times and the policeman watching only 4 times. The picture of the policeman carrying Kurdi away, which was initially the most frequent in the newspapers, was not appropriated at all.

The dominant reproduction of the frontal Kurdi image suggests that this is the most powerful image. In our focus groups and interviews, only the Danish informant mentioned the aesthetics of the images, explaining that he reacted strongly to this photo because there was only one element in the photograph: the boy (D, 4). Most appropriations would either reproduce this scene close up, or simply lift the boy out of the situation and place him in a different context—in a bed, for instance. The simplicity of the photo invites a response that focuses on the contrast between the position of the boy in the edge of the water, as a piece of wreckage, and his posture connoting sleep, childhood, and innocence. Our dominant categories of appropriation themes suggest that these were the dominant connotations evoked. Five categories stand out: (1) Kurdi playing, or reference to other children or children's activities (13 instances), (2) Kurdi sleeping (12 instances), (3) references to Angels or heaven (19 instances), (4) political comments and critique of the compassionless world of today (15 instances), and finally (5) a specific category of critique—placing the body of Kurdi in front of political leaders (5 instances, including the appropriation with the highest score). These categories can be divided into the evoking of private and primarily epideictic emotions (1–3) of sorrow and pain (44 instances), and primarily deliberative emotions of indignation and anger (4–5, 20 instances). The

categories also point to the power of the Kurdi images to evoke a fusion of the specific and the general, the personal and the political.

The Power of Evoking a Fusion of the Specific and the General

In all the forms of presentation and response we examined, we found the evoking of other images and related thoughts and feelings. The newspapers almost immediately compared the Kurdi images to other famous and iconic photographs such as “The tank man”, standing in front of military tanks at Tiananmen Square (Photo by Jeff Widener/AP, 1989), and especially “The Napalm girl” showing Phan Phúc running naked away from a napalm attack (Photo by Nick Ut/AP 1972). Several appropriations made the same connections, for instance, to Kevin Carter’s photo (Photo by Kevin Carter/Sygma 1993) of a small hunger-stricken child lying on the ground in Sudan, with a vulture watching from behind. Newspapers ascribed the image “an iconographic power”, and saw it as “the symbol of the tragedy that are playing out at Europe’s borders” (*Jyllands-Posten.dk* Sep. 3). Informants said that the image would: “become a symbol, like do you know the naked child, the Korean girl I think it is, or the Vietnamese girl?” (FG3, 13, R). Others would also mention Vietnam or even Auschwitz (FG 5, 11, 3).

This way of talking about the images demonstrates that they were not just seen as a presentation of reality. Neither were they perceived as just emotional immediacy. They were also understood as a symbolic and rhetorical message. In general, it seems that informants were very well aware of the image as a rhetorical artefact, functioning as a symbol and referring to other iconic images. The photographs clearly had the power to function simultaneously as representations of the specific and emotional (the dead boy) and of something general and political (the refugee crisis and suffering in general). They functioned as both event and language. The photographs were seen both as reality *and* as symbols (FG 4, 10; N, 3). Informants would say that they were a “representation of the refugee crisis” (FG 3, 13, J). Some would even capture the specific and the general in the same sentence: “This photo is not just about that ‘kid’. Rather it is a depiction of what all refugees go through” (CS *Aftonbladet*, Sep. 5). The movement between specific and general (particularization-generalization) was generally present. However, there was not agreement of what the drowned Alan Kurdi represented. Not all agreed that he was mainly a symbol of the victims of the refugee crisis. In the comment

sections, some criticized the newspapers' call for empathy as wrongheaded: "Such a nasty way of thinking one has at JP [*Jyllands-Posten*]. That an image of a drowned child is a symbol of the refugee's destiny. The image symbolizes how irresponsible and greedy some people are, putting their families lives at risk in order to reach Europe's tank of money" (CS *Jyllands-Posten*, Sep. 3).

CONCLUSION

The basis of the power of the Kurdi images is the shared belief that these images express reality. In spite of much talk about digital manipulation of photographs, all our material pointed to a shared and undisputed understanding of the images as presenting a window to the world. This belief is fundamental to the power of the images, and it is based on the rhetorical potential of images to create presence, realism, and emotional immediacy. It is touching because it is real and near.

However, moving an audience is not necessarily the same as having power over it. Firstly, evoking private emotions may make audiences feeling touched but does not necessarily lead to action. In our material, for example, we saw an emotional movement from distress to hopelessness. Secondly, even when the emotions of an audience are moved, it may still argue against this evocation and the intentions of the agent. Thirdly, while evoking strong emotions (pathos) certainly has power to effect in a specific situation, these emotions also have a tendency to be "momentary" (Quintilianus 1921; 6, 2, 8).

In other words: there may be a vividness effect, but the power of this effect will most certainly be countered by critical audiences. Still, there is no doubt that the photographs had power to provide a sense of urgency and a new understanding of the refugee crisis. This has to do with the kind of mental networks the images activate and connect to. Psychological research (cf. Domke et al. 2002) teaches us that pre-existing beliefs, emotions, and experiences influence how humans react to rhetoric. Rhetorical images cue something that already resides in the audience, which then connects to mental networks of thoughts and emotions: rational and emotional condensations. The reactions to the Alan Kurdi images in our material point to specific, salient configurations: the obvious fact that he is a child, the way he is dressed (e.g. "red shoes"), and the resemblance to a sleeping person connects to notions and feelings of innocence and roles of parenthood, nurturing, and responsibility. The position of Kurdi in the

water's edge connects to the incidental character of wreckage washed ashore, which leads to the topos *Humanity washed ashore* that was often used in relation to the images. Arguably, it is this contrast between innocence and humanity and then death, chance, and indifference that leads to the informants' feelings of distress, sadness, guilt, anger. The perceived inability to act then leads to hopelessness.

Although the five rhetorical potentials we based our analysis on are present in all of the material, some are more prominent in some parts of the material than other. The primary power of the images, however, is their ability to function both as event and symbol (language). The images of Kurdi are not only perceived to document a specific destiny in a way that makes us experience it as if we saw it with our own eyes (event), they are simultaneously seen as a representation, a symbol, of something more general: the issue of refugees and immigration.

Using triangulation of methods allowed us to discover different—and sometimes conflicting—aspects of the power of the images. The newspapers illustrated a firm belief in the power of the photographs and their role as a window to reality. They also explicitly connected to other iconic images. The commentary sections, on the other hand, demonstrated a clear opposition to the newspaper framings and to the alleged meaning of the photographs. The interviews and focus groups made it clear that a dominant movement of evoked emotions was from distress to hopelessness. Finally, the appropriations pointed to the iconic visual traits of the most salient of the four Kurdi images: simplicity and contrast.

Our study of these images across time and types of reception underscores that pictorial power is dependent on situation and audience, that this power is not one thing, and that it is contested. Power varies and changes. Taken together our varieties of approaches firstly suggest both the power and powerlessness of the images. Secondly they suggest three temporal phases of power for iconic press photographs: (1) *Evoking*, first they exercise the power of emotional presence immediacy and create attention and emotion; (2) *Fading*, then they are challenged, more general discussion ensues, the public moves on, and attention fades; and (3) *Iconic renaissance*, finally, because they are established and remembered as symbols for a specific event, people return to them when discussing this event. Furthermore, they are actively used in new circumstances and debates as we saw with the use of “Napalm girl” in relation to the Kurdi images, and in the appropriations of the Kurdi images themselves.

The use of several different forms of reception-oriented research has allowed us to establish what are arguably the most dominant and frequent

types of response to the rhetorical utterance we have examined. This simultaneously provided a nuanced and reliable suggestion of the power of the rhetoric. We find this type of audience research especially relevant for rhetorical scholarship, because it provides an avenue for thinking about rhetoric that lies in between the abandoning of rhetorical effect on the one hand and the scientific isolation of effects in experiments on the other. Studying audiences through such a plethora of reactions allows research to connect utterance to audience, and thereby to effect, without insisting on a transmission model of communication. Moving from response to text, instead of from text to assumed effect, makes it possible to go beyond textual conjectures and search for the circumstances and textual traits that created established responses.

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NOTES

1. See <http://www.boredpanda.com/syrian-boy-drowned-mediterranean-tragedy-artists-respond-aylan-kurdi/>.

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