



# **Rhetoric in Society 9**

## **RHETORIC IN THE DIGITAL AGE**

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
UNIVERSITY OF ZAGREB

**18-21 JUNE 2025 / Zagreb - Croatia**

**BOOK OF ABSTRACTS**



### **ORGANIZERS**

Rhetoric Society of Europe  
University of Zagreb  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

### **LOCAL ORGANIZING COMMITTEE**

Gabrijela Kišiček (chair)  
Davor Nikolić  
Diana Tomić  
Ana Vlah

### **ISBN**

978-953-379-243-9

# **Rhetoric in Society 9**

## **RHETORIC IN THE DIGITAL AGE**

International Conference on Rhetoric

Edited by Gabrijela Kišiček and Davor Nikolić

18-21 JUNE 2025 / Zagreb - Croatia







## Contents

<b>KEYNOTE SPEAKERS .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>Katarzyna Budzynska</i>	
Ethos in the Digital Society: A Computational Approach .....	2
<i>Henrike Jansen</i>	
Populists' responses to commotion about their words: A case study from Dutch politics .....	3
<i>Jean Wagemans</i>	
The Role of Rhetoric in Defending Against Weapons of Mass Persuasion.....	4
<b>INDIVIDUAL PRESENTATIONS .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Andrew Aberdein</i>	
Virtuous Argumentation and Unendorsed Claims.....	6
<i>Vasileios Adamidis</i>	
Identification, division, and social identity theory in the Digital Age. Alexis Tsipras and Syriza's communication campaign on the road to the May 2023 Greek parliamentary elections .....	7
<i>Maeve Adams</i>	
Defending Democracy and the New Rhetorics of Dissent.....	8
<i>Maryam Alavi Nia, Gilda Seddighi</i>	
From Frustration to Education: How Migrant Influencers Use Instagram to Address AMR and Shape Trust in EU Healthcare Systems.....	9
<i>Rob Alexander</i>	
Epic Exceptionalism: History, Chronotope, and the New York Times Obituary (A Rhetorical Genre Theory Analysis).....	10
<i>Kacper Andrychowski</i>	
Rhetorical Potential of Political Myths.....	11
<i>Kristine Marie Berg</i>	
Coincidental audience/potential rhetor: towards a rhetorical understanding of the "bystander" to hostile rhetoric .....	12
<i>Collin Bjork</i>	
Criminal Ethos in True Crime Podcasting.....	13
<i>Kristian Bjørkdahl</i>	
The State Might Hear, but Does It Listen? Investigating Influence in Public Hearing Processes in Norway.....	14
<i>Alicia Bremer, Terrence C. Stewart, Randy Allen Harris</i>	
Representing Rhetorical Figures in Vector Symbolic Architecture.....	15
<i>Iben Brinch</i>	
Kairotically falling into place.....	16
<i>Frida Hviid Broberg, Thore Keitum Fisker, Frederik Appel Olsen</i>	
How to be heard when no one is listening: Heckling as rhetorical resistance .....	17
<i>Kara Mae Brown</i>	
Teaching Geographic Rhetorics through Digital Maps.....	19



<i>Agnieszka Bryła-Cruz, Martin Hinton, Miriam Kobierski, Weronika Olkowska</i>	
Spiritual identities – The expression of religious identity and affiliation through argumentation .....	20
<i>Jarmila Bubikova-Moan, Margareth Sandvik</i>	
Digital devices as facilitators of argumentation in educational contexts .....	21
<i>Gabby Bunko</i>	
Diagnosing Chronic Pain: Rhetorical Implications for Asignification .....	22
<i>Vipulya Chari</i>	
Rhetoric of Development in Digital India.....	23
<i>Silvia Corradi</i>	
Digital objects in the rhetorical situation: a legal-philosophical perspective .....	24
<i>Johanna Couvée</i>	
Critical Rhetorics and Mental Health Literacy in the Digital Age: a Critical Pedagogy for Politicizing Care .....	25
<i>Shane Crombie</i>	
Punching Above Their Weight – the Rhetoric of Small Nations in diplomatic miss-matches .....	26
<i>Yun Ding</i>	
Return to the Primitive: Rhetoric as Secondary Orality in the Digital Age .....	27
<i>Jamie L. Downing, Jonathan Carter</i>	
Generative AI and the reconfiguration of public memory .....	28
<i>Foteini Egglezou</i>	
Thinking... Expressing... Communicating: Rhetorical Games in Primary Education. Familiarizing Students with Rhetoric through a Primary Education Rhetorical Festival.....	29
<i>Foteini Egglezou</i>	
“Equality in Civil Marriage, Amendment of the Civil Code, and Other Provisions”: Far-Right Populist Voices on Gender and Argumentative Strategies in Hate Speech .....	30
<i>Fabian Erhardt</i>	
Rhetorics of Knowledge: Probability, Plausibility, and Claims to Validity.....	31
<i>Daria Evangelista</i>	
Human vs AI-produced Awareness-Raising Speeches on the Environment: A Comparative Analysis .....	32
<i>Lydia E. Ferguson</i>	
Unjust Language Makes for Unjust Laws: Employing Rhetorical Analysis as a Tool for Social Change.....	33
<i>Sergio Figueiredo</i>	
Rhetorical Design for an Ethical Metaverse .....	34
<i>James Fredal</i>	
Is Rhetoric the antistrophos of Dialectic? Narrative Reasoning in Ancient Forensic Oratory.....	35
<i>Jonas Gabrielsen</i>	
Orality in Danish courts.....	36
<i>Caroline Glowka</i>	
Digital Praise in Professional Networks: AI-Generated LinkedIn Posts as Contemporary Expressions of Epideictic Rhetoric .....	37
<i>Peter Goggin</i>	
Island Diabetes and Diet: Rhetorical Regional Interfaces of Digital, Cultural, and Material .....	38



<i>Julius Graack</i>	
The role of parliamentary speeches on social media and its rhetorical implications: A case study of the ninth European Parliament 2019-2024.....	39
<i>Tejan Green Waszak</i>	
Pop-Culture, The Writing Classroom, and the Rhetoric of Hip-Hop .....	40
<i>Peter Oliver Greza</i>	
Digital Proxemics in Online Presentations: A New Dimension of Rhetoric in the Digital Age .....	41
<i>Leo Groarke</i>	
Images, Provenance, and Digital Acts of Arguing.....	42
<i>Hans Hansen</i>	
Discursive environments and normative pragmatics .....	43
<i>Randy Allen Harris, Rency Luan</i>	
The Rhetoricon .....	44
<i>Heather N. Hill</i>	
Rhetoric in Crisis: The Value of Rhetorical Education in the Age of AI.....	45
<i>Judy Holiday</i>	
Dear Folks: Whaddya Know—Still Alive!.....	46
<i>Michael Hoppmann, Michael Phillips-Anderson</i>	
Does the Universal Audience (still) laugh?.....	47
<i>Hsuan-I Huang</i>	
AI for “Humanity”: Rhetorical Framing in Sam Altman’s Congressional Testimony .....	48
<i>Brooke Hubsch</i>	
Atextual, Ahistorical, and Unjustifiable: Strategic presentations and re-presentations of judicial precedent in <i>Trump v. United States</i> .....	49
<i>Christine Isager</i>	
Rhetorical Citizenship, Elsinore: Towards a site-specific reinvention of citizen journalism .....	50
<i>Stefan Iversen</i>	
The Rhetoric of Personalized Synthetic Narration .....	51
<i>Anna M. Kiełbiewska</i>	
User’s privacy management in social media as a tool for shaping ethos.....	52
<i>Gabrijela Kišiček, Agnieszka Bryła-Cruz, Martin Hinton</i>	
Witchcraft in your lips? – Prosody as Persuasion in Advertising .....	53
<i>Marta Kobyłska</i>	
Presidential Rhetoric of Non-Intervention: How US Presidents Justify Military Inaction in the Context of the New World Order .....	54
<i>Solveig Kolstad</i>	
Innovative ethos: How Technology Constitutes the Ethos of Successful Innovators.....	55
<i>Manfred Kraus</i>	
Is There a Speaker in This Post? The Eclipse of the Orator in Digital Social Networks.....	56
<i>Jutta Krautter</i>	
Digital Learning Media and Rhetoric: Enhancing Knowledge Transfer .....	57
<i>Alexandra Kuzmina</i>	
Systematic Malicious Use of Generative AI in Online Extremism.....	58



<i>Louise Anna Ladegaard</i>	
"No one believes we dated" – lesbian YouTube as a tool for rhetorical citizenship .....	59
<i>Vivian Laurens, Michael Hoppmann</i>	
The rhetoric of hope and despair in peacebuilding: A Colombian case study of persuading self and others .....	60
<i>Carmen Lipphardt</i>	
Multimodal knowledge presentations as a future skill in a digitalised world .....	61
<i>David Lombard</i>	
Toward A Multi-Actor Understanding of Mental Illness: A Rhetorical-Narratological and Ecological Analysis of Schizophrenia Narratives on Blogs .....	62
<i>Brent Lucia</i>	
The Dystopian Imaginaries of ChatGPT: A Designed Cycle of Fear .....	63
<i>Zoltan P. Majdik</i>	
Evaluating the Deliberative-Rhetorical Norms of Human ↔ AI Interactions and Interactants .....	64
<i>Aleksandra Majdzińska-Koczorowicz</i>	
Academia-related memes as examples of visual metaphors. An analysis of picture-text dynamics .....	65
<i>Annika Mamat</i>	
Storytelling in scientific online presentations: Overcoming social distance .....	66
<i>Maurizio Manzin</i>	
Rhetoric in Times of Change .....	67
<i>Ivanka Mavrodieva</i>	
Rhetorical and communicative features of podcasts .....	68
<i>Erin Daina McClellan, Salla-Maaria Laaksonen</i>	
Ecological Care Work in Eco-Conscious Companies during the Nordic Green Transition .....	69
<i>Matt McKinney</i>	
Sage Against the Machine: Incorporating GenAI in a Reflexive Digital Rhetorical Pedagogy .....	70
<i>Ewa Modrzejewska, Agnieszka Kampka</i>	
Between Data-Driven and Visually-Driven Imaginaries: The Rhetorical Visions of Citizen Participation .....	71
<i>Ragnhild Mølster</i>	
Experts and narratives in factual TV on antimicrobial resistance .....	72
<i>Carlos Monteiro, Alexandra Kuzmina</i>	
The Rhetoric of Prompts: Multimodality, Intent and Ethics in AI meaning-making .....	73
<i>Davor Nikolić</i>	
<i>Wise people create proverbs and proverbs create wise people</i> – on rhetoric of proverbs and proverbs in rhetoric .....	74
<i>Turið Nolsøe</i>	
Constituting paternity: technological and political developments affecting Faroese paternity courtsuits in the 20th century .....	75
<i>Marko Novak</i>	
Tactile argumentation in law .....	76
<i>Fabio Paglieri</i>	
The impact of generative Artificial Intelligence on rhetorical and argumentative competence: deadly pitfall or training grounds? .....	77





<i>Miranda Perry</i>	
Deep Blue Mourn: Limits of Empathy and Grievability in Disaster Discourse.....	78
<i>Poropat Darrer, Mihaljević</i>	
Rhetorical means in structuring myths as part of the narrative strategy within Croatian presidential election campaign 2024 .....	79
<i>Federico Puppo</i>	
Reason, Reality and Rhetorical Truth in the Digital Age.....	80
<i>Sara Rabon</i>	
Trump in the Manosphere – How to Rhetorically Capture Young Men in the Digital Audience .....	81
<i>Antonio Rauccio</i>	
An insight in the light of the scholastic theory of legal government.....	82
<i>Jeff Rice</i>	
Digital Banality .....	83
<i>Noah Roderick</i>	
Make it more: Prompt engineering and the status of rhetorical invention in generative A.I.....	84
<i>Dorthea Roe</i>	
From fractured narratives to a united approach. The Norwegian Government's AMR-rhetoric concerning responsibility and solutions .....	85
<i>Kris Rutten, Marjan Doom</i>	
Curation as a Rhetorical Performance on the Museum Stage.....	86
<i>Roman Růžička</i>	
Pragma-Dialectical Analysis of Police Communication on Social Media .....	87
<i>Blake D. Scott</i>	
What Would Perelman Make of Persuasive Technologies? Rhetorical Agency after AI.....	88
<i>Lauren Seitz</i>	
“Exiled from the Interior”: The People and their Enemies in Radical Right French Discourse .....	89
<i>Ruoyu Shi</i>	
Argumentative Patterns in Parent-Child Mealtime Interactions.....	90
<i>Anders Sigrell</i>	
Kairos in Contemporary Teacher Education.....	91
<i>Ryan Skinnell</i>	
Weimar's Rhetorical Revival and Its Lessons for the Digital Age.....	92
<i>Linda Söderlindh, Waldemar Petermann</i>	
Digital Delivery – towards a digital understanding of action.....	93
<i>Davor Stanković</i>	
Rhetorical playground: Principles of Teaching Rhetoric to Elementary School Children.....	94
<i>Hartmut Stöckl</i>	
‘Going Places’: Multimodal Argument (Re-)Construction in Travel and Leisure Ads.....	95
<i>Serena Tomasi</i>	
Rhetoric as a Bridge between Ethics and AI in Predictive Justice.....	96
<i>Assimakis Tseronis</i>	
Environment memes and counter-memes: exploring the rhetorical and argumentative potential of meme templates.....	97



<i>Hilde Van Belle</i>	
From <i>A Noi!</i> (1922) to <i>The March on Rome</i> (2022).....	98
<i>Charlotte van der Voort</i>	
A mass medium and its ambiguous message: the case of Isocrates' literate rhetoric.....	99
<i>Alma Vančura, Ana Šovagović</i>	
English Language University Students' Attitudes on Communication Apprehension and Self-Perceived Public Speaking Competency.....	100
<i>Eirik Vatnøy</i>	
The Rhetoric of Paperwork.....	101
<i>Ana Vlah</i>	
The Impact of the Audience on Critical Thinking .....	102
<i>Viktorija Völker</i>	
From Grim to Grin: Decoding Sergey Lavrov's Strategic Wit.....	103
<i>Marina Vujnović, Michael Phillips-Anderson</i>	
Sympathy is an Out-of-Network Benefit: An Examination of Digital Rhetoric and Dark Humor following the Death of UnitedHealthcare's CEO .....	104
<i>Elizabeth Weiser</i>	
Material Witness: The Counter-Statement of Objects in a Virtual Age.....	105
<i>David Williams</i>	
Circulation Rhetorics: Foregrounding Algorithmic Knowledge in Digital Composition Pedagogy.....	106
<i>Ramy Younis</i>	
Steel man: experimental evidence on rhetorical effects of faithful reformulations.....	107
<i>Maria Załęska</i>	
Controversies over freedom of speech in online discussions .....	108
<i>Louise Zamparutti</i>	
Norma Cossetto's Digital Ethos: Enargeia and Prosthetic Memory in Italy's New National Heroine .....	109
<i>Aleksandra Zupančič</i>	
Who is Responsible for Speech Education (when should speech education begin and how good or bad examples influence speech culture)?.....	110
<b>PANELS.....</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>The Rhetorical Subject in and Against Technocapitalism.....</b>	<b>112</b>
<i>Ira Allen (co-chair)</i>	
Taking Impossible Goods Personally: The Subject of Degrowth and Salvage Communism .....	113
<i>James Rushing Daniel (co-chair)</i>	
New Gods, Old Enigmas: Proletariats, Entrepreneurs, and the Rhetoric of Class Transcendence .....	113
<i>Christopher W. Chagnon</i>	
The Obfuscating and Dangerous Language of Digital Extractivisms: electrified "clouds", "farms" of steel, and aggrandizing the "addictive" .....	114
<i>Antti Tarvainen</i>	
The colonial adventures of a startup entrepreneur: from homo economicus to homo innovatus.....	114
<b>The Rhetoric of Fraud and Scams in a Digital World .....</b>	<b>115</b>
<i>Jens E. Kjeldsen (chair)</i>	
The ethos, argumentation, emotional appeals and relation-building of a scammer .....	116



<i>Ragnhild Mølster</i>	
I dishonestly love you. The rhetoric of romance fraud.....	116
<i>Ida Vikøren Andersen</i>	
A rhetorical citizenship perspective on fraud and scams .....	117
<i>Aaron Hess</i>	
Taking the bait: Analyzing ethos in anti-scramming social media.....	117
<b>Hard Listening in the Digital Sphere: From the Personal to the Public .....</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>Mobilizing Bad Feelings: The Rhetorical Circulation of Affect in Public Discourse .....</b>	<b>120</b>
<i>Frida Hviid Broberg</i>	
Deconstructing the Myth of Anger's Counterproductivity .....	121
<i>Kendall R. Phillips (chair)</i>	
The Subjunctive Rhetoric of Fear .....	121
<i>Erin J. Rand</i>	
Affective Weapons: Polarizing Politics through Anti-Trans Rhetorics.....	122
<i>Louise Schou Therkildsen</i>	
Dwelling in Emotions: Transformative Anger and Communal Dwelling Places in Mats Jonsson's <i>When we were Sami</i> .....	122
<b>Rhetorical effects of argumentation (ECA panel).....</b>	<b>123</b>
<i>Amalia Haro Marchal</i>	
Social identity and rhetorical effects in conversational dynamics.....	124
<i>Steffen Herbold, Alexander Trautsch, Zlata Kikteva, Annette Hautli-Janisz</i>	
Rhetorical effects of LLM-generated impersonations.....	124
<i>Thierry Herman &amp; Maud Armani</i>	
Self-correction in contemporary French novels: rhetorical effects of a paradoxical ethotic strategy .....	125
<i>Steve Oswald (chair)</i>	
Reformulation as concealed argumentation.....	125
<b>Rhetoric across disciplines: the value of the rhetorical perspective in higher education .....</b>	<b>127</b>
<i>Laura van Beveren</i>	
Reflecting in/on social professions: the critical potential of rhetorical reflexivity.....	128
<i>Maarten van der Meulen</i>	
Supporting student presenters in times of AI: the growing importance of presentation delivery .....	128
<i>Jelte Olthof</i>	
Teaching rhetorical public speaking: the case of the rhetoric minor in Groningen .....	129
<i>Martijn Wackers</i>	
Integrating rhetoric into a transdisciplinary education programme: the Collaborative Science for Biomedical Breakthroughs minor .....	129
<b>Hostile Digital Architecture: Restricting Rhetorical Agency through Technology .....</b>	<b>130</b>
<i>Melissa Guadrón (chair)</i>	
"Deny, Delay, and Defend": Hostile Digital Architecture and Health Insurance.....	131
<i>Brittany Halley</i>	
"Deployment of the Solution": Hostile Digital Architecture and the European Border Surveillance System.....	131



*Elizabeth Velasquez*

"Designed to be Deleted": Hostile Digital Architecture and Dating Apps ..... 132

**Extremism in Public Discourse through a Rhetorical and Discursive Lens:**

**American and European Scholars in Conversation ..... 133**

*Ruth Amossy*

Dissimulating Extremism in Arguments "from Love": The Campaign Discourse of  
Eric Zemmour in the French Presidential Elections (2022)..... 135

*Isabela Fairclough*

Radicalised elites, radicalised publics. The framing of the 2024 riots  
in the context of mass-migration..... 135

*Christian Kock*

Oral Dialogue as Antidote to Digitally Powered Extremism..... 136

*Alexandru I. Cărlan, Irina Diana Mădroane, Camelia Beciu*

Countering Extremist Discourse – but at What Cost? The Rhetorical Construction  
and Contestation of the Legitimacy of a Constitutional Court Decision ..... 136

*Robert Asen*

Extremism in Legislative Settings: Anti-Woke Discourse and Public Education ..... 137

*Crystal Colombini*

Economic Extremity from Center to Margins ..... 137

*Robert Glenn Howard*

When Gun Rights Advocates "Eat Their Own": Extreme Grassroots Political Speech  
on Social Media in the US Context ..... 138

**RSA @ RSE Open Discussion Panel Rhetoric and the Future of Academia:**

**Transatlantic Dialogue in a Time of Crisis ..... 139**

**Manifest, Embodiment, Backlash: On Different Stages of Activist Rhetoric ..... 140**

*Kira Skovbo Moser*

Writing themselves into action: A rhetorical investigation of the manifesto as process ..... 141

*Thore Keitum Fisker*

"If we can get 24.000 people on the road" – Bodies beyond persuasion in Danish climate  
activist group Nødbremsen..... 142

*Esben Bjerggaard Nielsen (chair)*

Merely Impolite or Saboteurs of Democracy? Reactions to Activism and the Rhetorics of  
Admonishment..... 143

**The Use of Competitive Debates in Ethical Education: Research Report ..... 144**

*Anna Sędlak (chair)*

Methods and Approach in Studying the Competitive Debates in Poland in the Search of  
Ethical Elements: Research Report ..... 144

*Joanna Nowakowska*

Analysis of the Gathered Theses in the Study of Youth Competitive Debates in Poland..... 145

*Alicja Kornicka*

The Potential of Competitive Debates in Ethical Education: Results and Applications  
of the Study..... 145



<b>Feminist Powers of Rhetorical Listening .....</b>	<b>146</b>
<i>Krista Ratcliffe (chair)</i>	
Listening Beyond Cancel Culture via Metamodern Feminist Figuration .....	146
<i>Roxanne Mountford</i>	
Listening Beyond the Human .....	147
<i>Kasey Woody</i>	
Slow Argument: Teaching Ethical Rhetoric in the Midst of Speed .....	147
<b>The Species of Rhetoric as Contemporary Heuristics for the Digital Age .....</b>	<b>148</b>
<i>Nathaniel Street (Chair)</i>	
Forensic Rhetoric and The Past: Evaluation and the Presenting of the Past.....	149
<i>Caddie Alford</i>	
Epideictic Rhetoric and the Present: Witnessing Platformization.....	149
<i>Byron Hawk</i>	
Deliberative Rhetoric and the Future: Climate Change and the Ontological Sublime .....	150
<b>Speaking with the Voice of the Future: Children and Childhood in Climate Activist Rhetoric .....</b>	<b>151</b>
<i>Luke Winslow and Eli Mangold</i>	
"Our Children's Trust": Theorizing Rhetorical Children as Climate Activists.....	152
<i>Ida Vikøren Andersen</i>	
Youth activists' non-listening rhetoric: conflicting norms and understandings of citizenship in the Fosen wind power controversy .....	152
<i>Jelte Olthof (chair)</i>	
"Your Honor, they will live far longer than you." Youth, Presence, and Future in the Rhetoric of Young Climate Litigants .....	153
<b>Symbolic Screens and Digital Dreams: Reclaiming Aesthetics in Rhetorical Inquiry .....</b>	<b>154</b>
<i>Amanda Adam</i>	
Navigating the Digital Abyss: Rhetorical Analysis of Teen Tech Films in the Evolving Media Landscape.....	155
<i>Christian Kock</i>	
Aesthetic Experience as an End in Itself .....	156
<i>Kyle Jensen</i>	
Identification's Dimensions: Finding Higher Ground in the Generative AI Debates .....	157
<i>Justin Hodgson</i>	
Techno-Aesthetics, the Human Condition, and the Doing of Post-Digital Rhetoric .....	158
<b>Using Transnational and Decolonial as Technologies to Address the Epistemic Crisis of Rhetorical Studies .....</b>	<b>159</b>
<i>Tareq Samra Graban</i>	
Reconciling Diversity Agendas .....	159
<i>Belinda Walzer</i>	
Rethinking Intellectual Resistance .....	160
<i>Rebecca Dingo (chair)</i>	
Tracing Rhetoric's Imperialist Roots.....	160



<b>ROUND TABLES.....</b>	<b>161</b>
Persuasive Algorithms: Exploring the Intersections of Rhetoric and Generative AI.....	162
Digitising dialogue and animating actio: an international roundtable discussion.....	163
“Logos Don’t Care”: Digital Rhetorics of Activism and Dis/Information in the Age of Alt-Right Politics.....	164
<b>BOOK PRESENTATIONS .....</b>	<b>165</b>
<i>Aaron Hess, Jens Kjeldsen, eds.</i> <i>Ethos, Technology, and AI in Contemporary Society – the Character in the Machine</i> (2025).....	166
<i>Pamela Pietrucci &amp; Leah Ceccarelli, eds.</i> <i>Scientists, Politics, and Public Controversy</i> (2025).....	167
<i>Blake Scott</i> <i>The Rhetoricity of Philosophy – Audience in Perelman and Ricoeur after the Badiou-Cassin Debate</i> (2025) .....	168
<b>LIST OF PARTICIPANTS, THEIR AFFILIATIONS AND ADDRESSES .....</b>	<b>169</b>



## **Rhetoric in Society 9**

### **RHETORIC IN THE DIGITAL AGE**

With great joy and excitement we welcome the rhetoricians from all over the world to the 9th Rhetoric in Society conference in Zagreb.

The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences will be the host of the event which established itself as one of the major focal points for scholars in rhetoric and related disciplines. As it was the case with the previous editions of the Rhetoric in Society conferences we expect high-class presentations, fruitful discussions and overall the great spirit of communion.

When choosing the theme of the conference, *Rhetoric in the Digital Age* came up quite naturally because the development of technology and media in the 21st century influences the way people communicate and, ultimately, has an impact on people's persuasion and argumentation strategies. We wanted to raise the question (and possibly try to offer some answers) if the ancient discipline of rhetoric still have a role to play in contemporary society?

Other related questions concerned the way the technology shapes contemporary rhetoric, the importance of classical rhetorical concepts, and the change in the significance of rhetoric in the light of new scientific developments, such as AI. These are only some questions which are in the focus of many discussions among scholars of rhetoric and we deeply believe that this conference is the best place to discuss the different challenges that rhetoric is facing today.

Beside this central theme of the conference we also invited proposals which are interested in all possible domains and perspectives of rhetoric dealing with theory, practice, and rhetorical pedagogy. The received and accepted proposals includes the following areas:

- Rhetoric and politics
- Rhetoric and education
- Rhetoric and law
- Rhetoric and literature
- Rhetoric and healthcare

- History of rhetoric
- Multimodal rhetoric
- Rhetorical argumentation
- Argumentation theory

The conference program following this introduction contains the abstracts of individual presentations, panels, round tables and book presentations. At the end of the Book of Abstracts there is a list of all participants with their affiliations and contacts.

We sincerely hope that after four days of the conference all of the participants will return to their home institutions enriched with new insights and connections with fellow scholars. Also we hope that memories created during the Zagreb conference, concerning both formal and informal gatherings, will follow our rhetorical guests long after the formal end of the conference.

In the spirit of old Zagreb greeting *Dobro mi došel prijatel!* (*May you come well, my friend!*) let us end this short introduction by saying that we are looking forward to meeting all our old friends and those who will soon become such.





# KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



**Katarzyna Budzynska**

## **Ethos in the Digital Society: A Computational Approach**

One of the major threats associated with digitalisation – which manifests itself in online misbehaviour such as hate speech, fake news, echo chambers, cyber tribalism, and so on – is a violation of the basic condition for trusting and being trustworthy. Thus, when we calibrate our focus on this critical requirement for constructive, reasonable, and responsible interactions in the digital society, then ethos, that is, ethotic (mis)behaviour, becomes central for the study of communication. In this talk, I present a new research program, called The New Ethos, which employs AI-based technology to investigate rhetoric at scale, that is, distributed and digitised communication networks in which volume of information and velocity of message proliferation take on a hitherto unknown scale. We develop Rhetoric Analytics, a suit of computational tools that calculate and visualise statistical patterns, trends and tendencies in rhetorical use of language. It allows us to explore, for example, how social media users react to rhetorical strategies of Donald Trump in the presidential elections or how people argue about COVID-19 vaccines on Reddit. This opens the path to comprehend the present and the future of social communication and human condition. By unifying philosophy, linguistics and Artificial Intelligence, this goal becomes closer than ever before.



Henrike Jansen

## **Populists' responses to commotion about their words: A case study from Dutch politics**

A significant portion of today's public discourse revolves around criticizing others' statements for being unacceptable. Social media have made it remarkably easy to demand accountability – especially from public figures – when words are seen as offensive, threatening, misleading, or otherwise problematic. In turn, the accused individual is put in a position to restore their reputation and thus to find a way to explain their contested remarks in a manner that removes or diminishes culpability.

This keynote focuses on populist politicians whose words have caused commotion. It aims to uncover how these politicians defend themselves against accusations of making a controversial remark. One might expect them to be reluctant to distance themselves from their contested words, since those words usually resonate strongly with the populists' core supporters. However, like all politicians, populists seek to appeal to the largest possible group of voters, and this pressures them to align, at least to some extent, with general norms of reasonableness. The presentation will identify some typical defense strategies employed by these politicians and propose criteria for evaluating their reasonableness.

The analysis draws on Dutch political discourse, and the identified defense strategies are categorized according to the framework outlined in Boogaart, Jansen, and van Leeuwen (2021; 2022; 2024).



Jean Wagemans

## **The Role of Rhetoric in Defending Against Weapons of Mass Persuasion**

We live in the Information Age, where digital technologies shape our individual, social, and political realities. A central challenge of this era is 'misinformation', an umbrella term that includes fake news, echo chambers, polarization, conspiracy theories, and troll factories. The rise of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) has further intensified these concerns. Large Language Models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT reflect both Gorgias' description of rhetoric and Plato's criticism of it: they function like digital sophists, capable of generating persuasive texts on any topic and for any target audience at the push of a button, without any built-in guarantee of truth. They also enable large-scale rhetorical manipulation, mobilizing automated troll armies to sway public opinion.

Is there anything we can do against these 'weapons of mass persuasion'? And what is left of rhetoric, the art of crafting persuasive texts, now that these can be mass-produced by machines?

This keynote examines the shifting role of rhetoric in the face of these transformations. Rather than fading into obsolescence, I argue that rhetoric must evolve from a productive art into a critical one, arming individuals with the skills to analyze and resist manipulative discourse. In particular, I discuss the method of "rhetoric-checking" as a vital complement to fact-checking: while fact-checking verifies the accuracy of claims, rhetoric-checking assesses argumentation quality, emotional appeals, and deceptive persuasion tactics. In an era where persuasive language is both ubiquitous and machine-generated, democratic discourse hinges not only on crafting strong arguments but also on cultivating the ability to criticize them. By repositioning rhetoric as a safeguard against misinformation, we can preserve its role as a cornerstone of intellectual resilience in the digital age.



# INDIVIDUAL PRESENTATIONS



Andrew Aberdein

## Virtuous Argumentation and Unendorsed Claims

Should virtuous arguers reason from premises they do not endorse? Can virtuous arguers reason to conclusions they do not endorse? Should rhetorical education or competitive debate require participants to do either?

There are several situations in which arguers reason from premises or to conclusions that they do not endorse. 1. Hypothetical reasoning, to establish a conditional statement or, in argument by contradiction, to reject a hypothesis. 2. Argument ex concessis, or Lockean ad hominem, to derive a conclusion from the interlocutor's assumptions. 3. "Devil's advocacy" to give voice to an otherwise unrepresented standpoint. 4. Reasoning "in utramque partem", from both sides, in furtherance of Quintilian's dictum that the "true and perfect orator" must be able to take either side of any issue.

Situation (1) is unproblematic, but narrow in scope; both situations (2) and (3) have been criticized as inconsistent with the highest standards of argumentation; but situation (4) has been a feature of rhetorical education since antiquity and is baked into the design of most varieties of competitive debate. Can this tension be resolved? Is there an account of argumentative virtue which preserves our intuitions about all four types of argument from unendorsed premises?

This paper argues that, while bad faith argumentation is vicious, reasoning to or from claims that the arguer does not endorse can be undertaken virtuously. Indeed, when conducted with integrity, such reasoning is unavoidable in discharging the adversarial function of argumentation.



Vasileios Adamidis

## **Identification, division, and social identity theory in the Digital Age. Alexis Tsipras and Syriza's communication campaign on the road to the May 2023 Greek parliamentary elections**

In a tripartite dialogue between a speaker, his adversary, and the audience, rhetoric can be defined as the art of identification and division, to discover the means of persuasion available in a given case. Kenneth Burke, in his seminal study *A Rhetoric of Motives*, approached rhetoric as the enterprise of establishing rapport between the speaker and the audience. Once such 'identification' takes place, usually by reference to real or imagined shared values, interests, and beliefs, human beings become more receptive to persuasion.

Rhetoric, thus defined, belongs in the psychological realm of Social Identity Theory, which is the individual's knowledge that she belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to her of this group's membership. Within this psychological framework, individuals categorize themselves and others into separate social groups, fostering a sense of belonging and self-esteem based on this group membership. As a result, they often align their actions with the interests, values, and norms of their group, while showing prejudice against outsiders. To persuade, then, a skilful rhetorician aims to artfully construct a shared identity with the audience, while underscoring the opponent's division with the group.

With particular focus on social media posts (especially Twitter), the paper aims to analyse the rhetoric of Alexis Tsipras, former president of Syriza, on the road to the May 2023 Greek parliamentary elections and provide an empirical insight into the campaign strategy of a left-wing party leader who could possibly qualify as populist. Engaging in qualitative content analysis of the communications of Alexis Tsipras between July 2022, when an alleged wiretapping scandal was first disclosed, and May 2023, the paper reveals the focal concepts of Tsipras' rhetoric, identifies communication patterns in the Twitter posts, and classifies them within the context of Social Identity Theory and Burke's concept of 'identification'.



Maeve Adams

## Defending Democracy and the New Rhetorics of Dissent

Academic and popular media outlets have, of late, lamented rising authoritarianism worldwide, sounded alarms that democracy needs defending. But, what does it actually mean to defend democracy? What do we say and/or do to shore up democracy up from within (if not also from without)? To what extent, moreover, is that work rhetorical? As Phillip Pettit influentially argues, democracy relies on two fundamental rhetorical rights to vote and to protest—what he calls the “electoral” and “contestatory” rights. Drawing on and building on prior theories of democracy’s rhetorical character, dissent, deliberation, and agonism—including those of Pettit as well as Bonnie Honig, Judith Butler, and Chantal Mouffe—this paper explores the possibility that “defense” is an evolving variation of democracy’s contestatory right. As such, defense is becoming crucially pertinent to the changing character of democracy and its rhetorical constitution. While democracy’s defense in prior eras chiefly involved protecting the nation-state from foreign incursion, its role has more clearly shifted inward, deploying new rhetorical tools in place of militaristic ones.

This paper draws lessons from modern media of dissent to explore new ways of thinking about the rhetorics of democracy’s defense. It focuses on two examples: the #MeToo hashtag and the evolving response to the trial of Dominique Pelicot, which includes the work of the Amazons of Avignon who have been pasting trial testimony to the medieval walls of Avignon and inspiring other women to add responses and stories of their own experiences of rape. In both cases, new rhetorics of dissent shift the meaning of democratic agency and action by foregrounding the power of feminist re-narration of history. Such new rhetorics engender new ways of thinking about the demos (who gets to participate in democracy and how), defending the borders that democracy draws around the people whose rights it promises to protect.





Maryam Alavi Nia, Gilda Seddighi

## **From Frustration to Education: How Migrant Influencers Use Instagram to Address AMR and Shape Trust in EU Healthcare Systems**

For patients to confidently seek care, accept diagnoses, and follow treatments, trust in the health-care system is essential (Tucker et al., 2016). However, refugees and migrants often face barriers to accessing care, as emphasized by the WHO's Fourth Global Evidence Review on Health and Migration (2022). These challenges frequently lead to self-medication, exacerbating the global antimicrobial resistance (AMR) crisis. This study investigates how migrant influencers in the EU use Instagram to communicate about AMR during slow-developing crises, focusing on how platform-specific affordances shape interactions and amplify marginalized perspectives. By leveraging Instagram's multimodal tools—such as video, captions, and interactive comments—these influencers foster engagement and participatory dialogues on complex health topics. Two Iranian-born, Germany-based nurse-influencers serve as case studies. One influencer (188,000 followers) shared frustration over receiving advice to drink water for a lung infection, contrasting German doctors' cautious approaches with Iranian doctors' proactive use of antibiotics. Another influencer (88,000 followers) humorously compared Iranian doctors' liberal antibiotic prescribing—even for mild conditions—with German doctors' restraint. Both posts leveraged Instagram's affordances, including visual storytelling and conversational threads, to frame healthcare practices in culturally resonant ways. The resulting discussions in the comment threads illustrate how Instagram's interactivity facilitates collective knowledge-building, where users share experiences, debate critiques, and engage with AMR-related narratives. This participatory communication is influenced by Instagram's design, which amplifies personal storytelling and creates a space for peer-to-peer education. Using a critical rhetorical lens, this study examines how Instagram's technological affordances mediate AMR dialogues, trust in healthcare, and cultural negotiation. By highlighting the interplay between platform features and influencer strategies, this research contributes to understanding how migrants' engagement with healthcare systems in the EU is influenced by digital communication technologies.



Rob Alexander

## **Epic Exceptionalism: History, Chronotope, and the New York Times Obituary (A Rhetorical Genre Theory Analysis)**

Described as “oases of calm in a world gone mad” (New York Times columnist Russell Baker), newspaper obituaries have been frequently praised for the refuge they offer readers from the tumult of the events reported by daily journalism. In this paper, I would like to consider the peculiar temporality of obituaries with an eye towards discovering what these features reveal about the chronotope – Mikhail Bakhtin’s term for the assumptions of time and space unique to every genre – of American news discourse. Basing my argument on a rhetorical genre analysis of the more than 100 obituaries which ran in the pages of The New York Times in October 2004, I suggest that, through its emphases on summary and closure and its thematic preoccupation with what we might call “firsts, bests, and longest,” the Times obituary embodies features consistent with the “world of ‘beginnings’ and ‘peak times’” in a nation’s history that Mikhail Bakhtin identified with epic. And yet, because every genre is accompanied in Bakhtin by its parodic counterpart, obituaries in the Times include not only those honouring the passing of noteworthy (largely American) pioneers, but also memorial notices exposing the suspect celebrity of figures whose fame was of a more ephemeral nature. “[H]ostile to all that was immortal and completed,” such “mock epic” obituaries resemble, in their enacting of the “mock crowning and subsequent decrowning of the carnival king” (Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics 124), characteristics consistent with Bakhtin’s notion of carnival. I will examine this play of epic and mock epic through a close reading of the rhetoric of two obituaries which appeared in the Times the same day, and which represent in a truly uncanny fashion (but in markedly different tones), the lives and careers of two very different scholars, the American historian James Chace and the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida.



**Kacper Andrychowski**

## **Rhetorical Potential of Political Myths**

The aim of my paper is to show the rhetorical potential of political myths when compared to Michael Calvin McGee's ideographs which are 'high-order abstractions found in political discourse representing collective commitment to a particular but equivocal normative goals' (McGee 1980, 15). I want to start with the Mark P. Moore's article Rhetorical Criticism of Political Myth from 1991 where the link between McGee's ideographs and political myths was suggested for the first time (Moore 1991) and to extend this idea by the analysis of another McGee's concept – rhetorical the People described in his 1975 article In Search of 'the People' (McGee 1975).

In the theoretical part of my paper I will briefly introduce both McGee's ideas and show their philosophical inspirations like the proletarian strike from Georges Sorel's Reflections on Violence, Louis Althusser's interpellation from his Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses and the concept of myths in Hans Blumenberg's philosophy.

In the practical part I will show the positive implications this method can bring us for the analysis of historical descriptions of political conflicts and ideologies by which they are driven.

The examples I want to show will concern the works from two ancient writers – Livy and Tacitus and the way they described political ideology in the Roman Republic and Empire.



Kristine Marie Berg

## Coincidental audience/potential rhetor: towards a rhetorical understanding of the “bystander” to hostile rhetoric

Hostile and hateful rhetoric, online and in physical settings, has been shown in numerous reports to have severe effects on democratic participation (e.g. van Tongerlo and Tamsons, 2022, Analyse og Tal, 2021, Institut for Menneskerettigheder, 2022). Attempts to reduce such hostile and hateful rhetoric include strengthening laws on hate speech, better moderation of online debates, civic education and more. However, often little attention is paid to the people who are not the targets of the hateful rhetoric, but simply happens to be present, online or offline, when it is uttered, a position sometimes referred to as the “bystander” (but see Lindekilde & Rasmussen, 2022). The mitigating potential of bystander reactions is thereby overlooked. However, qualitative interviews with a diverse group of people politically active in the Danish public show that even small gestures from bystanders can make a big difference for the targets. Drawing on these interviews about experiences with hateful rhetoric online and offline, this paper discusses, first, the roles the “bystander” can play for targets of hateful rhetoric and, second, drawing on bystander studies (such as Kvalnes, 2023; Levine et al., 2020) and rhetorical studies on personae (such as Anderson, 2007; Bruhn, 2018) discusses possible rhetorical conceptualizations of this position of coincidental audience/potential rhetor. Conceptualizing this position could have both practical implications for the planning of campaigns against hateful rhetoric and contribute to rhetorical persona studies.

### References:

- Analyse og Tal og Trygfonden. 2021. Angreb i den offentlige debat på Facebook.
- Anderson, D. 2007. *Identity's Strategy. Rhetorical Selves in Conversion*. Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press.
- Bruhn, T. 2018. *Delade meningar. Retorisk flertydighet och den pluralistiska publiken i politiska förnyelsesprocesser*. Åstorp: Retorikförlaget.
- Institut for Menneskerettigheder. 2022. Den offentlige debat på facebook. En undersøgelse af danskernes debatadfærd.
- Kvalnes, Ø. 2023. “Bystander Effects”, chapter 3 in *Communication Climate at Work: Fostering Friendly Friction in Organisations*, Palgrave Macmillan
- Levine, M., Philpot, R. and Kovalenko, A. 2020. “Rethinking the Bystander Effect in Violence Reduction Training Programs”, *Social Issues and Policy Review*, vol. 14, issue 1.
- Lindekilde, L. og J. Rasmussen. 2022. “Had, humor og bystander-reaktioner: danske unges reaktioner på politisk hadefulde memes”. *Politica*, 54. årg., nr. 2, 170-203
- van Tongerlo, W. and Tamsons, K. 2022. “Hate speech and Fake news: the impact on working conditions of local and regional elected representatives”, Council of Europe, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, report CG(2022)43-11final.



Collin Bjork

## Criminal Ethos in True Crime Podcasting

The ethos of alleged criminals has long been a touchstone in rhetorical studies. In ancient Greece and Rome, Gorgias' Encomium of Helen, the trial of Socrates in Plato's Apology, and Cicero's Pro Milone all serve as examples where the ethos of an alleged wrong-doer is recounted—and rhetorically constructed—so the wider public can make judgments about both the accused and the speaker. Today, the ethos of alleged criminals is foregrounded in true crime podcasts. Although rhetorical studies has a growing body of scholarship about podcasting (Kumanyika 2015; Florini 2015; Eckstein 2017; Danforth, Stedman, & Faris 2018; Detweiler 2019; Choong & Bjork 2023), the concept of ethos and the genre of true crime remains underexplored in rhetorical studies of podcasting.

This presentation draws on a long line of rhetorical scholarship about ethos (Aristotle 1991; Baumlin & Baumlin 1994; Amossy 2001; Žmavc 2012; Pfister 2014; Ryan, Myers, & Jones 2016; Eberly & Johnson 2018; Bjork 2021), including two of the three keynotes from the recent Nordic Rhetoric Conference in Copenhagen (Hartelius 2024; Pfister 2024). The speaker extends this scholarship into the domain of true crime podcasting by examining *In the Dark Season 2* (2019-2022), a podcast hosted by journalist Madeleine Baran about the wrongful conviction of Curtis Flowers, a Black man falsely accused of murder in Mississippi. Through an analysis of the podcast's main characters—Flowers, Baran, the district attorney, the family of the victims, and the family of the accused—this investigation reveals how each character's attempts to construct the ethos of the alleged criminal Flowers also contributes to the construction of their own ethos. Ultimately, the speaker argues that true crime podcasting is less about the facts of the case and more about the contested rhetorical construction of a criminal ethos.



Kristian Bjørkdahl

## **The State Might Hear, but Does It Listen? Investigating Influence in Public Hearing Processes in Norway**

Most modern democracies integrate some sort of public hearing process into their policy-making procedures. At the outset, this might look like an unequivocal good. It has the air of yielding decision-making power to the *people* in political systems dominated – as modern democracies are – by career politicians, professional bureaucrats, and scientific experts. The question is, however, whether the State not only hears, but also listens, through these processes – and if so, *whom* it listens to.

Norway has an old and well-established system for public hearings – the so-called *høringsinstituttet*, or “remiss system” – based largely on written calls and ditto responses. Especially after it was digitized, this system encompasses an enormous mass of communication back and forth between the government and the people. It has hardly been researched at all, however, and consequently we are surprisingly ignorant about how these processes actually work. In this paper, I present a project that aims to understand *whether* the State actually listens in these hearing processes, *how* they do so, and *to whom* they primarily suspend their own speech and lend their ear to the people.

The project is based mainly on interviews with officials in a selection of Norwegian ministries. To frame the project, I draw partly on empirical research into Norwegian policy-making processes (e.g. Hesstvedt & Christensen), and partly on the literature about rhetorical (Ratcliffe) and democratic (ex. Scudder) listening.

### References

Stine Hesstvedt and Johan Christensen, “Political and Administrative Control of Expert Groups—A Mixed-Methods Study”, *Governance* 36, 2 (2023): 337-357

Krista Ratcliffe, *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005)

Mary F. Scudder, *Beyond Empathy and Inclusion: The Challenge of Listening in Democratic Deliberation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020)



Alicia Bremer, Terrence C. Stewart, Randy Allen Harris

## Representing Rhetorical Figures in Vector Symbolic Architecture

Rhetorical figures structure salient configurations of language—utterances that recruit attention and impress memory because they appeal to innate neurocognitive pattern biases. That's why proverbs (an apple a day keeps the doctor away), heuristics (i before e except after c), clichés (jump the gun) and other such verbal units are highly figured. We notice them, we remember them, and we propagate them, because of our fundamental brain wiring. We respond to rhymes, alliterations, and lexical iterations, for instance, because we are tuned to notice and efficiently process subsequent instances of a stimulus, and to notice them relative to their temporal 'position.' Rhyme, for instance, is not just syllabic repetition. It is syllabic repetition at the ends of words. Alliteration occurs at the beginnings of words. Most lexical-repetition figures are defined by their syntactic position: initial (easy come, easy go), final (waste not, want not), medial (you do you, I'll do me). Rhetorical figures therefore represent an important neurolinguistic domain. But they have never been adequately modelled in a neural architecture. Vector Symbolic Architectures VSAs offer a method which is strongly motivated by biological plausibility that can representing and manipulate structured information using numerical vectors. VSAs have been used for computational models of language but of a wholly vanilla, see-Dick-and-Jane sort, which is not notably responsive to neurocognitive processing biases. Specifically, this presentation reports on the implementation of various methods of encoding rhetorically figured and control utterances using VSAs, and then the extraction of information back out of them, with the aim of finding encodings in which the presence or absence of rhetorical figures has an impact on the accuracy of the information extraction, with particular attention to the form/function theory of figuration (Fahnestock, 1999, 2005, 2011; Harris, 2013, 2020, 2023; Harris & Fahnestock 2022; Tindale, 2004)

### Cited

- Fahnestock, J. (1999). *Rhetorical figures in science*. Oxford University Press.
- Fahnestock, J. (2005). *Figures of argument*. *Informal Logic*, 23(3), 1–22.
- Fahnestock, J. (2011). *Rhetorical style: The uses of language in persuasion*. Oxford University Press.
- Harris, R. A. (2013). Figural Logic in Gregor Mendel's "Experiments on Plant Hybrids." *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 46(4), 570–602.
- Harris, R. A. (2020). Ploke. *Metaphor & Symbol*, 35(1), 23–42.
- Harris, R. A. (2023). Rules are rules: Rhetorical figures as algorithms. In R. Loukanova, P. LeFanu Lumsdaine, & R. Muskens (Eds.), *Logic and algorithms in computational linguistics* (pp. 217–260). Springer.
- Harris, R.A. & J. Fahnestock, J (2022). Rhetoric, linguistics, and the study of persuasion. In Fahnestock & Harris, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of language and persuasion*. Routledge.
- Tindale, C. W. (2004). *Rhetorical argumentation: Principles of theory and practice*. Sage Publications.



Iben Brinch

## **Kairotically falling into place**

In 2007, a young version of the American researcher in rhetoric and composition Michael Harker published "The Ethics of Argument: Rereading Kairos and Making Sense in a Timely Fashion". As the title indicates, the article is a review of theories of kairos when it comes to the question of time. Harker's main conclusion is that writing instructors should make use of "...the significance and influence of the passage of time and the importance of identifying the ethical "preferences" that inevitably inform our arguments and actions in the world" (p. 93). In this paper, I will revisit kairos as a concept that is fruitful for composition studies in general, and for writing instructors more specifically, but now digging into the kairotic meaning of place.

Together with time, the place of the speaker and audience is a central part of multifaced concept of kairos (Helsley, 1996, p. 371). Yet, the question of where has been less discussed systematically and theoretically, both in rhetorical literature and in the field of rhetoric and composition. The last decades of theory development of post humanistic and ecological perspectives as well as research on uses of places for rhetorical deliberation have showed us the importance of place.

In the paper, I will show examples from a rhetorical field study where I follow scholars in their physical and digital "placing" when they write, asking for and observing how they organize, plan for and arrange for writing in places like the office, the café or the train, and how they arrange themselves with hardware, software and apps as well as virtual places in their digital "onlife" (Floridi, 2023) writing space.

### References

- Floridi, L. (2023). *The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence: Principles, Challenges, and Opportunities*. Oxford.
- Helsley, S. L. (1986). Kairos. In T. Enos (Ed.) *Encyclopaedia of rhetoric and composition from ancient times to the information age*, p. 371-372. Routledge.
- Harker, M. (2007). The Ethics of Argument: Rereading Kairos and Making Sense in a Timely Fashion. *College Composition and Communication*, 59(1), 77-97.





Frida Hviid Broberg, Thore Keitum Fisker, Frederik Appel Olsen

## How to be heard when no one is listening: Heckling as rhetorical resistance

Acts of civil disobedience such as heckling (speech interruption), sit-ins, and roadblocks have played important parts in social movements such as the suffragettes (UK) and the civil rights movement (USA) and continue to play important parts in contemporary pro-Palestine and climate movements internationally (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Malm 2021; Fisher 2024). On March 8th 2024, which marked the International Women's Day, pro-Palestine activists interrupted a speech given by the Danish prime minister, Mette Frederiksen, at an event hosted by KVINFO (Denmark's knowledge center for gender and equality). The activists engaged in the non-violent activist practice of heckling, which eventually led to the prime minister leaving the event. The protest was filmed and circulated widely. Organizers as well as politicians categorized the protest as 'undemocratic' and 'counterproductive.' If analyzed as a persuasive act and evaluated according to the ideals of deliberative democracy, scholars would likely draw the same conclusions.

While rhetorical scholarship occasionally praises the oratory of civil disobedience activists such as Martin Luther King, Jr. (see e.g., Leff and Utley 2004), we argue rhetoric has a hard time dealing with the actions of the same activists, which are subjected to persuasive standards. While persuasion and identification are perceived by many as foundational concepts in the field of rhetoric, we argue they also blind our field when it comes to understanding how acts of civil disobedience function. In this paper we sketch a conception of protest acts that function not primarily on a basis of verbal persuasion but material tension (Muarry 2021; 2022) and the accumulation of affective energy as an effect of rhetorical circulation (Edbauer 2005; Ahmed 2004). Finally, inspired by a range of scholars with similar arguments (Young 2001; Mouffe 1999; Fraser 1990; Peters 2001), we argue deliberative democracy's sympathetic ideal of keeping the conversation going (Bengtsson and Villadsen 2024) also effectively transforms already inaudible voices into noise (see Rancière 2001).

### References

- Ahmed, Sara. 2004. "Affective Economies." *Social Text* 22 (2): 117–39.
- Bengtsson, Mette, and Lisa Villadsen. 2024. "It's Not (Only) about Getting the Last Word: Rhetorical Norms of Public Argumentation and the Responsibility to Keep the Conversation Going." *Argumentation* 38 (1): 41–61.
- Chenoweth, Erica, and Maria J. Stephan. 2011. *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*. 1st ed. Columbia Studies in Terrorism and Irregular Warfare. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Edbauer, Jenny. 2005. "Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 35 (4): 5–24.
- Fisher, Dana. 2024. *Saving Ourselves: From Climate Shocks to Climate Action*. Society and the Environment. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Fraser, Nancy. 1990. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text*, no. 25/26, 56.
- Leff, Michael C., and Ebony A. Utley. 2004. "Instrumental and Constitutive Rhetoric in Martin Luther King Jr.'s - Letter from Birmingham Jail." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 7 (1): 37–51.
- Malm, Andreas. 2021. *How to Blow up a Pipeline: Learning to Fight in a World on Fire*. Brooklyn, New York: Verso Books.



- Mouffe, Chantal. 1999. "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?" *Social Research* 66 (3): 745–58.
- Murray, Billie. 2021. "Reimagining Activism as Combative." In *Reimagining Communication: Action*, edited by Veronika Tzankova and Michael Filimowicz, 1st ed., 15–33. United Kingdom: Routledge.
- . 2022. "The Anti-Democratic Consequences of the 'More-Speech' System." *Communication and Democracy* 56 (2): 198–204.
- Peters, John Durham. 2001. *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Rancière, Jacques. 2001. "Ten Theses on Politics." Edited by Davide Panagia and Rachel Bowlby. *Theory & Event* 5 (3).
- Rand, Erin J. 2008. "An Inflammatory Fag and a Queer Form: Larry Kramer, Polemics, and Rhetorical Agency." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94 (3): 297–319.
- Young, Iris Marion. 2001. "Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democracy." *Political Theory* 29 (5): 670–90.



**Kara Mae Brown**

## **Teaching Geographic Rhetorics through Digital Maps**

Writing, even that which in the end is delivered in a digital form, is an embodied, spatial practice. What do digital texts mean for our understanding of writing about place? How might writers use digital tools to engage with space and place? What arguments are made, lost, or changed in the translation from the physical, geographical place to the digital?

In *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Difference* (2004), Nedra Reynolds includes mapping as a part of “geographic rhetorics,” as a way to understand “the sense of space and place that readers and writers bring with them to the intellectual work of writing, navigating, remembering, and composing” (p. 176). This presentation will discuss a pedagogical intervention in which students visit a university nature reserve for an overnight camping trip, engage in lectures about the ecology of the place, and visit a particular site within the reserve at different times of day in order to contribute a written profile of that site to a digital map of the reserve, highlighting a particular ecological or geographic feature.

This presentation will feature an overview of the digital mapping assignment, as well as an analysis of students’ reflections on the experience, trying to understand how the map works as a representation of the physical place, their own role and identity within that place, and how the map as a whole constructs an argument about the place for readers. Participants will come away with practical knowledge about digital mapping assignments as well as an understanding of the complex interactions between place, text, and digital representations.



Agnieszka Bryła-Cruz, Martin Hinton, Miriam Kobierski, Weronika Olkowska

## **Spiritual identities – The expression of religious identity and affiliation through argumentation**

In this study we examine how identity is affirmed through the use of arguments in religious discourse. We consider both the structure of the arguments employed and the form of their presentation in terms of linguistic characteristics and rhetorical devices. The resulting analysis allows us to draw conclusions concerning identity arguments in general, as well as the particular use of argument in religious identity affirmation. Clear differences emerge amongst the speakers, however, suggesting that whilst some common themes can be extracted, there is much variety in the strategies and devices used within the genre.

The role of expressive arguments which function to promote identity has been discussed in the literature (Asen 2005, Goodwin 2007, Hinton 2016), but studied only a little (Hample & Irions 2015, Hinton 2024). Examples used in this talk include sermons and homilies from the Catholic priests Fr. Mike Schmitz and Fr. Peter Glas, as well as speakers from less traditional and hierarchical religious movements.

The typology of argument functions is taken from Hinton, Kobierski, Olkowska, & Sroka (forthcoming) and includes Expression as one of the five main argument functions. Within the expressive category are a number of sub-functions, such as including in or excluding from certain groups, as well as the confirmation of identity. Our study illustrates the range of these sub-functions across the considered texts and reassesses the functional types in the light of their analysis.

As expected, our study reveals a variety of arguments based on testimony and we examine carefully their different forms, comparing arguments from authority with arguments from personal experience and arguments from scripture. We suggest that arguments concerned with an individual's core beliefs almost inevitably carry with them an expressive component, but that the form of expression is both varied and revealing.

### **References**

- Asen, R. 2005. Pluralism, Disagreement, and the Status of Argument in the Public Sphere. *Informal Logic* 25 (2): 117–137.
- Goodwin, J. 2007. Argument Has No Function. *Informal Logic* 27 (1): 69–90.
- Hample, D., and A. Irions. 2015. Arguing to Display Identity. *Argumentation* 29: 389–416.
- Hinton, M. 2016. Identity as argumentation: Argumentation as identity. In Ciepiela, K. (ed.) *Identity in Communicative Contexts*. Łódź Studies in Language Vol.48, pp 177–188. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Hinton, M. 2024. Argumentation and Identity: A Normative Evaluation of the Arguments of Delegates to the COP26 UN Climate Change Conference. *Argumentation* 38: 85–108.
- Hinton, M., Kobierski, M., Olkowska, W., & Sroka, A. Forthcoming. Functions of Argument: Changing minds about what? *Proceedings, OSSA* 13.



Jarmila Bubikova-Moan, Margareth Sandvik

## Digital devices as facilitators of argumentation in educational contexts

Research on argumentation in classroom contexts has shown that young students' argumentation is often limited to short responses to teachers' initiatives (e.g. Bubikova-Moan et al., 2025). This may be because the teacher in whole-class interactions aims at giving every single student the opportunity to voice their opinions which restricts both individual and collective argumentation. However, previous studies on computer-supported collaborative learning have shown that technology can facilitate student's argumentation by providing an interactional space and design for argumentation (Asterhan, 2012).

A part of a larger project on critical thinking in primary school, the present study examines student discussions about space tourism in the seventh grade and addresses the following research question: "How does the use of digital technology facilitate young students' argumentation in whole-class settings? By drawing on transcribed video-recorded observations, we analyze the complexity and soundness of the students' argumentation in relation to the teacher's repeated use of Menti-meter during the discussions.

Our findings show that the teacher's digital design is relevant for the development of argumentation in the classroom. By creating several word clouds in Mentimeter with the same question during one lesson ("Is it ok to be a tourist in space for pleasure?") the students are encouraged to engage with counter-arguments on the issue and probe their knowledge together, thus developing more complex and sound argumentation.

### References

- Asterhan, C. S. C. (2012). Facilitating classroom argumentation with computer technology. Gillies, R. (Ed), *Pedagogies: New Developments in the Learning Sciences*. Nova Science
- Bubikova-Moan, J., Sandvik, M., & Jegstad, K. M. (2025). Arguing about environmental issues in primary school. In K. M. Jegstad, E. Andersson-Bakken, & T. Bjørkvold (Eds.), *Enacting critical thinking in primary school: Perspectives from the classroom*. Universitetsforlaget.



**Gabby Bunko**

## **Diagnosing Chronic Pain: Rhetorical Implications for Asignification**

Under the umbrella of the rhetoric of health and medicine, many scholars have pointed out the relationship between rhetoric and the diagnostic process. Judy Segal (2005) points out the rhetorical nature of patient/medical professional interaction and the role that persuasion plays in those diagnostic interactions while Lisa Keränen (2010) takes on the role of persuasion in a specific case study of breast cancer and the affects of the diagnosis process arguing that the relationship between doctor and patient is crucial for understanding and acting on diagnosis. Disability studies/rhetorics have also discussed the diagnosis process from both the angle of medicine and from the role that diagnosis plays in larger social contexts. Margaret Price (2024) discusses diagnosis and disability in academia, demonstrating that, regardless of diagnosis, those with disabilities experience space and time differently.

Together, these areas of study focus on identification processes between doctor and patient and social contexts. One aspect of the identification process they come back to often is what happens when the bodily experience cannot be truly represented through language to others. How can we talk about and further understand that asignification (Muckelbauer 2021) inherent in the diagnostic process, such as idiopathic diagnoses, particularly for difficult diagnoses like chronic pain? My dissertation interrogates the asignification that occurs with and as a result of chronic pain, how that asignification affects the diagnosis process and the way chronic pain is discussed both in medical and social discourse, as well as what that means for the isolation and non-recognition that compounds the pain experienced. My poster presentation will address my ongoing research into this area, looking specifically at the history of diagnosis and how it currently handles instances of asignification. Attendees will gain deeper insight into the rhetorical nature of the diagnostic process and how it is shaped by asignification.



Vipulya Chari

## Rhetoric of Development in Digital India

In February 2014, during his campaign for Prime Minister, Narendra Modi laid out a simple formula to promise a bright future: “IT + IT = IT: Indian Talent + Information Technology = India Tomorrow. Thus, internally, and globally, the IT sector can become a shining light of Brand India” (Modi 2014). The transformation into ‘India Tomorrow,’ he assured, would be all but guaranteed with his vision—that “India should become ‘DIGITAL INDIA’”(Modi 2014). Within his first one hundred days in office, Modi manifested this vision: announcing plans for a flagship federal policy named “Digital India,” imagined as an ambitious modernizing measure “to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy” (“Vision and Vision Areas | Digital India Programme” 2017).

This paper attends to the rhetorical work of state-led digitalization efforts to analyze these visions of transformation. I examine a multi-modal archive of state artifacts on Digital India including promotional films, mobile applications, radio shows, policy handbooks, and public statements by high-ranking Ministers—national addresses, op-eds, speeches at various governmental and non-governmental events (2014-2022). This archive represents the extensive institutional rhetoric on digitalization in contemporary India to demonstrate the emergence of a rhetoric of ‘digital development.’ I argue that rhetorics of digital development be studied as offshoots of long-standing techno-nationalistic imaginaries built around postcolonial preoccupations around science, technology, religion, and development. By tracing these discursive histories, and analyzing their reinvention throughout my archive, I show that the digital development promoted under Digital India promises a distinctly populist techno-nationalistic imaginary of India.



Silvia Corradi

## **Digital objects in the rhetorical situation: a legal-philosophical perspective**

The paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach combining rhetorical studies and philosophy of techno-science. It aims at investigating how the rhetorical situation (Bitzer 1968) changes with the introduction of digital objects. The inquiry aims to show that onto-epistemological changes introduced by digital objects modify constraints, one of the three elements of which the rhetorical situation consists of. Constraints are defined as “made up of persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence. Standard sources of constraint include beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives and the like” (Bitzer 1968, 8). The paper will investigate this issue as follows. The notion of “digital object” will be clarified, highlighting features coming especially from philosophy of techno-science. It will be recalled particularities of third-order technologies (Floridi 2022; Russo 2022), the occurred techno-linguistic revolution (Garapon, Lasségue 2019), the change in the representational schemes (Capone, Bertolaso 2021), the capacity of techno-scientific practices of promoting values (Ratti, Russo 2024). All these features lead to affirm that digital objects change significantly the way human beings know the world. Far from being neutral tools, digital objects require the subjects involved in a rhetorical situation to be aware of their features.





Johanna Couvée

## **Critical Rhetorics and Mental Health Literacy in the Digital Age: a Critical Pedagogy for Politicizing Care**

Mental health problems are acknowledged as the primary causes of disability globally. Public understandings of mental health influence whether or not and in what ways people take action and seek adequate help for their problems. Insufficient mental health literacy (MHL), i.e. poor understanding of mental health problems, has been recognized as a factor contributing to stigma and people's reluctance to seek help. To develop public MHL, a critical mental health pedagogy is deemed necessary to challenge dominant, individualizing, and often stigmatizing narratives about mental health, fostering a deeper understanding of the structural, cultural, and social determinants of well-being. In this digital age, social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok serve as powerful rhetorical spaces for shaping public discourse on mental health. User-generated content by mental health professionals and activists increasingly challenges biogenetic models of mental health by connecting it to broader societal determinants. These digital narratives not only normalize discussions about mental health but also politicize them, fostering counter-narratives of collective resilience, structural injustice, and marginalized agency. Based on a rhetorical cluster analysis of Instagram and TikTok accounts, this study examines how digital rhetoric is reshaping mental health literacy by revealing emergent strategies that prioritize relational understanding, cultural sensitivity, and social justice. These findings inform a framework for a new and critical mental health pedagogy, equipping individuals to navigate the complex dynamics of mental health in ways that are empowering, inclusive, and contextually grounded.



Shane Crombie

## **Punching Above Their Weight – the Rhetoric of Small Nations in diplomatic miss-matches**

Since Thermopylae smaller nations have picked fights with larger ones: inferior forces challenging seemingly insurmountable foes. These stories are told and retold as part of a peoples' identity. The records of such exploits often seep into more widespread linguistic symbolism, such as David and Goliath.

Numerous modern examples also exist. Belgium's resistance to the 1914 German invasion gained it the epithet "Plucky little Belgium" in Britain. This was used as a call to action; if "little Belgium" (not withstanding its vast colony in the Congo) could fight gallantly, the British Empire could hardly stand idly by.

While sometimes serious – the Icelandic Cod Wars involved live fire – others are regarded as humorous, 'spats' rather than incidents that threaten international order. For example, the albeit unintentional Swiss 'incursion' of Liechtenstein in 2007; dismissed by Vaduz as "it's not like they invaded with attack helicopters!"

In this context this paper examines a simmering contest between Lithuania and the People's Republic of China. For the last number of years ongoing tension has existed between them, primarily in response to Vilnius' attitude to Taiwan. This culminated with the downgrading of diplomatic relations by China in 2021.

The paper examines selected public statements, and the reaction to them, of the outgoing Lithuanian foreign minister Gabrielius Landsbergis. A point of interest is that Landsbergis' grandfather, Vytautas, was the first premier of post-soviet Lithuania, and a leading figure in the preceding independence movement.

Using fantasy theme analysis the paper will examine why small nations like Lithuania, with no possibility of unilateral victory, engage in bellicose or pre-bellicose rhetoric.

Such incidents are not 'kite-flying' exercises for bigger powers, nor are they for the amusement for the international audience. From a rhetorical perspective they are important texts, allowing innocuous nations both create domestic identification, and garner international recognition.



Yun Ding

## **Return to the Primitive: Rhetoric as Secondary Orality in the Digital Age**

The proliferating and promiscuous environment of digital media has given rise to a new hyperactivated world of oral rhetoric. Dubbed as “Secondary Orality,” digital rhetoric is characterized by a total casualness bordering on what Walter J. Ong has memorably described as “infantilism,” with its predictable “prepuberty rites.”

In addition to its “super-relaxedness,” a total irony pervades the Secondary Orality of digital rhetoric, which combines its rite of studious informality of “hey hey hey” and “wow wow wow” with shrewd exploitation of some pompous cultural clichés from the past. An overdose on cultural clichés would prepare for a rhetoric of hatred that is often sublimated in a patriotic fervor, assisted by a contrived humor that is often delivered in crude language. More specifically, Secondary Orality relies heavily on slogans, catch phrases and compulsive jingles that are aimed at nourishing a new popular romanticism with its avowed commitment to winning back the good old days.

The rhapsodic structure of Secondary Orality is therefore sustained by a limited economy of thought and expression. As such, Secondary Orality of digital rhetoric constitutes what Ong called, in *The Barbarian Within*, “the latest manifestation of popular un-think.”

This paper follows Ong’s lead in isolating some “formulaic devices” (rhetorical commonplaces) that manifest in the oral carnival of digital rhetoric, with a special reference to the first and second inaugural addresses by President Trump.



Jamie L. Downing, Jonathan Carter

## Generative AI and the reconfiguration of public memory

Generative AI has transformed how students learn about their worlds. To make history come to life, students are encouraged to chat with bots that respond as everyone from Aristotle to Babe Ruth. Although conversations are generally benign, platforms also enable users to seek darker company. While LLMs are famously error-prone, inaccuracies about the Holocaust are among the platforms' most common and troubling hallucinations. Unsurprisingly, a 2024 UNESCO report asserts that the integration of AI into daily life threatens the integrity of Holocaust memory and public memory more broadly.

Beyond instrumental uses, technologies serve as repositories of collective memory, preserving and shaping narratives about their own uses and functions (see Landsburg; Carter). Traditionally, public memory has been mediated by rhetorical circulations and negotiations of doxa (Bruner; Vivian). LLMs, however, circumvent these safeguards in two critical ways.

First, LLMs construct memory by aggregating content from across the web, including unregulated and extremist sources. As a result, the "memory" generated by LLMs risks becoming an amalgam of widely accepted public narratives and radical counter-narratives. Second, while some LLMs incorporate ethical guidelines, these safeguards are opaque, inconsistently applied, and frequently circumvented, leaving the ethics of memory to the discretion of programmers and adept users who can exploit the system.

Our presentation examines how generative AI rhetorically remediates public memory of the Holocaust, focusing on the normalization of Holocaust denial and distortion. Drawing from published interactions with AI chatbots, personal experimentation, and analyses of the ethical training processes behind these models, we reveal how LLMs not only misrepresent historical truths but also actively participate in renegotiating memory. Finally, we consider the broader implications of shifting technology's role from a passive repository of memory to an active agent in reshaping collective memory.

### References

- Bruner, Michael Lane. *Strategies of remembrance: The public negotiation of national identity in Germany and Canada*. University of Washington, 1997.
- Carter, Jonathan S. "Transindividuating nodes: rhetoric as the architechnical organizer of networks." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 49, no. 5 (2019): 542-565.
- Landsberg, Alison. "Prosthetic memory: total recall and blade runner." *Body & Society* 1, no. 3-4 (1995): 175-189.
- UNESCO. *AI and the Holocaust: Rewriting history*. UNESCO, 2024.
- Vivian, Bradford. *Commonplace witnessing: Rhetorical invention, historical remembrance, and public culture*. Oxford University Press, 2017.



Foteini Egglezou

## **Thinking... Expressing... Communicating: Rhetorical Games in Primary Education. Familiarizing Students with Rhetoric through a Primary Education Rhetorical Festival**

This study highlights the organization of a rhetoric festival for primary school students (aged 10–12) in Greece, initiated in 2018 by the Institute of Rhetorical and Communication Studies of Greece (HIRCS) in collaboration with the Cultural Programs Coordinators of Primary Education Directorates in the Attica region. The festival, the first of its kind in Athens, introduces rhetoric at an earlier educational stage than traditionally expected and fosters students' engagement in rhetorical skills through playful activities.

The festival is based on the educational program “Thinking... Expressing... Communicating: Rhetorical Games for Primary School Students,” which has been approved for the last six consecutive years by the Greek Institute of Educational Policy. Through this program, students engage gradually and experientially with the art of rhetoric via activities such as: a) meaningful oral interpretation, b) impromptu speech production, and c) argumentation through interactive and playful formats (e.g., fishbowl debates, fairytale trials etc.).

These activities cultivate multiple literacies, including linguistic, textual, academic, social, critical, and rhetorical literacy. Students also explore fundamental theoretical concepts related to rhetoric and communication, engaging with ancient rhetoricians who “offer advice” in innovative and interactive ways.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the festival adapted successfully to a virtual format, demonstrating its flexibility and relevance in a digital context. This adaptation also highlighted the importance of rhetorical literacy in helping students navigate the challenges of online communication and collaboration in an interconnected world.

To date, the festival has hosted 198 schools and 1,354 students from grades 4, 5, and 6, providing them with opportunities to explore the art of rhetoric. This study presents findings from 136 participating teachers, who completed post-event questionnaires. Teachers reported significant improvements in students' speech delivery, confidence, critical thinking, and communication skills.

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating elements of phenomenology and discourse analysis. Phenomenology is employed to understand the teachers' subjective experiences of the festival's impact on their students' communicative abilities. Concurrently, discourse analysis examines how teachers construct their narratives and meanings through the language they use.



Foteini Egglezou

## **“Equality in Civil Marriage, Amendment of the Civil Code, and Other Provisions”: Far-Right Populist Voices on Gender and Argumentative Strategies in Hate Speech**

In February 2024, the Greek Parliament passed the landmark bill legalizing same-sex marriage, titled Equality in Civil Marriage, Amendment of the Civil Code, and Other Provisions, with 175 votes in favor, 77 against, 46 abstentions, and 2 present. However, the bill's introduction and debate sparked fierce opposition during the consultation process, particularly from three far-right parties. Far-right MPs framed their objections through rhetorical appeals to Greek nationalist ideals, invoking the sanctity of homeland, religion, and family values. These arguments selectively critiqued Western and European influences, portraying LGBTQIA+ rights as a threat to Greece's cultural identity and sovereignty.

While parliamentary proceedings served as the primary platform for this confrontation, the discourse extended beyond legislative chambers. Digital platforms and media outlets amplified far-right populist rhetoric, allowing for the dissemination and reinforcement of these narratives in broader public debates. This intersection between traditional and digital spaces highlights the evolving dynamics of political rhetoric in shaping public opinion on equality and civil rights.

At the heart of these debates were the lived experiences, needs, and struggles of LGBTQIA+ communities, who encountered opposition framed within far-right populism. Gender, as a socially constructed and contested concept, emerged as a central target of these rhetorical strategies. This research examines how far-right populist voices deployed discursive tools to produce and legitimize hate speech explicitly and implicitly targeting gender and sexual diversity.

Drawing on the Proceedings of the Hellenic Parliament from February 15, 2024, this study employs Ruth Wodak's Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) within a broader postmodern framework of critical discourse analysis and rhetorical critique. It identifies the argumentative strategies used by far-right parties to frame hate speech against LGBTQIA+ individuals, exploring how these strategies permeate explicit and implicit forms of gender-based hate speech. By contextualizing these findings within the broader interplay between rhetoric and media, this study sheds light on the mechanisms through which far-right populism reinforces inequality and exclusion in both traditional and digital spheres.



Fabian Erhardt

## **Rhetorics of Knowledge: Probability, Plausibility, and Claims to Validity**

Recently, discussions about an independent epistemological perspective of rhetoric have gained momentum again (Bengtson 2024). This is partly because, in the digital age in so-called “knowledge societies”, the production of claims of validity of the most diverse kinds and qualities has become an omnipresent prerequisite for individual and social orientation and agency.

But how exactly does rhetoric draw on the concept of knowledge? This lecture assumes that the intersubjective plausibilization of claims to validity in multifactorial persuasive fields of tension is particularly relevant. In the classical definition of knowledge as a justified, true belief, rhetoric thus primarily concerns the component of justification. One of the central concepts in rhetorical epistemology is “probability”. Unlike in scientific contexts, where “truth” is often the focus, in rhetoric, “probability” involves presenting claims in a way that makes them plausible. At this point, crucial questions arise: Which rhetorical strategies of justifying claims of validity can be distinguished? What are the differences between strategies of justification within scientific discourses and those used in public discourses? And above all: How can we conceptualize the interfaces at which different strategies of justification have to be coordinated, for example in policy advice or science communication?

To answer these questions, the presentation proceeds in four steps: The first step is to distinguish the terms “probability” and “plausibility” and to secure them as basic concepts of any rhetorical epistemology. In a second step, a genuinely rhetorical concept of validity claims is developed, based on and in contrast to the works of Habermas and Perelman. In a third step, various persuasive strategies for making claims of validity plausible are differentiated and categorized. Finally, in a fourth step, the compatibilities and incompatibilities of the various strategies are reconstructed and explained using current examples of justifying political decisions in public debates.



**Daria Evangelista**

## **Human vs AI-produced Awareness-Raising Speeches on the Environment: A Comparative Analysis**

With the growing urgency of climate change, awareness-raising discourse plays a pivotal role in mobilizing public action. While human speakers have long been at the forefront of such efforts, the increasing use of artificial intelligence in content creation calls for a critical examination of its effectiveness in elaborating persuasive rhetorical techniques on the subject of the environment. This study presents a comparative analysis of a pilot corpus containing ten prominent environmental speeches by world leaders and activists, alongside ten AI-generated speeches crafted by ChatGPT on the basis of a specific prompt that reproduces key elements such as the context, speaker, audience, and register of the original human speeches.

The study focuses on the rhetorical facets of *ethos* (strategies that build credibility in the message), *pathos* (emotion-eliciting strategies), and *logos* (logical argumentation), drawing on the theoretical background set by Aristotle (2018), on more recent theories on rhetoric and argumentation (e.g. Perelman/Olbrechts-Tyteca 2008; Amossy 2006; Prandi 2023), and on already conducted linguistic analyses about public speeches (e.g. Santulli 2024). Within this theoretical framework, the analysis investigates with a qualitative and a quantitative methodology, followed by a holistic evaluation of the texts, how both human and AI-generated speeches employ rhetorical techniques to convey urgency and foster engagement with environmental issues.

The results show that while AI can replicate basic structural and logical elements (e.g., by using data effectively in the argumentation chain), it often falls short in establishing emotional resonance and credibility—the hallmarks of persuasive climate discourse (see e.g. Augé 2023).

### **Bibliography**

Amossy, R. (2006), *L'argumentation dans le discours*, Armand Colin.

Aristotle (2018), *The Art of Rhetoric*, Trans. R. Waterfield, Oxford University Press.

Augé, A. (2023), *Metaphor and Argumentation in Climate Crisis Discourse*, Routledge.

Perelman, C., & Olbrechts-Tyteca, L. (2008), *The New Rhetoric. A Treatise on Argumentation*, University of Notre Dame Press.

Prandi, M. (2023), *Retorica. Una disciplina da rifondare*, Il Mulino.

Santulli, F. (2024), "'Face-work night': Representations of Self and Other(s) in the Presidential Concession Speech", In: Held, G., *Face. (New) Facets of a Sociopragmatic Concept*, Brill.





Lydia E. Ferguson

## **Unjust Language Makes for Unjust Laws: Employing Rhetorical Analysis as a Tool for Social Change**

My primary area of research is the intersecting dynamics of race, sex, age, and enslavement in nineteenth and early-twentieth century American literature and culture, so when I moved to the south for graduate school (and now life), I began studying American history from a range of perspectives that required learning and unlearning twenty-plus years of misinformation and midwestern indoctrination. Currently, I am designing an open-call praxis on precarious subjects for students interested in restoring and preserving historic Black cemeteries, which are in constant danger of relocation to make way for developers who want the land. After listening to several presentations from local activists, I decided to facilitate ways for students from across courses, disciplines, and even departments, to be able to opt into participation in ongoing activism and research efforts in lieu of a course's standard assignments. In other words, the course objectives remain the same, but students may channel their efforts toward social work if they feel compelled to do so.

Ultimately, this praxis promotes interdisciplinary means of turning rhetorical listening into action. One example, which is the focus of this proposed work, is a prompt through which students (and community activists and researchers) learn to employ rhetorical analysis to identify oppressive language used in historical archives and contemporary government proceedings as a means of combatting ongoing systems of injustice. Ideally, this research will provide local organizers additional support in making arguments for historic protection and preservation by demonstrating that exposing versions of history that glorify and/or obscure disturbing truths is not a matter of woke-ness, but of humanness...of ethics. The unearthing of such hidden histories not only emphasizes how much we have yet to learn regarding the complex systems of racial oppression that built America—they also teach us how to navigate and mitigate the damage of modern legacies still rocking precariously in their wake.



**Sergio Figueiredo**

## **Rhetorical Design for an Ethical Metaverse**

This presentation will focus on a work-in-progress book addressing rhetorical and ethical approaches to the *metaverse* (Ball 2024; Au 2023), an emerging, conceptual virtual/augmented/extended reality digital platform. The authors, including this presenter, focus on applying “care” and “feminist” ethics to the design and development of the metaverse, grounding that work in twentieth- and twenty-first-century literary explorations of similar environments. The presenter will begin by providing an overview of the conceptual history of the metaverse through one short story and two films. Using this history, the panelist then discusses possible approaches to care-based design for embodied experience in the metaverse, applying that work to higher education contexts, community development in these environments, and possible governance structures that emphasize care-based community building. Throughout the presentation, the presenter will compare the care-based ethical design of the metaverse to contemporary social media environments (e.g., X, Facebook, and similar platforms) to suggest ways of avoiding the social, cultural, and political pitfalls that have become apparent in current digital social media environments. Finally, the presenter will address how rhetorical scholars focused on digital discourse might use what are called digital twins to test metaverse designs based on ethical frameworks.



James Fredal

## **Is Rhetoric the antistrophos of Dialectic? Narrative Reasoning in Ancient Forensic Oratory**

Rhetoric has traditionally been understood, on the authority of Aristotle, as an antistrophe of dialectic. This assertion has shaped and enriched our understanding of rhetoric for over two millennia. But this claim describes a model for, not the reality of ancient rhetorical practice. Like any model, it distorts and conceals as much as it reveals. In this paper, I will propose narrative, and specifically narrative reasoning as an alternative model for understanding ancient rhetorical argument. This essay describes the many forms of narrative that fill ancient forensic speeches, including not only the narrative of the case (the diegesis), but the narrative of the suit (similar to the stasis of *translatio*), narratives of the law (the *nomos*), narratives of the culture (understood as *eikos* and *doxa*), and the narratives of the proof (the *pisteis*). The latter is particularly associated with a dialectical and topical model of argument, described as a series of propositions for which, some things being so, something else results through them because they are true (Rhetoric ; Topics ). I will suggest a form of reasoning that departs from the familiar binary offered by Aristotle of *sullogismos* or *enthymēma* (often referred to as deduction) and *apogoge* or *paradeigma* (translated as induction or example). Narrative reasoning, I will argue, follows its own sequential form the differs from both the *enthymeme* and the example. After describing this and other differences between narrative reasoning as it takes place in ancient forensic oratory, and dialectical reasoning as described in Aristotle's Rhetoric and Topics, I conclude by proposing some advantages to a narrative model for ancient rhetorical argument.



Jonas Gabrielsen

## Orality in Danish courts

The interplay between rhetoric and law is as old as the disciplines themselves. Even today, we find in legislation wording and regulations that remind us of the interplay between the two fields – inviting both legal and rhetorical studies. A crucial example of this is § 148 in the Danish Administration of Justice Act (Retsplejeloven), which states: “Court proceedings shall be conducted orally. Writing is only used to the extent specified by law. Section 2: In oral proceedings, free lectures are used” (Retsplejeloven § 148, my translation and italics).

Obviously, what is stated here is that orality is the guiding principle of the administration of justice in Danish courts; as it is the case in civilised states in general and prescribed in human rights conventions, because it ensures publicity in judicial proceedings. But why is also the form of the pleading regulated, and what does it actually mean to give pleadings as ‘free lectures’? And, more importantly, what is the rationale of using free lectures when pleading?

Consulting the juridical literature commenting § 148, Section 2, one quickly realises that the paragraph is interpreted ambiguously: Some state that manuscripts are banned in Danish courtrooms, others that you should not read aloud your pleading from a manuscript. The unambiguous reading of the section increases, when we look at the rationale: Very different considerations are accentuated, also considerations that are, one could argue, more rhetorical than juridical in nature.

In the paper I first conduct a textual analysis of the different interpretations of the section found in juridical commentary works and legal textbooks. I include rhetorical literature on orality, where they are overlapping. Second, I present a qualitative study, where litigators not using manuscript in their pleadings are interviewed. The study reveals that there are practical benefits when pleading without manuscripts.



Caroline Glowka

## **Digital Praise in Professional Networks: AI-Generated LinkedIn Posts as Contemporary Expressions of Epideictic Rhetoric**

The emergence of generative AI tools has transformed professional self-presentation on social media platforms, particularly LinkedIn, where AI-assisted content creation intersects with classical rhetorical traditions. This paper examines AI-generated LinkedIn posts through the lens of epideictic rhetoric, analyzing how these digital artifacts serve as exemplars for praise, value reinforcement, and community building in professional networks.

Drawing on Rosenfield's (1980) interpretation of epideiktikos as more than mere presentation—rather as a manifestation of human excellence that might otherwise remain invisible—this study argues that AI-generated LinkedIn posts function as contemporary expressions of epideictic rhetoric. These posts celebrate individual achievements and create what McKeon (2005) describes as a “specific perspective” through demonstrative rhetoric, constituting professional values through rhetorical presentation.

The analysis reveals how AI-generated content employs traditional epideictic patterns identified by Tomlinson and Newman (2018), including metaphor, amplification, and repetition, while adapting these classical techniques for digital audiences. The transformation from epideictic to demonstrative rhetoric, as noted by Hauser (2006), takes on new significance in AI-generated content, where the “power of creating suggestions” becomes algorithmically enhanced.

Through thematic analysis, this research demonstrates how these texts fulfill Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's (1969) vision of epideictic rhetoric as strengthening “disposition toward action by increasing adherence to the values it lauds.” The study explores how AI tools facilitate what Sheard (1996) identifies as the creative potential of epideictic rhetoric, simultaneously reinforcing professional values while adapting them to contemporary contexts. These posts shape achievement perceptions through narratives that create shared understanding and reinforce community values.

This research contributes to understanding how artificial intelligence reshapes classical rhetorical practices in digital spaces, with implications for both rhetorical theory and professional communication in an AI-augmented future.



Peter Goggin

## **Island Diabetes and Diet: Rhetorical Regional Interfaces of Digital, Cultural, and Material**

In this paper I will define and use regional rhetorical theory to argue for the significance of media, place, and cultural context as it relates to diabetes and diet and how discourses on island diets and health can be engaged with and deliberated. Islands are harbingers for emerging global climate and health crises (Goggin, 2010). One of the greatest health challenges that many small island states face are high and increasing rates of diabetes. The International Diabetes Federation (2001) lists eleven small island nations among the top 15 countries with the highest rates of diabetes, over 20% of the population, both types 1 and 2. In Pacific islands the disease is endemic (Lancet, 2018), but the prevalence of diabetes in many other small island populations is a global concern. In the Caribbean, diabetes rates in St Kitts, Nevis, Barbados, Puerto Rico, and Cayman, to name a few, range from 13% to 16% of populations, among the highest worldwide. Among the causes of such alarming rates are: the multiple effects of media influences promoting lifestyle diets, processed imported food products, sedentary lifestyles, genetics, and availability and high costs of healthy foods (fresh fruit and vegetables, lean proteins, grains & legumes, etc.). For this presentation I will discuss specific cases of diabetes crises of selected small islands as a rhetorical interface of culture, colonialism, regional diets and digital influences. For example, the Bermuda Isles (population of 65,000) has one of the highest rates of diabetes (15.5%) of all other affluent countries in the OECD, (IDF, 2021). I am one of those statistical Bermudians with type 2 diabetes. The Bermuda Diabetes Association strongly advocates for what is generally termed the “Mediterranean Diet” as a significant component of diabetes prevention and management. But as I will address, even Mediterranean islands are seeing alarming rates of diabetes, especially with younger and ageing residents due to factors listed above (Šarac, et al., 2021).



Julius Graack

## **The role of parliamentary speeches on social media and its rhetorical implications: A case study of the ninth European Parliament 2019-2024**

The modern-day politician must incorporate traditional skills of speech delivery in parliamentary settings and modern capabilities of social media content creation in their rhetorical toolkit for full communicative success. There has been a lot of research on the rhetoric of parliamentary speeches, as well as on the role of rhetoric in social media. This presentation aims at dissecting the rhetorical interconnections between the two.

As a parliament with 24 official languages, limited representation in media and a debate setting which often leads to extremely low participation rates of the parliamentarians, audience expansion through social media would seem to be especially vital for the European Parliament. To reflect the ongoing growth of social media's importance in politics especially in the recent years I will be looking at the last legislative term from 2019-2024. The quantitative analysis will focus on the rhetorical display of MEPs' parliamentary speeches on social media (in particular on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and X/formerly Twitter) contrasting with their overall social media presence. Additionally, with support through interviews with (former) Members of the ninth European Parliament and their assistants, the paper will examine to which degree both the preparation and delivery of parliamentary speeches are actually influenced by their intended use for social media.

I will argue that while the actual audiences of parliamentary speeches in the European Parliament have for a long time gone beyond just the listeners in the plenary, the intended usefulness for social media has further accelerated and expanded this development of multi-level audience rhetoric. Ultimately, the conclusion of this analysis shall offer a more practical basis for an in-depth discussion on the societal value of this interconnectional relationship of social media and parliamentary speeches.



Tejan Green Waszak

## Pop-Culture, The Writing Classroom, and the Rhetoric of Hip-Hop

Many have championed the place for hip-hop in the college curriculum highlighting the genre as a “...part of the popular musical culture of the United States” (Lusted). With its roots in 1970s New York City, hip-hop’s influence extends globally. Vanessa Oswald points out in *Hip-Hop, A Cultural and Musical Revolution*, “As hip-hop culture became more widespread in American society, it also expanded its reach into different countries, with each country incorporating a bit of their own cultural heritage into the movement” (Oswald, 73). This far reach and dynamic impact continues to be a subject to be researched and the genre serves as a rich site of conversation in the classroom.

In this presentation, through engaging research within the areas of performance studies, writing studies, and Black digital rhetorics, I aim to showcase the advantages of hip hop in the writing classroom as a tool for teaching rhetorical strategy. I will focus on a few key artists with great impact on the genre (based on established metrics used to measure popularity such as streams, album sales, recognition) including Megan Thee Stallion, Kanye West, and Nicki Minaj, artists who I argue push their audiences in particularly important, if sometimes arguably unsettling ways. I will identify the relationship between hip hop and key objectives of the writing classroom identifying how hip hop can offer students an opportunity to examine different ways of communicating a message that accommodates to both traditional and innovative media spaces. I will also draw connections to social media, with specific focus on Instagram as an extension of the creative output of current popular hip-hop artists to demonstrate the far reaching potential of such digital spaces.

### Works Cited

Lusted, Marcia Amidon. *Hip-Hop Music*, ABDO Publishing Company, 2017.

Oswald, Vanessa. *Hip-Hop: A Cultural and Musical Revolution*, Greenhaven Publishing LLC, 2018.





Peter Oliver Greza

## **Digital Proxemics in Online Presentations: A New Dimension of Rhetoric in the Digital Age**

The ongoing digitalization has fundamentally transformed how we communicate, especially in professional contexts such as online presentations. This presentation explores how digital proxemics—the study of space in communication—affects rhetorical effectiveness. Incorporating an interdisciplinary approach, it combines insights from rhetoric, space philosophy, and psychology to address the unique challenges and opportunities presented by digital communication spaces. The presentation will introduce a theoretical framework that integrates these diverse perspectives to develop a deeper understanding of how spatial configurations influence interactions and persuasion in digital environments. This exploration is crucial for laying the groundwork for more effective communication strategies in an increasingly digital world, particularly in designing encounters that enhance engagement and understanding.



Leo Groarke

## Images, Provenance, and Digital Acts of Arguing

The advent of digital communication has ushered in an era in which arguers may easily create, alter, and distribute images. One result has been a boom in visual arguing. In a constantly evolving way, it has emerged as an increasingly popular way to use powerful images produced in a myriad of ways. Ironically, the technological advances that have fostered the rise of visual arguing have at the same time raised doubts about its reliability, for they are frequently used to promote persuasive but misleading images in public discussion and debate.

In an attempt to further recent scholarship on visual (and multimodal) arguing, I suggest two ways in which rhetoric can manage the interpretive and assessment challenges inherent in the rise of visual arguing.

First, by developing a fuller theoretical account of the meaning of visual elements that define visual arguing. Semiotics has made headway in this regard, but rhetoric needs the development of a more focused account of visual meaning which explains visual argumentation schemes, visual fallacies, and visual tropes. I will illustrate this point with some common, but ignored, patterns of visual inference that illustrate the kinds of complexity we need to better understand.

Second, I suggest provenance as a key concept which can be the basis of attempts to assess visual acts of arguing. I understand appeals to it as a form of ethotic evaluation that can establish (or undermine) the credibility and persuasiveness of visual appeals.

I will apply the provenance approach to two controversies that have arisen over images (thumbnailed below) which have been used (i) in environmental advocacy on plastic pollution, and (ii) in a Mother's Day photograph of the Princess of Wales released by the British royal family (roundly criticized as a "fake" photograph).





Hans Hansen

## Discursive environments and normative pragmatics

In this presentation I develop the concept of cognitive environment (Sperber and Wilson, 1985; Tindale, 2004), into a broader concept to fit the practice and evaluation of argumentation. This wider concept I call a discursive environment. It combines the idea of cognitive environments with the concept of psychological climates. By 'a psychological climate' I mean the attitudes, values and social atmosphere in which argumentation takes place. Just as our natural climate affects the things we do and the things we can do, so do the psychological climates in which we conduct our argumentation affect the arguments we do and can make and how we understand them. Importantly, as the last 50 years have taught us, our behaviour as human beings affects the environments in which we live; similarly, our argumentation behaviour can affect the discursive environments in which we conduct our argumentation business, and this in turn can affect the outcome of our argumentations.

On the Pragma-dialectical model, rhetoric's role in argumentation is to advance the interest of individual arguers as far as possible within the normative framework of a critical discussion (van Eemeren 2018). However, if we want our argumentation to promote democratic outcomes we will have to modify our practice such that it serves, not individuals, but the community of arguers. Here we can build on the ideas of inclusive democracy proposed by Iris Young (2000). So, if we consider rhetoric to be the use of practical reasoning that influences arguers then rhetoric should take on the role of fashioning a fair discursive environment. Building such an environment must be done from the ground up rather than by the imposition of some prior normative template. Insights from recent work in normative pragmatics (Kauffeld, Goodwin, Jacobs) reinforces this proposal and gives us suggestions for how to build optimal discursive environments.

### References

- Goodwin, Jean. 2007. "Argument has No Function." *Informal Logic* 27, no.1: 69–90.
- Jacob, S. 1999. "Argumentation as Normative Pragmatics." In *Proceedings of the Fourth ISSA Conference on Argumentation*.
- Kauffeld, F. 2003. "The Ordinary Practice of Presuming and Presumption with Special Attention to Veracity and the Burden of Proof." In *Anyone Who has a View. Theoretical Contributions to the Study of Argumentation*.
- Sperber, D., and D. Wilson. (1986). *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Tindale, C.W. (2004). *Rhetorical argumentation: Principles of theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Van Eemeren, Frans H. (2018). *Argumentation Theory: A Pragma-dialectical perspective*. Cham: Springer.
- Young, Iris M. (2000) *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford University Press.



**Randy Allen Harris, Rency Luan**

## **The Rhetoricon**

This presentation will report on a large-scale research project anchored in an ontologically structured database that holds instances of language annotated for rhetorical figures. Its features include

- A taxonomy of figures classified by
  - Traditional categories (schemes, tropes, figures of thought, and moves)
  - Linguistic domains (phonological, morphological, lexical, semantic, pragmatic, and discourse)
  - Neurocognitive pattern biases (analogy, correlation, meronymy, opposition, scale, repetition, position, addition, omission) (Harris, 2017)
- An annotation protocol (Harris et al., 2018)
- A focus on collocation (figures that preferentially co-occur)
- A web infrastructure
  - An administrative portal, for populating and editing the database
  - A public site, for displaying our research results and theoretical commitments
- A citizen-science game for harvesting annotated instances. (Atienza et al., 2020)

The research goals of the project include

- Probing the form/function alignments of rhetorical patterns, as introduced to contemporary scholarship by Jeanne Fahnestock (especially 1999, 2005, 2011)
- Supporting figure-detection research (Dubremetz & Nivre, 2018; Kühn et al., 2024; Kühn & Mitrović, 2024)
- Supporting neurocognitive rhetoric research (Kara-Yakoubian et al., 2022)
- Building training sets for Machine Learning algorithms.



Heather N. Hill

## Rhetoric in Crisis: The Value of Rhetorical Education in the Age of AI

Rhetorical education (and its related field of writing studies) is having an existential crisis. This may sound overly dramatic, but with the advent of generative AI such as ChatGPT and others, we must begin asking ourselves: Why do we exist? What is the purpose of our field if AI can do everything that we typically teach our students? The purpose of this presentation is to discuss what rhetorical education still has to offer that large language models can't do, what we can still teach our students that will benefit them when the landscape of rhetorical education is changing rapidly. Focusing on rhetorical concepts such as ethos, kairos, genre, ethics, voice, and audience awareness, this presentation will discuss what AI can't do, and thus what we, as rhetorical educators, can still offer our students. While the advent of AI may change the ways that we teach and use rhetoric, rhetorical education is as important or even more important now than it ever has been. Teaching students to think critically about rhetoric in an age of AI is vitally important to their future success in academics as well as in professional and social settings. Along with this, a major challenge is to justify why we exist to people outside our discipline. How do we convince students as well as academic stakeholders that our discipline is still needed? What arguments can we make in the face of very real threats of having our programs and thus our jobs cut? In the end, this presentation is an argument for why we, as a field, are still needed and should continue to exist.



## Judy Holiday

### **Dear Folks: Whaddya Know—Still Alive!**

On August 5th 1944, my father Carl Glassman (a 20-year-old Jewish American bomber pilot) penned a letter from Belgium to his parents in New York to let them know that he was still alive—despite the fact that he and his crew had been shot down on the German/Netherlands border four months previously. My father would spend more months missing until the allies arrived, surviving with the help of brave Europeans. Fannie and Charles Bivort, two such individuals, took care of my father for more than 3 months. My father felt such a debt of gratitude to the Bivorts, he visited them for the rest of his life, and took his children when I, the youngest, was sixteen. Clearly, I knew the basics of my father's story despite his reluctance to share details, yet I didn't fully appreciate the thoughtfulness and rhetorical savviness that went into the letter until a digital copy was shared with me in 2019.

This RSE presentation rhetorically analyzes the letter and unpacks its recent impact on me. Terrifically funny with a heavy use of enallage, the humor in the letter “Whaddya Know—Still Alive” demonstrates a palliative approach to war. In knowing that the letter would not be sent until after the war and that he might be dead by then, my father provided his parents with something to hold and re-read, a tangible artifact designed to offset the anguish and parental self-doubts my paternal grandparents would have suffered. The letter, now digitized, has had a surprising palliative effect on me as well, helping me better understand the complex relationship I had with my father, much as Jim Corder explains in “Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love” that our stories are much more than mere stories—they are arguments that define and regulate our relationships.



**Michael Hoppmann, Michael Phillips-Anderson**

## **Does the Universal Audience (still) laugh?**

Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca asks – and tentatively answers – the question “Does the universal audience laugh?” in her 1974 work *Le comique du discours*. This question may seem trivial, almost quaint – after all, why would we care about the hypothetical reaction of a hypothetical group of people? Yet on closer examination, it quickly touches the core of the relationship between modern conceptions of reasonableness and humor. The former requires a careful analysis of the concept of universal audience and the latter an examination of contemporary humor models. And while Olbrechts-Tyteca's expertise on the universal audience is unquestionable, a lot has happened in the development of humor theory over the last fifty years – thus giving reason to revisit the question she posed.

In this paper, we offer a thorough analysis of those qualities of the universal audience (as presented across the New Rhetoric Project) that are relevant to humor theory. These include their assumed knowledge, approach to information assessment, conditions for sound judgment, expected level of critical listening, and attitude towards opposing viewpoints.

These qualities of the universal audience in turn are then contrasted with the requirements that recent humor models postulate or imply for the creation of mirth in an audience. The key models we consider are: 1) Lucie Olbrecht-Tyteca's own concept of comic discourse, 2) traditional superiority models, 3) linguistic ambiguity models (SSTH and GTVH), 4) the Benign Violation Theory (BVT) model, and 5) Hurley et al.'s 2011 Belief Debugging Theory (BDT). Each of these models take distinct starting points, but they all include specific requirements for (real) audiences that stand in interesting tension with the (hypothetical) universal audience. Given that humor is generally bound by contextual, cultural, and temporal considerations, we ask: does the universal audience laugh? The answer depends a lot on what you think (should) create mirth in humans.



Hsuan-I Huang

## **AI for “Humanity”: Rhetorical Framing in Sam Altman’s Congressional Testimony**

The launch of ChatGPT by OpenAI in 2022 marks a significant milestone in the evolution of artificial intelligence (AI), profoundly impacting daily work practices and broader social dynamics. Yet, amid the gold rush of AI applications and investments, public understanding of this technology remains limited, with its capability and conceptual definition—crucial for its governance—largely controlled by a handful of influential tech leaders. As one of the most prominent companies in this space, OpenAI continues to play a decisive role in both developing and defining AI technology.

Through textual and contextual analysis, this study examines OpenAI CEO Sam Altman’s May 16, 2023 congressional testimony, a pivotal proceeding joining tech industry leaders and government regulators to address AI oversight. I explore the rhetoric employed in framing AI’s trajectory, potential, and challenges, revealing three key themes: the positive yet nebulous framing of AI progress alongside human adaptability, the ambiguous conceptualization of “humanity” as the presumed beneficiary of AI advancement, and Altman’s construction of his public persona. Such persona notably balances technological optimism with measured concern, maintaining decorum through a participatory attitude in the discussion and a welcoming gesture toward regulations despite offering rare pieces of information and few concrete policy recommendations. Synthesizing these perspectives, this paper aims to contribute to the scholarly understanding of how tech actors’ narratives shape public perception and discussion of AI development and its societal implications.





Brooke Hubsch

**Atextual, Ahistorical, and Unjustifiable:  
Strategic presentations and re-presentations  
of judicial precedent in *Trump v. United States***

On July 1st, 2024, the Supreme Court granted sweeping immunity to former and future presidents of the United States. *Trump v. United States* is a landmark case legally speaking for how it will change the exercise of power by the president of the United States, but it is also a landmark case rhetorically speaking for how it shows both the persuasive, legitimizing authority of precedent and the potential for deliberate, systematic abuse of the technical nature of judicial precedent. The majority opinion presents the precedent binding its unprecedented decision through a particular telling of the separation of powers within the Constitution, the framers' intent regarding a bold and energetic executive branch, and the few available cases regarding the constraints on executive privilege and immunity. Philosophically similar cases are cited in the majority opinion regarding whether a sitting president could be subject to civil suits for actions taken within the scope of presidential authority and whether a sitting president's executive privilege was "absolute" and "unqualified." However, this lack of an explicit precedent which the majority would have to overturn (despite significant implicatures that a president is not absolutely immune) left open the door for the majority to present that precedent as if it were merely acting in accordance with *stare decisis* rather than blatantly violating it. In this paper, I contrast the majority opinion's presentation of each of its sources of authority with Justice Sotomayor's re-presentation of those same sources in her dissent, which challenges the precedential authority upon which the majority claims to stand. A side-by-side analysis of the majority opinion and Sotomayor's dissent reveals how the rhetorical framing of precedent both constitutes and undermines judicial authority, and I consider the consequences of conflicting frames for public interpretation of the court's decision.



Christine Isager

## **Rhetorical Citizenship, Elsinore: Towards a site-specific reinvention of citizen journalism**

This paper presents an investigation of citizen journalism as currently practiced at a local newspaper in the municipality of Elsinore in Northeastern Denmark. While the rise of citizen journalism across the world since the 2000s has been closely tied to the spread of social media technologies, most strikingly in the form of footage from mobile phones at street level in zones of conflict, (Bruno, 2010; Mathiesen, 2010; Rosen, 2020), the Elsinore Daily has kept the label of citizen journalism reserved mainly for written material. By 2017 an estimated 50-70 citizen journalists were actively contributing to the paper: "Most of these have no professional background as journalists but are driven by an impulse to share stories about their interests and neighbourhoods" (Krarup, 2018). Today, the paper itself introduces its citizen journalists as people making their "talent, insight, eyes, and ears available, writing articles to the paper about things that they experience or are engaged with" (Josephsen, 2023). By way of close readings of published content as well as interviews with citizen journalists, I explore and discuss the community-building potential of these site-specific writing practices. In conclusion, I suggest to reinvent citizen journalism within the framework of rhetorical citizenship (Kock & Villadsen, 2015; Villadsen, 2024) rather than mapping these practices on conceptions of (professional) journalism. Ideally, such a reinvention would be developed further in collaboration with local professional and citizen journalists, possibly as a form of action research project, in order to resolve some of the tensions involved when amateur and professional practices merge and, in the process, to motivate more fellow citizens to engage in continuous co-coverage of their local community.

### **Literature**

- Bruno, N. Oct. 26, 2010. The use of citizen journalism by traditional media. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (RISJ)
- Josephsen, O. May 8, 2023. *Spilleglæde lyste*. Helsingør Dagblad.
- Kock, C., & Villadsen, L.S. (eds.) 2015. *Contemporary Rhetorical Citizenship*. Leiden University Press.
- Krarup, A. 2018. Helsingør Dagblad og borgerjournalistik. Lex: Danmarks Nationalleksikon:
- Mathiesen, S.K. 2010. Når borgere bliver journalister. *Retorikmagasinet* 77:10-13.
- Rosen, J. 2020. The People Formerly Known as the Audience. In: M. Mandiberg (ed.), *The Social Media Reader*. New York University Press.
- Villadsen, L. 2024. "Propaedeutic Rhetorical Citizenship: Deweyan Impulses in Danish Community-Building." In: K. Bjørkdahl (ed.), *The Problematic Public : Lippmann, Dewey, and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century*. University of Pennsylvania Press.



Stefan Iversen

## The Rhetoric of Personalized Synthetic Narration

The ongoing proliferations of digital systems for producing and modifying media and data through algorithms, powered by large language models, natural language processing and generative adversarial networks, call for reconsiderations of key concepts in the humanities. This call is exemplified by recent special issues, addressing how AI can become an object of or method for rhetorical criticism (Rhetoric Society Quarterly 54:3, 2024) and how AI challenges notions such as text (Poetics Today 45:2, 2024), literacy (Reading Research Quarterly 59:4, 2024), and authorship (American Literature 95:2, 2023). Whether understood as a rhetorical event (Phelan 2017), a sensemaking tool (Fisher 1987; Herman 2009), or a semiotic structure (Abbott 2009) ideas about what a narrative is and how it functions are likewise challenged by these technological evolutions. Generative AI is not merely an ecology or platform for telling, not merely an infrastructure. Aided by but not reducible to prompting, generative AI produces semiotic artifacts that tell stories. Because of AI-powered semiosis, there is now a call to study not only the rhetoric of storytelling in the digital, but also the rhetoric of storytelling by the digital.

This paper sets out to investigate the rhetoric of a specific form of prompted storytelling in the shape of situations where a human through the use of a text-prompt interface feeds directions into a large language model in order to have it produce a narrative about or tailored to a specific person. Such instances of personalized synthetic narration will be investigated both as particular storytelling practices and as vehicles for continued reflections on what the influx of generative AI could mean for rhetorical theorizations about the nexus of narrative, identity constitution, and agency.



**Anna M. Kielbiewska**

## **User's privacy management in social media as a tool for shaping ethos**

The category of privacy in the area of the image of public figures is related to the development of mass media and their ubiquity. The private and public spheres operated separately at a time of no photojournalists, paparazzi or social media that allowed insight into various aspects of the lives of its users. In times of mediatized reality, we already know that skillful control of what is private and public can be an effective tool of persuasion in the area of ethos. In the article, I analyze how the categories of privacy and transparency are used to shape the image of leading politicians from various countries around the world and what persuasive goals are achieved thanks to the chosen communication strategy.



Gabrijela Kišiček, Agnieszka Bryła-Cruz, Martin Hinton

## Witchcraft in your lips? – Prosody as Persuasion in Advertising

In this study, we consider the way that elements of prosody are used in advertising texts to produce effects corresponding to the three classical strands of persuasion: ethos, logos, and pathos; as well as to invoke rhetorical devices usually considered to relate to verbal content, such as allusion and antithesis. By looking at the connection between prosodic features and persuasion we aim to draw conclusions which will assist in the interpretation of multimodal arguments featuring linguistic content expressed in speech and to illustrate the flexibility and continued relevance of the traditional rhetorical categories in the age of digital communication.

The links between aspects of prosody and characteristics lending ethos to a speaker have been frequently investigated, with qualities such as competence and honesty found to be inferred from certain attractive voices (Berry 1992), and studies have also shown that particular accents can provoke strong emotions in an audience, making them susceptible to persuasion by pathos (Peled & Bonotti 2019). Less understood, however, is the way in which features of voice can be used to express the argumentative content of a text, and thus persuade through logos, although some discussion of auditory arguments in which the sound by which the verbal message is delivered bears the reasoning itself has been conducted (Kišiček 2016, Kišiček & Hinton 2024), while the wider subject of multi-modal argumentation has been receiving great attention recently (Stöckl & Tseronis 2024).

By considering several examples of audio-visual persuasive texts, we are able to illustrate the range of effects that can be achieved and the variety of rhetorical and argumentative techniques with which they can be combined. We show that the features of accent, rate of speech, rhythm, and intonation, can all be employed with the goal of persuasion across a variety of contexts and genres.

### References

- Berry, D. S. (1992). Vocal types and stereotypes: Joint effects of vocal attractiveness and vocal maturity on person perception. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, Spring 1992, Volume 16, Issue 1, pp 41-54
- Kišiček, G. (2016). Prosodic features in the analysis of multimodal argumentation. *Argumentation and reasoned action: Proceedings of 1st European Conference on Argumentation*, eds. Dima Mohamed, and Marcin Lewinski, 629-643. Collage Publications: Milton Keynes.
- Kišiček, G., & Hinton, M. (2024). As Syllable from Sound: Evaluating Auditory Arguments. *Informal Logic*, 44(2), 135-165.
- Peled, Y., & Bonotti, M. (2019). Sound reasoning: Why accent bias matters for democratic theory. *The Journal of Politics*, 81(2), 411-425.
- Stöckl, H., & Tseronis, A. (2024). Multimodal rhetoric and argumentation: Applications—genres—methods. *Journal of Argumentation in Context*, 13(2), 167-176.



Marta Kobylska

## **Presidential Rhetoric of Non-Intervention: How US Presidents Justify Military Inaction in the Context of the New World Order**

This paper is an investigation into presidential rhetoric as used to argue against US intervention into the affairs of other countries in the context of the new world order. The analysis spans the crises in Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sudan, Georgia, and Ukraine which developed during the terms of Presidents George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama across nearly three decades of the post-Cold War era. The examination identifies the challenges facing presidential rhetoric from the perspective of Kenneth Burke's concepts of topoi and cluster analysis. It finds that presidential argumentation against intervention draws from the topoi of diplomacy, sanctions, humanitarian aid, and leadership and that presidential no-use-of-force justification revolves around binary opposition between military and non-military measures of crisis/conflict resolution. The findings support a claim that there is a degree of regularity in how military inaction is presented with the implication that the functions of the rhetoric of non-intervention for the decisions not to use force are similar across administrations in a number of important ways. The results provide insight into the understanding of intervention, the working of crisis rhetoric, and the meaning of inaction in the context of the new world order.



Solveig Kolstad

## Innovative ethos: How Technology Constitutes the Ethos of Successful Innovators

Rhetoricians have long discussed racial (Haas 2012) and gendered (Gurack 1994) bias in the field of science and technology. More recently, Hallenbeck (2024) brings a tech bias into this discussion, by problematizing the patent as a “genre of exclusion”, an “index of inventiveness”. With the consequence that new ideas, that are not understood as new technology and therefore can get patented, are overlooked and excluded. This indicates that ideas of what counts as innovation is defined by what is considered to be new technology.

To understand the influence new tech has on the discourse of innovation, it is relevant to look more into ideas of what constitutes an “innovator”, including looking at her use of rhetorical strategies. Rhetorical scholars (Navis and Glynn 2011; Van Werven 2019; Varas et al 2023;) have shown how ethos is key for understanding the success of the innovator, e.g. her chances at receiving funding. However, it remains to be explored how tech tropes are used to constitutes ideas about an innovative ethos.

In this paper I bring in recent discussions on ethos, being a constantly renegotiated quality, (Baumlin and Meyer 2018; Condit 2019; Offerdal et al 2021) to detangle how new technology constitutes the innovative ethos of the successful innovator. I do so by analysing how the ethos of entrepreneurs pitching is assessed, using three-minute pitches from newly established startups and the investor evaluations from the Danish public fund, Innovation Fund Denmark. I examine entrepreneurs’ way of constituting an innovative ethos through technological tropes as patents, prototypes and a techy persona, and how this is received by the fund. This has the potential to bring new insight into how ethos functions as an unofficial assessment criteria when assessing innovators potential on the basis of pitching.

### References:

- Baumlin, J. S., Scisco P. L. (2018) Ethos and its Constitutive Role in *The Handbook of Organizational Rhetoric and Communication*, First Edition. Edited by Ihlen and L. Heath., John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Condit, C. M., (2019) Public Health Experts, Expertise, and Ebola: A Relational Theory of Ethos In *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, Volume 22, Number 2, Summer 2019, pp. 177–215. Published by Michigan State University Press
- Gurack, L. L. and Bayer, N. L., Making Gender Visible: Extending Feminist Critiques of Technology to Technical Communication. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1994, pp. 257–70.
- Haas, A. (2012) Race, Rhetoric, and Technology: A Case Study of Decolonial Technical Communication Theory, Methodology, and Pedagogy. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2012, pp. 277–310.
- Hallenbeck, S. (2024) Decentering the Patent: Opportunities to Reframe American Innovation Rhetorics, *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 54:2, 127–141
- Offerdal, T. S., Just, S. N., Ihlen Ø. (2021) Public Ethos in the Pandemic Rhetorical Situation: Strategies for Building Trust in Authorities’ Risk Communication in *Journal of International Crisis and Risk Communication Research*, vol 4, no 2, 247–270
- Navis, C., Glynn, M.A., (2011). Legitimate distinctiveness and the entrepreneurial identity: influence on investor judgments of new venture plausibility. *Acad. Manag. Rev.* 36, 479–499.
- Van Werven, R., Bouwmeester, O., & Cornelissen, J. P. (2019). Pitching a business idea to investors: How new venture founders use micro-level rhetoric to achieve narrative plausibility and resonance. *International Small Business Journal*, 37(3), 193–214.
- Varas G., Sabaj, O, Spinuzzi C., Fuentes M., Gerard V., (2023) Value Creation in Start-Up Discourse: Linking Pitch and Venture Through Logics of Justification. *International Journal of Business Communication*.



Manfred Kraus

## **Is There a Speaker in This Post? The Eclipse of the Orator in Digital Social Networks**

In his essay “Is There a Text in This Class?”, in 1980 Stanley Fish famously exposed the reader-response-dependence of the meaning of a textual message. In today's digital social networks, however, it is not only the meaning of a posted text that becomes unstable, but the traditional rhetorical role of the speaker or orator (as the authorial sender of a message) likewise gets progressively blurred by several factors: The message is as a rule encoded and dispatched in written form, which disconnects it from its author and commits its interpretation entirely to the individual recipients, whose cultural and cognitive backgrounds may vary greatly and may thus yield diverse understandings and reactions that will mirror the recipient's rather than the sender's views and intentions. Recipients are even free to entirely ignore an unwelcome message. Moreover, since messages frequently get reposted and thus forwarded to audiences neither known to nor intended by the original sender, the progressively remote personality of the original sender dwindles from the context of the message and ceases to influence the expectations of the readers. This means that the ethos aspect of rhetorical communication wanes, whereas pathetic elements gain weight, since a message will be processed and propagated more willingly when it resonates with the emotional feelings of recipients and their preexistent ‘belief boxes’. This is why persuasive appeals aimed at a change of opinion tend to be ignored or repudiated, whereas endorsing opinions within a closed ‘filter bubble’ or ‘echo chamber’ are more happily embraced. The paper will address the reasons, mechanisms and effects of this sneaking eclipse of the orator role and the concomitant erosion of the rhetorical communication model in digital media and point to its dangers and threats to an unbiased exchange of arguments in the contemporary public sphere.





Jutta Krautter

## Digital Learning Media and Rhetoric: Enhancing Knowledge Transfer

Communicating knowledge is often more difficult than expected, even when one feels confident in their understanding. This difficulty often arises because understanding, learning, and thinking rely on diverse modalities—modalities that extend beyond verbal expression to include imagery, spatial reasoning, and other cognitive forms. Translating internal understanding into external communication is a key challenge.

This presentation will begin by exploring how awareness of these modalities can facilitate this translation process. Recognizing the modalities that supported one's understanding—whether visual, linguistic, or spatial—is crucial. Such awareness fosters strategies to make complex ideas clearer and more accessible. In educational and communicative contexts, this reflection forms the foundation for more effective knowledge transfer.

Digital learning environments offer unique opportunities by creating spaces where learners can consciously refine these modalities. These platforms allow for the visualization, organization and structuring of thought processes, improving both understanding and external communication and rhetoric. Research, such as Cortes et al. (2023), shows that spatial exercises not only improve cognitive skills but also linguistic and rhetorical abilities: Brain regions involved in spatial reasoning are essential for language processing and argumentation.

The connection between spatial thinking and verbal expression is long established. Ancient rhetoric highlighted the importance of spatial structures for organizing knowledge. Mnemonic techniques were used to anchor knowledge in spatial patterns, making it easier to retrieve and communicate effectively. These techniques demonstrate how spatial thinking supports not only comprehension but also the ability to communicate ideas rhetorically.

The presentation thus underlines the continuing relevance of rhetoric in the digital age. Effective argumentation requires clear structures, a refined sense of language and the ability to adapt complex ideas to the needs of the audience. Even as AI advances, the human capacity for creative and emotional communication remains indispensable.



Alexandra Kuzmina

## Systematic Malicious Use of Generative AI in Online Extremism

The paper explores the systematic malicious use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in online extremism (Tech Against Terrorism, 2023; Siegel, 2023; Siegel, 2024). It employs a theoretical and methodological framework that integrates theories around Online Extremism, Multimodal Argumentation and GenAI to investigate the ways in which AI technologies are shaping the landscape of online extremism (Gilbert, 2024; Groarke, 2002; Mardiana & Daniels, 2019; Stenzler-Koblentz, 2023). This research conceptualises extremism in argumentation using Hassan et al.'s (2023) definition, i.e. a radical position, either held by individuals or groups, aimed at challenging or changing the status quo. This position can relate to political or non-political matters and have positive or negative implications, characterised by a resolute adherence (Hassan et al., 2023). The paper examines how the development and deployment of AI might inherently encourage or facilitate extremist behaviours by offering new tools for propaganda and manipulation, shaping the understanding of power-relations, justice and crime as conveyed through the imagery (McClanahan, 2021). The paper analyses how AI-generated images act as arguments within online extremist communities, focusing on the visual elements, text, and layout that communicate, reinforce and persuade followers of extremist ideologies (Groarke, 2014; Waldek, 2021; Wintrobe, 2006). Such integration offers a comprehensive approach to studying the AI-generated extremist images, as it allows for a detailed examination of both the arguments put forward by these images and their social role. The methodological approach starts with a multimodal analysis of a corpus, assembled of AI-generated extremist imagery, leading to the (reverse) prompt-engineering, and argument reconstruction, with further insights inferred from contextual correlation of the findings. By doing so, this study contributes to the broader discourse on the ethical use of AI and offers insights into the prevention and mitigation of AI-assisted extremist activities online, as well as offers a new topical application of multimodal argumentation approaches in criminological research.



Louise Anna Ladegaard

## **“No one believes we dated” – lesbian YouTube as a tool for rhetorical citizenship**

This paper investigates how lesbians utilize YouTube to make themselves into rhetorical citizens, and how YouTubers use hypermediation and mediated authenticity to achieve an authentic sense of a virtual community among the lesbian minority group. I review the concepts of rhetorical citizenship, mediated authenticity and remediation. Furthermore, I analyze two videos by lesbian YouTubers, focusing on the stylistic features while applying the theory of mediated authenticity. The paper concludes that, through the platform of YouTube, some lesbians have the opportunity to acquire rhetorical agency—and become rhetorical citizens through participation in democracy. Through the use of authenticity puzzles, the lesbian YouTubers manage to create a sense of community and encourage lesbian viewers to actively participate—and unite them in shared experiences they can relate to such as shared cultural codes. Although lesbian YouTubers today play a big part in giving lesbians representation and reducing minority stress, there is a long way to go before lesbians have achieved the diverse representation they need to attain access to rhetorical citizenship through the platform of YouTube. Until BIPOC lesbians get more visibility, one will not be able to claim that lesbians have gained the full potential of rhetorical citizenship through YouTube.



Vivian Laurens, Michael Hoppmann

## **The rhetoric of hope and despair in peacebuilding: A Colombian case study of persuading self and others**

After more than sixty years of internal armed conflict, the Colombian Government and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP), signed a peace agreement in 2016 to end most open hostilities. But the hope that the peace agreement brought to the Colombian people was short-lived after it was narrowly voted down in a plebiscite the same year. Hope was further compromised by the resurgence of armed conflict, including the targeted assassination of civil society leaders and former FARC combatants, and a contentious presidential race.

This is the context for a group of meetings of Red SaludPaz (Health-Peace-Network), a national network of scholars and civil society leaders in support of the implementation of the peace accord. Its members share a strong dedication towards the peace process, as well as a fundamental hope for its success. Yet in the conversations immediately surrounding the 2018 presidential election (an election that sees a vocal opponent of the peace accord win the presidency), there is a palpable tension between hope for a brighter future, and despair about the political direction of the county.

In this paper we offer a close rhetorical analysis of these conversations, with a particular focus on explicit and implied differences of opinion and recurring rhetorical frames and reframing. Traditional rhetorical theory takes the telos or certum of the orator as a nuclear point – the idea that the speaker wants to persuade the audience of his or her point of view. In the Colombian case study this basic assumption gets challenged in an interesting way: speakers voice their despair in the hope of being opposed – thus creating a special form of non-adversarial difference of opinion. The discussants deal with this non-traditional challenge on variety of argumentative and rhetorical levels that create opportunities for productive disagreements, and that allow valuable insights into this form of discourse at large.



Carmen Lipphardt

## **Multimodal knowledge presentations as a future skill in a digitalised world**

The ability of experts to disseminate their knowledge to others is a fundamental aspect of knowledge societies (Schnettler & Knoblauch, 2007). A common format of knowledge communication is the digital presentation, which allows for the re-contextualisation of knowledge through its multimodal character (Bucher & Niemann, 2012; Lobin, 2013). The rhetorical communication of information includes a wide variety of means, including audiovisual ones, can be combined with each other simultaneously (Friendly & Wainer, 2021). A review of past developments in the technological field reveals a growing range of possibilities for engaging and effective knowledge communication. The expansion of rhetorical scope, as evidenced by the use of programs such as PowerPoint or video conferencing software for synchronous online presentations, demonstrates the necessity for speakers to comprehend and effectively utilise the evolving setting factors.

Nevertheless, the capacity to convey knowledge in a lucid and accessible manner, facilitating the acquisition of new insights by non-expert audiences, should not be confined to the academic sphere. In the domain of future skills, the capacity to present is regarded as a component of communicative competence (Ehlers, 2020). Consequently, it is vital for the education system to implement programmes for pupils (Lipphardt & Krautter, 2024). One example is the Germany-wide educational initiative Youth presents, which provides children and young people to learn how to present. The capacity to communicate rhetorically is similarly vital in an increasingly digitalised world. However, it is of importance that rhetorical education incorporates the ways in which communication technologies alter the framework for action. The conference paper focuses on methods for developing presentation skills, with a specific focus on aspects of multimodal vividness.

The paper demonstrates the significance of adopting an interdisciplinary approach (Herbein et al., 2021), which entails integrating theoretical perspectives on multimodal argumentation with those drawn from the field of educational science.



David Lombard

## **Toward A Multi-Actor Understanding of Mental Illness: A Rhetorical-Narratological and Ecological Analysis of Schizophrenia Narratives on Blogs**

Since the rise of the interdisciplinary field of health humanities at the turn of the century, patients' narratives have been more and more considered as a source of knowledge about the subjective dimension of mental illness. Such illness narratives have been traditionally published as autobiographies and memoirs, namely often solicited literary works with institutional dimensions, which makes their educational and therapeutic value questionable (Radden and Varga 2013, 100; Franssen 2020, 440). In the Digital Age, illness narratives have also been massively posted on blogs. Illness blogs have drawn scholarly attention, especially because illness blogging is unsolicited and interactive (visitors can comment on narratives), and has a uniquely emotional style (Heilferty 2009, 1540; Paal 2010, 54). For these reasons, their value is not necessarily literary but social since they create 'safe' spaces for expression and communities of sufferers, relatives, and strangers who, together, contribute to shaping our understanding of illness. In this presentation, I will analyze exemplary schizophrenia narratives from personal blogs (Pat Deegan, Blogschizo, Ta Gueule Boris, and Overcoming Schizophrenia) and blogs managed by associations (Pulse and Mind). Schizophrenia is still a medically and culturally misunderstood mental illness that is subject to stigmatization (Granger and Naudin 2022). Building on insights from life writing studies (Rak 2005; Smith and Watson 2014), rhetorical narratology (Phelan 2017; 2022), and the rhetoric of health and medicine (Ehrenfeld 2018), I will examine the rhetorical functions of schizophrenia blogs by focusing on how their narratives are constructed (the narrative elements and affects) and presented (the distinctive characteristics and the paratext of the sites) to address their audiences. In doing so, while adopting a rhetorical-ecological approach, I will show how blogs contribute to destigmatization and illustrate how knowledge about schizophrenia is produced, that is by multiple actors and agencies, not only psychiatrists but also patients and others.

### Works Cited

- Ehrenfeld, Dan. 2018. "Ecological Investments and the Circulation of Rhetoric: Studying the 'Saving Knowledge' of Dr. Emma Walker's Social Hygiene Lectures." In *Methodologies for the Rhetoric of Health & Medicine*, edited by Lisa Meloncon and Blake J. Scott, 41–60. New York and London: Routledge.
- Franssen, Gaston. 2020. "Narratives of Undiagnosability: Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Life-Writing and the Indeterminacy of Illness Memoirs." *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* 27 (4): 403–18.
- Granger, Bernard, and Jean Naudin. 2022. *Idées reçues sur la schizophrénie*. Paris: Le Cavalier Bleu.
- Heilferty, Catherine McGeehin. 2009. "Toward a Theory of Online Communication in Illness: Concept Analysis of Illness Blogs." *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 65 (7): 1539–47.
- Paal, Piret. 2010. "Illness Narratives: Patients' Online Discussions about Life after Cancer." *Elore* 17:49–66.
- Phelan, James. 2017. *Somebody Telling Somebody Else: A Rhetorical Poetics of Narrative*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press.
- . 2022. *Narrative Medicine: A Rhetorical Rx*. New York: Routledge.
- Radden, Jennifer, and Somogy Varga. 2013. "The Epistemological Value of Depression Memoirs: A Meta-Analysis." In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Psychiatry*, edited by K. W. M. Fulford, Martin Davies, Richard Gipps, George Graham, John Z. Sadler, Giovanni Stanghellini, and Tim Thornton, 99–116. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rak, Julie. 2005. "The Digital Queer: Weblogs and Internet Identity." *Biography* 28 (1): 166–82.
- Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. 2014. "Virtually Me: A Toolbox about Online Self-Presentation." In *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online*, edited by Anna Poletti and Julie Rak, 70–95. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press.



**Brent Lucia**

## **The Dystopian Imaginaries of ChatGPT: A Designed Cycle of Fear**

The advent of ChatGPT in 2022 catalyzed a wave of excitement and apprehension, but especially fear. My presentation examines the dystopian narratives that emerged after ChatGPT's release date. Through a critical rhetorical analysis of media responses, I uncover how dystopian imaginaries discussing ChatGPT become rhetorically constructed in popular, journalistic discourse. The presentation locates prevalent anxieties surrounding ChatGPT's unprecedented text-generation capabilities and identifies recurrent fears regarding academic integrity, the proliferation of misinformation, ethical dilemmas in human-AI interaction, and the perpetuation of social biases. Moreover, the presentation introduces the concept of "fear cycles" – recurring patterns of dystopian projections of the future in response to emerging technologies. By documenting and dissecting these fear cycles, I offer insights into the underlying rhetorical features that drive societal reactions to technological advancements. The research ultimately contributes to a nuanced understanding of how ChatGPT dystopian imaginaries pave the way for a particular future while grounding the present in predictable anxieties related to technological innovation.



Zoltan P. Majdik

## **Evaluating the Deliberative-Rhetorical Norms of Human ↔ AI Interactions and Interactants**

In this paper, we analyze how emergent AI technologies impact argumentative and dialogical strategies. Specifically, we study how challenges to two Habermasian validity claim types – theoretical truth and normative rightness – alter communicative engagements between human interlocutors and language model-driven AI interactants.

Language models are increasingly adept at persuasion (Carrasco-Farre, 2024; Dehnert & Mongeau, 2022; Huang & Wang, 2023; Matz et al., 2024), occupying functions of rhetorical practices that until now were only occupied by humans (Bai et al., 2023; Potter et al., 2024). As our use of generative AI technologies evolves, so will our need to engage with language models not only as lookup machines but also as functional deliberative interactants. One might, for example, interact with AI to learn about arguments in favor and against a political issue and, as part of such interactions, challenge the correctness of an assertion with the expectation that the assertion will either be rationally defended or transparently amended.

In deliberative argument contexts, skilled rhetorical dialogue recognizes and responds to such expectations. This study – an early version of which was presented as part of the “Persuasive Algorithms” conference in Tübingen, Germany – analyzes and compares how different AI language models respond to dialogical challenges to the truth and the normative rightness of assertions. Using a hybrid dataset of human-generated and synthetic prompts, we use OpenAI and Anthropic APIs to prompt a range of state-of-the-art language models with conversational prompts that lend themselves to dialogical, deliberative engagement. We then randomly present dialogical validity challenges to either the truthfulness or normative rightness of responses, and evaluate how different models’ response characteristics alter the rhetoricity – the constraints and affordances – of dialogical-deliberative engagement with language model-driven AI interactants.





Aleksandra Majdzińska-Koczorowicz

## **Academia-related memes as examples of visual metaphors. An analysis of picture-text dynamics**

Internet memes have become an omnipresent digital means of communication that fosters a number of functions: they are referential, emotive, persuasive, or even phatic. The communicative effectiveness of memes may be related to their multimodal configuration, which involves different semiotic codes to capture a lot of meaning in a compact form. This dense construction can communicate a lot thanks to multiple associative links engaging the recipient: memes are intertextual, self-referential, dependent on extra-contextual knowledge or pre-existing assumptions that are based on the speaker's viewpoint (Dancygier and Vandelanotte 2017).

In their bimodal semiosis, memes integrate verbal and visual elements with a varying rhetorical function of each. Memes have the power of making unrelated scenarios congruent thanks to skillfully mingling them into a meaningful syntagm. In such creations, the role of visual metaphor is not without significance. The device enables concept comprehension by manifesting a high degree of specificity, facilitating making an emotional appeal, and aiding cross-cultural accessibility (Forceville 2008). In highly visual-dependent structures, such as memes, visual metaphor becomes a pivotal semiotic resource.

The presentation aims to discuss the function of visual metaphor in chosen multimodal memes (image macros) related to academia available on such social media profiles as High Impact PhD Memes or Academic Memes that attend to the ups and downs of being an academic. Sharing common experiences connected to research activities, teaching, or administrative tasks, academics might face similar challenges. In this context, memes can offer solace, sense of identity, or humorous relief.



**Annika Mamat**

## **Storytelling in scientific online presentations: Overcoming social distance**

Although the Covid-19 pandemic is in the past, teleworking or working from home is a remnant that has become permanent in many professional contexts. However, although the various communication channels have simplified the exchange of information, interpersonal connections have been made more difficult.

Online teaching and online presentations as part of it have often been seen as a temporary solution and not an attractive alternative to face-to-face teaching.

The focus is often on conveying content and transferring facts to the audience. Emotions and feelings, which play an essential role in the exchange of information, are sometimes neglected. Due to the lack of physical proximity, a perceived distance can increasingly arise when working together across physical spaces. This is where storytelling can offer a solution.

Despite the prejudice that storytelling replaces facts with stories, they can be useful, not only to lay audiences but also in scientific discourse. On the one hand, stories can make information relevant in a specific context. On the other hand, narratives can create credibility and trust in the presenter, for example in the form of self-revelation. Ethos in particular plays a role here, not only as a means of credibility, but also as a means of mild emotional arousal.

These findings can be supplemented by the context of online presentations, which have been little researched in connection with storytelling so far. This study is to find out how small impulses can establish a connection between the presenter and the audience and overcome perceived social distances.



**Maurizio Manzin**

## **Rhetoric in Times of Change**

If we look to the past we could easily observe that rhetoric has a peculiar dynamic: sometimes it disappears, some other it resurfaces. For a very long time rhetoric has been considered the queen of the discursive disciplines (especially in politics), while in the modern age it has often suffered from a bad reputation – as a kind of deceptive technique of persuasion. This series of deaths and rebirths is quite precisely situated in the passage between the different eras, in the s.c. “ages of transition”. The first one was between the classical period and the early Middle Ages, just at the end of the Western Roman Empire (6th century A.D.); the second between the late middle ages and early modern age (14th-15th century); the third between that period and the full modern age (17th century); the last one in the fifties of the last century. In all these ages of transition some remarkable and influential figures went out and propose rhetoric for serious epistemic reasons. This was the case of Augustine of Hippo, Francis Petrarch, John-Baptist Vico, Chaim Perelman. In each of these cases they fought against epistemic reduction of knowledge into respectively grammar (Augustine), dialectics (Petrarch), analytics (Vico), neo-empiricist logic (Perelman), recommending rhetoric as a discipline capable of being a link for all the others. Could it be the case that rhetoric can play this role today too, in the age of AI?



Ivanka Mavrodieva

## Rhetorical and communicative features of podcasts

Podcasts are establishing themselves as a media genre in the 21st century. Podcasts are also evolving as an independent communication channel that includes content created by representatives of business organizations, cultural and educational institutions, NGOs, and others. The dialogical format of podcasts is preferred in its implementation and has specific communicative and rhetorical features. The subject of analysis is the dynamics of directing the dialogue, asking questions, giving answers, rhetorical techniques, techniques, and arguments. A selection of podcasts in Bulgaria for the period 1st January 2024 – 1st March 2025 is made. The methodology includes rhetorical and discursive analysis and the cyber ethnographic method. The hypothesis is that podcasts are not a homogeneous genre or format and rhetorical features are realized both during the creation of podcasts and in the post-communication stage when they are advertised and promoted on platforms and social networks. The assumption is that digital tools contribute to podcasts functioning as a specific manifestation of virtual multimodal rhetoric.



Erin Daina McClellan, Salla-Maaria Laaksonen

## **Ecological Care Work in Eco-Conscious Companies during the Nordic Green Transition**

While some rhetorical strategies have changed alongside digital advancements, others have remained relatively the same. Historically and presently, a rhetoric of care has worked across contexts, moments and cultures in various ways. By focusing on rhetoric that self-professed “green” companies use to amalgamate their technologies with sustainability efforts, we will discuss how rhetorics of ecological care function within—and apart from—a subset of eco-conscious companies’ “ecological care work” in the Nordics.

The role of care in self-professed eco-conscious companies’ digital rhetoric requires more nuanced and critical attention. By focusing on what we refer to as ecological care work, we will focus on the relationship between a rhetoric of care and sustainability efforts visible in such companies’ digital footprints. By analyzing representative texts across several eco-conscious companies in the Nordics, we aim to demonstrate how taking a relationally-oriented approach to understanding ecological care can help us further break down the digitally (re)constructed identities of self-professed eco-conscious organizations as they seek to advance both technology and sustainability in an era of “green transition.”

Grounded in Pender’s (2018) notion of “rhetoric of care” as caught between hermeneutics and rhetoric, Tronto’s (2010) exploration of “caring institutions” and Deva Woodley et al’s (2021) focus on the “politics of care”, our analysis aims to show that a relational orientation to digital rhetorics of ecological care can reveal (1) a collective (re)construction of ecological care work, (2) expectations for ecological care workers, and (3) an emergent relational responsibility of care in organizations. Such insight can help to further conversations about the larger green transition in ways that can attend to how eco-friendly company discourses of care impact the experiences of ecological care workers both presently and potentially, while reflecting on the collective understandings, expectations and responsibility of care givers and care receivers in ecological care work more generally.



**Matt McKinney**

## **Sage Against the Machine: Incorporating GenAI in a Reflexive Digital Rhetorical Pedagogy**

In recent years, the rise of GenAI and large language models (LLMs) has been one of the most pressing exigencies in rhetorical education. The conversations rhetorical pedagogues have been having about GenAI's role and potential range widely in scope; however, common focal points among these conversations have emerged. These include the effects on students' cultivation of rhetorical agency and rhetorical skills (both in terms of how the technology is used and who has access to it), the need to prepare students to engage rhetorically in a world where GenAI technology is widely used, and what parts of the writing process are most promising for GenAI classroom use. In response to each of these focal points, I argue that a reflexive pedagogical framework facilitates instructors' application of best practices for preparing students to engage in digital rhetoric and use GenAI effectively as a tool.

My presentation will investigate and demonstrate the value of my reflexive pedagogical approach through a two-pronged focus. First, I will review rhetorical scholarship to contextualize my initial GenAI encounters while teaching. Specifically, I review Bender's use of GenAI as a "More Knowledgeable Other" to scaffold teaching critical digital literacy (2024), van Beveren's review of reflexive pedagogy in social learning (2023), and Cinque's use of reflexive methodologies to analyze GenAI classroom use (2024).

The second half of my presentation will focus on a course I teach at Texas A&M with digital rhetorical components: Rhetoric of Pop Culture. Students in this course apply media-centered criticism to a variety of digital texts, and course papers/projects are scaffolded with exercises that model GenAI's strengths and weaknesses in rhetorical composition. I will conclude my presentation with examples of the latter and reflections on my practice.



Ewa Modrzejewska, Agnieszka Kampka

## Between Data-Driven and Visually-Driven Imaginaries: The Rhetorical Visions of Citizen Participation

"Warsaw of the Future" is a long-term initiative launched by the municipality to develop a strategic vision for Poland's capital, termed #Warsaw 2040+. A key aspect of this democratic process is the active participation of citizens, who must be encouraged to express their opinions.

Utilizing deliberative systems theory, which views deliberation as a fact-based exchange of arguments foundational to democratic politics, we analyze this process through the lens of the rhetorical situation (Bitzer, 1968). Our research examines online communications available on the city's website and its dedicated Facebook profile. In this context, Warsaw acts as a synecdochic speaker, crafting two distinct rhetorical narratives about the city's present and future. These narratives engage imagined audiences—specifically, the citizens—who, as Bitzer describes, can effect change by responding to the rhetorical situation.

The first narrative is data-driven, reflecting the current situation while promoting the idea of an informed, engaged citizenry ready to gather and analyze information for argumentation. This aligns with the notion that data visualizations can engage the public across various forums on matters of collective importance (Nærlund & Engebretsen, 2023).

Conversely, Warsaw's Facebook profile presents a visually-driven narrative of a transformed, collaborative city with active citizen participation.

We pose the following research questions:

1. What rhetorical function is performed by the visualized data in the materials related to the Warsaw2040 development strategy?
2. What rhetorical function is performed by the visual materials posted on the city's social media profiles?

Our theoretical framework is based on the concept of the rhetorical situation (Biesecker, 1989; Edbauer, 2005; Garrett & Xiao, 1993; Vatz, 1973). This analysis contributes to the broader discourse on how digital rhetoric transforms democratic communication, enabling more active citizen engagement while raising concerns about the authenticity of participation and collaboration.

### References

- Biesecker, B. A. (1989) 'Rethinking the rhetorical situation from within the thematic of difference', *Philosophy & Rhetoric* (22) 2: 110–30.
- Bitzer, L. F. (1968) 'The rhetorical situation', *Philosophy & Rhetoric* (1)1: 1–14.
- Edbauer, J. (2005), 'Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies', *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* (35)4: 5–24.
- Garret, M. and Xiao, X. (1993) 'The rhetorical situation revisited', *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* (23)2: 30–40.
- Nærlund T.U., Engebretsen, M. (2023) 'Towards a critical understanding of data visualisation in democracy', *Information, Communication & Society*, 26(3): 637–655.
- Vatz, R.E. (1973) 'The myth of the rhetorical situation', *Philosophy & Rhetoric* (6)3: 154–161.

**Ragnhild Mølster**

## **Experts and narratives in factual TV on antimicrobial resistance**

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) – microbes becoming resistant to antibiotics – is one of the most serious threats to global health and welfare. When antibiotics lose their effect, trivial infections may become life threatening. By 2050, AMR may cause more 10 million deaths every year (UN, 2023). The main cause of AMR is overuse and misuse of antibiotics, and there is a crucial need for a reduction of the use of antibiotics. In many lower-and middle-income countries AMR is already a full-scale crisis, but in Norway and the Nordics, AMR is still what many call a creeping crisis.

To obtain a change of behaviour and attitude, and address misinformation and lack of knowledge among the public, communication of knowledge is key. However, the prevalence of AMR in the Norwegian public debate does not match the urgency given to the crisis in policy documents. This paper takes a closer look at the AMR coverage of the Norwegian public service TV channel NRK. Naturally, medical experts, are common sources in news on AMR. Their role is mainly as providers of knowledge, but they also alert, advise, and point at possible solutions. It is not without importance who provides us with scientific knowledge; it is “indelibly shaped by perceptions of the personal temperament, trustworthiness, overall integrity, and transparency of those who produce it” (Keranen 2010, p. 2). The trustworthiness of scientific knowledge in TV news and factual programs also depends on the role of this person in the journalistic narrative. This paper looks at how scientific knowledge, presented through medical experts and scientists in NRK’s TV news and current affairs. It asks: How can we understand the role of experts’ ethos in these audiovisual journalistic texts, and what is the relationship between the expert ethos and the various (journalistic) narratives?

### **References**

- Keranen, Lisa (201): *Scientific Characters. Rhetoric, Politics, and Trust in Breast Cancer Research*. University of Alabama press. 1-236. Visited 22nd February 2023
- UN Environment Programme, <https://www.unep.org/topics/chemicals-and-pollution-action/pollution-and-health/anti-microbial-resistance-global-threat>, seen 18 April 2024.





Carlos Monteiro, Alexandra Kuzmina

## **The Rhetoric of Prompts: Multimodality, Intent and Ethics in AI meaning-making**

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) language models and generative image systems challenges foundational assumptions about intentionality in meaning-making. Traditionally, the field of rhetoric, from Aristotle to Perelman, has examined how speakers influence audiences through verbal discourse (oral or written), emphasizing the epistemic components of persuasion—rooted in meaning-making—as inseparable from intent and, consequently, ethics. AI-generated texts or images, however, lack deliberate intent, as they arise from probabilistic patterns in training data. This absence complicates any rhetorical theorizing of AI, especially when it comes to the inherently rhetorical aspects behind meaning-making. Yet, intent can still be discerned in the human actors who design algorithms, curate training data, set limitations, craft prompts, and decide on content distribution. This allows us to conceive of AI both rhetorically and ethically, by centering on the notion of intent, a notion that underpins assessments of criminality, the assignment of responsibility, and, more generally, theorizing about moral reasoning. The problem is that the inherently multimodal nature of AI outputs can obscure human agency and intent, as is the case with AI-generated images. However, while appearing as autonomous visual artifacts, such images are shaped by textual inputs that permeate the visual mode. The cross-modal translation of prompts into images effectively embeds the user's intent, even though it may not appear explicitly identifiable in the image itself. With this in mind, we argue that multimodality provides a valuable theoretical framework for analysing AI-generated content from an ethical perspective. Intent can be identified in multimodal media by reconstructing the textual prompts that generate them and analysing them as verbal discourse intentionally created by a human agent that, in doing so, imbues them with meaning. By relying on intent as the basis for meaning, a rhetoric-oriented multimodal analysis can thus offer a robust foundation for ethical theorizing about AI.



Davor Nikolić

***Wise people create proverbs and proverbs create wise people***  
**– on rhetoric of proverbs and proverbs in rhetoric**

Proverbs, being “the wisdom of many and the wit of one”, have long been recognized by rhetoricians as a powerful expressive tool. Nevertheless there are no strict or even very general set of rules governing the appropriate and successful use of certain proverb in certain rhetorical situation. Opinions are divided on the usage and the frequency of proverbs in public discourse, especially among politicians, especially having in mind the rise of politicians and public leaders in recent decades who embrace the populist strategies. Appeal to “common wisdom” or even more specifically “folk wisdom” in many cases undoubtedly represents an example of *ad populum* fallacy. However it can be argued that the surface structure of proverbs (rhyme, parallelism, contrast) offers the material for such (mis)use because many political slogans tend to imitate these typical features. The presentation will focus on these rhetorical traits of proverbs as well as analyzing their occurrence in contemporary Croatian parliamentary debates.



Turið Nolsøe

## **Constituting paternity: technological and political developments affecting Faroese paternity courtsuits in the 20th century**

During the Second World War, the Faroe Islands were isolated from Denmark, and especially its government and medical facilities. Occupied by Great Britain, the large number of British soldiers resulted in a special type of paternity courtsuits, where considerations of their status as non-Danish citizens was taken into account. At the same time, blood type testing, which was the only biological method of assessing paternity was made impossible by the limited means of sending samples and communicating between the islands and Denmark.

While contemporary discussions on fatherhood often relate to how fertility treatment and donor status has shifted how we define paternity, technological advancements in the 20th century have been pivotal for how these family bonds have been constituted. With the 1937 law on children conceived outside of marriage, designating a father became mandatory. The Faroese case of children conceived by British soldiers and Faroese mothers illuminates how political constraints, but just as much their technological counterparts, have been formative for how the right to a father has been constituted – especially historically, but also laying grounds for the discourse of today.

Employing STS and a constitutive rhetorical approach to how argumentation in these courtsuits unfolded, the aim is to sketch lines from historical to contemporary discourses on paternity. I will discuss how these legal developments and practical setbacks are formative and affect how the role of the father is constituted by technological advancements, situating paternity as a material-rhetorical construct.



**Marko Novak**

## **Tactile argumentation in law**

Tactile argumentation is a semiotic mode of argumentation using touch or texture as a sign. At least in intellectual property (hereinafter IP) law, it is necessarily multimodal combining tactile and verbal argumentation when copyrights such as sculptures (with a specific surface carved as a work of art), tactile trademarks, and tactile industrial designs are to be legally protected. A crucial problem in this area is to present a texture as a proposition in the argument. To enjoy legal protection, it needs to be distinctive enough so that it could be recognized as unique for that very product or the work of art in the world of all possible textures. Furthermore, it needs to be presented in a clear, precise, and stable manner, which is difficult to achieve but is required by the overarching principle of legal certainty in the legal context. But it is not impossible, which has been proven so far, especially by several successfully registered tactile trademarks in the US. Moreover, additional possibilities are on the horizon with incoming haptic technology (e.g. VR gloves, tactile Internet, haptic jackets). Perhaps e-tactile language would make easier what was very hard to be done by older semiotic resources in this area, to contribute to the acceptability of such signs for IP legal protection purposes.



Fabio Paglieri

## **The impact of generative Artificial Intelligence on rhetorical and argumentative competence: deadly pitfall or training grounds?**

Widespread adoption of Large Language Models (LLMs) like ChatGPT to perform writing tasks is raising concerns for its impact on users' cognitive skills: some applaud this as empowerment of humans via technological extensions (cognitive enhancement), whereas others fear it might atrophy basic competences, e.g. attention, memory, and literacy (cognitive diminishment). The dilemma applies also to rhetorical and argumentative skills: is frequent use of LLMs making us better rhetoricians and arguers, or is it leading us towards a linguistic wasteland?

The answer depends on how LLMs are used: substitution or complementarity? Currently, substitutive use is the mainstream option: relying on LLMs to write on our behalf is, after all, what they are designed for. The more tedious the task, the stronger the inclination to delegate it to AI helpers. However, these systems perform well also in non-trivial linguistic assignments: given suitable prompts, they can write expressively and even beautifully, with cogent arguments, convincing rhetoric, and full control of formal aspects. As a result, we are constantly tempted to let LLMs do the writing in our place: the downside is that, even if immediate results are good, this happens because the AI knows how to write, whereas our competences remain untested.

Using these systems to complement our work avoids this pitfall, yet it costs time and effort: instead of relying on LLMs to write on our behalf, we use them as "linguistic sparring partners" and their output as training materials. Having a tutor capable of providing tailor-made textual materials is a boon for argumentative and rhetorical skills, if we use those texts as input to our own critical reflection. However, the correct policy must be implemented collectively, especially in education: if generative AI is to be integrated in schools, it should be introduced as a complement to students' competences, not a replacement.



Miranda Perry

## **Deep Blue Mourn: Limits of Empathy and Grievability in Disaster Discourse**

Rather than being a great equalizer, death can elucidate larger societal divisions through public memory and mourning expressions, even for casualties of the same circumstances. This paper interrogates the limits of public grief and empathy in disaster discourse through digital mediums in response to the 2023 Titan submersible implosion. Through an examination of traditional media coverage, YouTube videos, and their respective comment sections, this paper traces the rhetorical construction by audiences of what death is worthy of being mourned. In its analysis, this paper focuses on two case studies to explore the intersections of tourism, capitalism, and grief through the examination discourse around two of the five passengers lost in the Titan submersible implosion. I assert that their participation in extreme tourism - a space imbued with thrill seeking, risk, and often privilege - further situates these passengers' complicated digital memorials in terms of perceived authenticity and vulnerability. Ultimately, this paper aims to contribute to an ongoing body of discussion around the politicization of grievable subjects in an increasingly digital space of public deliberation and memory.



Poropat Darrer, Mihaljević

## **Rhetorical means in structuring myths as part of the narrative strategy within Croatian presidential election campaign 2024**

Every democracy uses the same path in achieving governance; some through direct, and others through indirect elections which are preceded by elections campaigns. Croatian democracy uses direct presidential elections which means one man – one vote that is equally worthy in casting a ballot. Such a system presents a great opportunity for each candidate to fight to the last vote showcasing proper oratory skills. The presidents of states are the most prominent politicians, and through their rhetoric, they shape public opinion, create an image of themselves in the public eye, gain, retain, but also lose the trust of the voters, and significantly influence social reality (Poropat Darrer, 2024). Using rhetorical means, they construct a myth that it's an actualization of the strategic narrative as it is described in a functional theory of political campaign discourse. According to the functional theory, any form of communication during a political election has a particular function (Benoit, 2007). The theory is based on two main pillars: functions and topics. We focus on the functions, and how are arguments and rhetorical figures used in speeches on social media by four presidential candidates Zoran Milanović, Dragan Primorac, Marija Selak Raspudić, and Ivana Kekin in creating “myth of the enemy”, “myth of the hero”, “myth of the golden age”, and “myth of the unity”. The aim of the research is to (1) determine which myth is used the most; (2) determine which rhetorical means are used to construct that myth; (3) determine which functions are used. We apply rhetorical analysis and narrative analysis method (Gillespie and Toynbee, 2006). The value of this combined methods is that understanding how the political world is “storied” in particular ways can help us gain insight into operations of power and the power of narrative to shape perceptions of social reality.

### References

- Benoit, William L. (2017). The functional theory of political campaign communication. In: Kenski, Kate & Jamieson, Kathleen Hall (eds.) *The Oxford handbook of political communication* (pp. 195- 204). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gillespie, Marie and Toynbee, Jason (2006). *Analysing Media Texts*. New York: Open University Press.
- Poropat Darrer, Jagoda (2024). *Tako mi Bog pomogao: Predsjednička retorika u Hrvatskoj*. Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada: Zagreb.



**Federico Puppo**

## **Reason, Reality and Rhetorical Truth in the Digital Age**

The “fourth revolution” (Floridi, 2014) is changing many aspects of our lives and the world around us. This includes the transition to “the age of non-things” (Han, 2022), characterized by the fact that the entities that surround us and constitute our external world are less and less concrete objects and more and more abstract objects, i.e. information. We are so losing the real world, and with it our power of authentic action and choice, as we are guided by algorithmic processes that remain opaque and hidden from us. Information itself, instead of continuing to be the key to knowing the real, paradoxically ends up hiding it: the amount of data we are expected to handle turns out to be too large to be managed and critically sifted through and known. In the post-truth era (McIntyre, 2018), characterized by objectivity in a weak sense (Agazzi, 2014), the difference between true and false seems to disappear because information no longer has an objective referent. Communication itself, in the absence of any reference to the real world, ends up being dominated only by speeches that are closed in on themselves, by mere impulses and passions. What problems, if any, does this context pose for rhetoric? What form does rhetoric take? And what can its function be? The aim of this paper is to address these questions and to propose possible answers, also in view of the particular status of rhetorical truth and the role that reference to reality plays for it.

### **References**

- Agazzi, E. (2014). *Scientific Objectivity and Its Contexts*. Heidelberg/New York/Dordrecht/London: Springer.
- Floridi, L. (2014). *The Fourth Revolution: How the Infosphere is Reshaping Human Reality*. OUP: Oxford.
- Han, B.-C. (2022). *Non-things: Upheaval in the Lifeworld*. Polity Press: Cambridge, Oxford, Boston, New York.
- McIntyre, L. (2018). *Post-Truth*. The MIT Press: Cambridge, MA.





Sara Rabon

## **Trump in the Manosphere – How to Rhetorically Capture Young Men in the Digital Audience**

From May 2024 to election day in November, Donald Trump engaged in a pioneering digital strategy to capture the growing population of apathetic young male voters via a dozen appearances on online live streams and podcasts within, dubbed by some, the “manosphere”. With audiences dominated by young men, the manosphere consists of podcasts like This Past Weekend w/ Theo Von and The Joe Rogan Experience that offer alternative, right-wing informed digital media experiences and news commentary. This media sphere, directly and indirectly, validates and reinforces the increasingly conservative worldview of disaffected young men, particularly within the United States. Breaking into this space, Trump’s appearances as a presidential candidate took advantage of the interpersonal and parasocial elements of digital media to present an image of an authentic, accessible, and empathetic candidate. His strategy ultimately targeted the young male viewers for their growing disillusionment with mainstream media and the political establishment. These campaign appearances offer an alternative presentation of Trump from mainstream news coverage (such as formal interviews and campaign speeches) and instead reach younger voting audiences as they transition away from traditional modes of media consumption and towards digital content. In this paper, I demonstrate how Trump’s manosphere appearances rhetorically frame his character as relatable and accessible to these young male audiences and thus inform the success of his digital presidential campaign strategy. I investigate specifically how the rhetorical affordances of digital mediums and the collective parasocial experience between hosts and shared audiences help shape Trump’s positive reception. Importantly, these elements reveal a broader framework that underpins how future political candidates in the US and globally will utilize digital media spheres for contemporary rhetorical strategies to target specific demographics as voters transition away from traditional news media outlets.



**Antonio Rauccio**

## **An insight in the light of the scholastic theory of legal government**

Ancient scholasticism, from the Middle Ages to the height of the modern age, delivers us a conception of legal government that, albeit significant internal differences, presents a unified underlying structure. There is one aspect, however, that tends to be overlooked today: the rhetorical character of this structure, which fits harmoniously within an anthropological and ethical conception that has its theoretical paradigm in the aristotelian thought. The relationship between legislator and citizens, centered on legal discourse, is articulated on various interconnected levels, in which the three traditional piteis of rhetoric can easily be recognized. To a first approximation, is possible to say that the law influences the conduct of citizens at the same time by the threat of punishment, which inclines to fear; by its directive force, which compels practical judgment about the action to be performed; and, finally, by its honorable and just character, which inclines the will to respect (reverentia) and ultimately aims to generate the civic virtue of justice. Especially focusing on a few authors, such as Thomas Aquinas, Suárez and Thomasius, this paper aims to highlight and deepen this rhetorical structure, showing its fruitfulness for contemporary legal theory. Although an explicitly rhetorical approach is still in the minority, indeed, even in the most recent legal thinking the multiplicity of levels according to which the relationship of legal governance is articulated emerges strongly and perhaps aristotelian and scholastic practical philosophy tradition could itself constitute a sufficiently comprehensive key to understanding it.



Jeff Rice

## Digital Banality

Michel De Certeau and Roland Barthes are among writers who embraced the banal as scholarship, focusing on walking or everyday practices that often go unnoticed but that contain meaning. The question of meaning is, as well, a banal one. What does this mean or what does that mean evokes an assumption, as Barthes wrote, that everything shudders with meaning. In the digital, such meanings have included grand narratives of privacy, AI, commerce, and others. That type of focus, however, ignores the banality of digital media: scrolling, likes, linking, connecting, posting. That banality, in turn, offers an affective rhetoric, a mundane yet powerful means of written and visual communication where meaning does not need to be grand. In this presentation, I present the banal as not so much a system of meaning, but as a type of discourse without conclusion or persuasion. In particular, I focus on the banal as an affective, digital discourse, shaped by fragments, brevity, imagery, commenting; that is, I work with the logics and rhetorics of new media to not discuss a problem with new media but to instead offer my own banal explorations of travel, work, love, social media. The digital, of course, encompasses platforms and code, but the digital, as Marshall McLuhan would have noted, offers a rhetoric whether one is online or not, whether one posts or not, whether one codes or not. The digital is an environment we construct various forms of meanings within. The banal contains ordinary meanings, the day to day, the observations and interactions which shape experiences. The digital banal, as I will show in my own narrative, does so as well, but in a way more reflective of movement and affect, of performance, of boredom, of a recognition that not everything, in fact, shudders with meaning to have meaning.



Noah Roderick

## **Make it more: Prompt engineering and the status of rhetorical invention in generative A.I.**

Prompt engineering, or the design of instructions for generative A.I., is becoming an increasingly valuable and widely taught skill for academic, artistic and professional work. In this talk, I present the results of a survey I am conducting on the emerging genre of prompt engineering instructional literature. In that survey, I look for how—if at all—the literature addresses the rhetorical aspects of textual production (i.e., rhetorical invention), such as sensitivities to exigence, audience, genre, and style.

The title of the talk comes from the Make-it-more meme on social media, in which a creator prompts an A.I. image generator to make successive iterations of a person, thing, or scenario. With each iteration, the creator prompts the A.I. to make the image 'more' of what it is. For example, if the first image is of a spicy bowl of ramen, the next image may depict the bowl engulfed in flames. By the *n*th iteration, the bowl may be melting the very cosmos. I argue that that the Make-it-more meme is emblematic of textual production with generative A.I.

Prominent in the instructional literature is the 'few shot' or 'iterative' approach, where, through successive iterations, the human writer prompts the A.I. to bring the text into sharper and sharper resolutions of itself. Rather than adapting a specific message to abstract rhetorical principles, the A.I.-generated text begins as a non-specific, multi-purpose object and then becomes individuated for a specific purpose through recursive generation. In this way, the prompt engineering process comes to resemble what Gilbert Simondon (2017) calls the concretization of technical objects, which stands in contrast to other, pro-social modes of textual production, such as dialogical negotiation and rhetorical invention. I conclude by speculating about whether the relationship between human creator and text as a technical object introduces a new layer of proletarianization (Stiegler, 2010) in knowledge work.

### **Works cited**

Simondon, G. (2017). *On the mode of existence of technical objects*. Trans. Malaspina, C. & Rogove, J. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Stiegler, B. (2010). *For a new critique of political economy*. Trans. Ross, D. Cambridge: Polity Books.



Dorthea Roe

## **From fractured narratives to a united approach. The Norwegian Government's AMR-rhetoric concerning responsibility and solutions**

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is one of the top 10 global health threats, according to the World Health Organization, and it's estimated that AMR will lead to 10 million deaths per year by 2050 (Lu et al., 2020). All countries should have an AMR agenda across audiences, and even though there is a dilemma concerning how countries should create awareness through communication, targeted communication is possible, especially with factual national statistics available (Othieno et al., 2020).

The Norwegian Government's communication on AMR mainly consists of National Strategies and Action Plans. The latest Action Plans for AMR were published in 2015, with a focus on targeting different sectors separately. In 2024, a new National Strategy for AMR was published, with a One Health (Overton et al., 2021) approach. Thus, the paper examines the question: How does the Norwegian Government change the rhetorical narrative of AMR from a separate responsibility to a united approach, and how will the new narrative(s) affect new Action Plans and the practice of handling AMR in Norway?

This will be answered through two combined methods. Through document analysis, the study will be able to say something about how the Norwegian Government is changing the rhetorical narrative of AMR, and how they argue for a united approach. Through interview(s) with authors of the new National Strategy for AMR the study aims to uncover how this strategy will implement the new Action Plans for 2025 and why the Norwegian Government chose the One Health approach, especially in connection to creating awareness on AMR among the general public.

### References

- Lu, Jiahui, Anita Sheldenkar and May Oo Lwin. 2020. A Decade of Antimicrobial Resistance Research in Social Science Fields: A Scientometric Review. *Antimicrobial Resistance and Infection Controls. BMC* 2020. 9:178.
- Othieno, J. O., Njagi, O., & Azegele, A. (2020). Opportunities and challenges in antimicrobial resistance behavior change communication. *One Health*, 11.
- Overton K. Fortune N, Broom A, et al. 2021. Waves of Attention: Patterns and Themes of International Antimicrobial Resistance Reports, 1945-2020. *BMJ Global Health* 2021.



**Kris Rutten, Marjan Doom**

## **Curation as a Rhetorical Performance on the Museum Stage**

In this paper, we explore the shift from the museum's role as an (educational) institution that mediates knowledge to one that rhetorically subverts meaning-making. The focus is particularly on science museums, where objects have traditionally been presented within a framework of knowledge creation through scientific processes. We address the following questions: how can a science museum become a place of rhetorical contemplation and what does this imply for its traditional mission to emancipate visitors through scientific literacy? How can that shift redefine the mission of the institution? What are the implications of such a framing for multiperspectivism and for engaging with diverse publics?

Curating in this paper is approached as a rhetorical performance, focusing on the transformation of the object from a passive knowledge carrier into an “actant”—an active agent that rhetorically stimulates thought in the visitor—and the museum as a dynamic stage that sparks intellectual engagement.

The Ghent University Museum (GUM) serves both as a case study as well as an experimental platform for this research. We will analyze several recent and on-going exhibitions at the GUM in which juxtaposition was used as an explicit rhetorical strategy to activate meaning making in audiences. As such, we aim to contribute to a broader understanding of the role of (science) museums and curators in facilitating persuasive interactions between objects and visitors through rhetorical juxtaposition.



Roman Růžička

## Pragma-Dialectical Analysis of Police Communication on Social Media

Digital platforms have transformed the way institutions, including law enforcement, interact with the public. This paper examines police communication on social media, analysing its argumentative dimension through the lens of pragma-dialectical argumentation theory. It examines how police use social media to build public trust and defend institutional actions.

Police communication operates as a distinct communicative activity type, shaped by institutional constraints and an implicit goal of persuading the public of the legitimacy and appropriateness of police interventions. Social media adds a multimodal layer to this activity, allowing for the integration of not only text, but also images and limited interaction while imposing constraints such as brevity and selective responsiveness.

The paper first situates police communication within institutional discourse, synthesizing insights from prior pragma-dialectical research. It then defines the communicative activity type, identifying its institutional purpose, procedural and material starting points, and initial situation.

Empirical analysis is based on a case study of Facebook and X posts by Czech law enforcement, illustrating prototypical argumentative pattern used to address public concerns and affirm the institution's accountability. The study identifies critical questions to such pattern, its typical supporting premises, and expected counterarguments.

The research demonstrates how police communication on social media reflects the constraints and opportunities of digital platforms while relying on conventional argumentative structures. Using a pragma-dialectical perspective, this paper clarifies how institutions may navigate public accountability and engagement in the context of digital communication.



Blake D. Scott

## **What Would Perelman Make of Persuasive Technologies? Rhetorical Agency after AI**

One of the most pressing challenges to humanistic theories of argument is the increasing ubiquity of AI in our everyday lives. One consequence of this development has been widespread pessimism about the emancipatory potential of public argument. Indeed, if the capture of these technologies by states and private interests were to become total, it is difficult to see how the public sphere could meaningfully perform its critical function.

The concerns raised by this strong pessimistic view must not be overlooked. But my aim here is to identify a glimmer of optimism about the future argument by turning to the “New Rhetoric Project” (hereafter NRP) of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca. Unlike more normative theories, the NRP remains unique in its attempt to develop what might be called a “non-ideal” theory of argumentation. Instead of starting from a pre-established conception of rationality, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca theorize argumentation as a form of social interaction where people attempt to earn the assent of their interlocutor by offering reasons of various sorts. This more minimalist definition allows the theorist to detect rationality in situations that might otherwise appear anti-thetical to reason.

What I shall argue is that the NRP’s approach to theorizing argumentation protects the agency of arguers without idealizing the social conditions they argue in. In other words, while AI and persuasive technologies certainly pollute our cognitive environments, they do not change the fact that people continue to act argumentatively. As Perelman points out, even the attempt to feign argument attests to the social value of giving reasons. This is an important insight for any theory of argumentation with critical ambition. If the point of a theory of argumentation is to intervene in or improve the social activity it is concerned with, it must not short-change the activity of the agents it seeks to describe.





Lauren Seitz

## **“Exiled from the Interior”: The People and their Enemies in Radical Right French Discourse**

In spring 2022, Emmanuel Macron won re-election to the French presidency, defeating radical right candidate Marine Le Pen in the final run-off vote. Despite this loss, the far right is stronger than ever in France, as shown by the bloc's recent legislative victories. In this essay, I analyze how the two right-wing presidential candidates—Marine Le Pen and Éric Zemmour—used their public-facing discourse to constitute a narrow vision of French national identity during the 2022 presidential election. Drawing on Kenneth Burke's scapegoat mechanism, I argue that the far-right candidates constituted the presidential election as a mass purification ritual, one that would cast out national scapegoats while unifying and purifying the French people. I explore how the candidates constituted “the people” as an idealized national in-group and explain how Le Pen and Zemmour turned this group into victims of national scapegoats like politicians, the EU, immigrants, and Muslims. My paper offers an understanding of how radical right rhetors may deploy rhetorical strategies like ultimate terms and nativism in service of the scapegoat mechanism. In doing so, I draw attention to the rhetorical features of nationalism and populism which amplify right-wing xenophobia, Islamophobia, and racism.



Ruoyu Shi

## Argumentative Patterns in Parent-Child Mealtime Interactions

When parents and children engage in argumentation, they often aim to achieve their goals by convincing the other party. Research indicates that parents typically engage in argumentation with their children to achieve socialization goals, such as transmitting socially accepted behaviors and norms to their children (e.g., Pontecorvo & Arcidiacono, 2010, 2016), while older children, particularly adolescents, often argue with the goal of asserting autonomy and independence (Hofer et al., 1999; Arcidiacono & Pontecorvo, 2009). Family members also argue for making decisions about future plans (Pontecorvo & Fasulo, 1997) and solving problems (Ochs & Taylor, 1992: 30). In the specific context of family mealtimes, family members argue to achieve goals related to food choices (Bova & Arcidiacono, 2015).

The goals underlying argumentative interactions may influence the argumentative patterns used: certain argumentative patterns may be particularly suited to achieving particular goals in parent-child argumentation. The argumentation pattern consists of a particular constellation of argumentative moves wherein a particular type of standpoint is defended by a particular argument scheme or combination of argument schemes (van Eemeren, 2017: 19-20). For instance, when parents pursue socialization goals, the issue that triggers argumentation is often about children's "problematic" attitudes or beliefs. In such cases, parents tend to advance prescriptive standpoints (e.g., "you should not quit") justified by symptomatic argumentation, which highlights that the argument (e.g., "If you decide to participate, you should stick with it and do your best") serves as an indication of broader social rules or norms that support the standpoint.

Within the pragma-dialectical framework (van Eemeren, 2010, 2017), this study explores the types of argumentative patterns that are prototypically used in family mealtime conversations. The findings will be illustrated through an analysis of a corpus of 75 video-recorded meals from 15 Chinese families.

### References

- Arcidiacono, F., & Pontecorvo, C. (2009). Cultural practices in Italian family conversations: Verbal conflict between parents and preadolescents. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 24(1), 97-117.
- Bova, A., & Arcidiacono, F. (2015). Beyond conflicts: Origin and types of issues leading to argumentative discussions during family mealtimes. *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict*, 3(2), 263-288.
- Eemeren, F. H. van. (2004). *A Systematic Theory of Argumentation: The Pragma-dialectical Approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Eemeren, F. H. van. (2010). *Strategic maneuvering in argumentative discourse: Extending the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation*. John Benjamins Pub.
- Eemeren, F. H. van. (Ed.). (2017). *Prototypical Argumentative Patterns: Exploring the relationship between argumentative discourse and institutional context*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Hofer, M., Sassenberg, K., & Pikowsky, B. (1999). Discourse asymmetries in adolescent daughters' disputes with mothers. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 23(4), 1001-1022.
- Ochs, E., & Taylor, C. (1992). Science at dinner. In C. Kramsch & S. McConnell-Ginet (Eds.), *Text and context: Cross-disciplinary perspectives on language study* (pp. 29-45). Heath and Company.
- Pontecorvo, C., & Arcidiacono, F. (2010). Development of reasoning through arguing in young children. *Cultural-Historical Psychology*, 19-29.
- Pontecorvo, C., & Arcidiacono, F. (2016). The dialogic construction of justifications and arguments of a seven-year-old child within a 'democratic' family. *Language and Dialogue*, 6(2), 306-328.
- Pontecorvo, C., & Fasulo, A. (1997). Learning to argue in family dinner conversations: The reconstruction of past events. In C. Pontecorvo (Ed.), *Discourse, Tools and Reasoning: Essays on situated cognition* (pp. 406-442). Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg.



Anders Sigrell

## Kairos in Contemporary Teacher Education

One of the central terms in rhetorical theory is *kairos*, the capacity to grasp the opportune moment. In this paper I will try to show how possible ways to make this, rather nebulous, capacity more concrete in teacher education might look like, theoretical as well as practical. In the 16th century Girolamo de Carpi's painting *Kairos and remorse* we see the god Kairos balancing on small sphere with wings on his feet's, ready to cease the moment. In his shadow is the goddess Metanoia, an embodiment of regret, a sorrowful woman cowering under the weight of remorse. It is easy to see Kairos as something positive and Metanoia as negative. But to be able to grasp the moment, we must have the capacity to do this. An axiomatic starting point for rhetoric could be that we chose how to communicate, and that rhetoric is there to help us choose wisely. We chose more or less freely how to communicate, but only from the register we have to choose from, which is one way to understand another central term *copia*. A central pedagogic understanding of *copia* is that the way to enlarge it is by being inspired of good examples. And that goes for the kairotic capacity as well as other rhetorical skills. If we are to improve our kairotic skills, we must listen not only to the situation itself, but to how others – and ourselves – deal with situational demands and opportunities. It is in this light we could see Metanoia. To reflect over what happened in a communication situation, what constructive choices could be found for storage in our *copia*, and could we sharpen our eyes for opportunities in future situations? In a rhetoric class for high-school mother-tongue teachers at Lund University we tried to theorize kairos and develop practical exercises, for the future teachers and their students as well. This will be presented in the paper.



Ryan Skinnell

## Weimar's Rhetorical Revival and Its Lessons for the Digital Age

In 2003, German rhetorician Josef Kopperschmidt traced a long tradition of historians, including historians of rhetoric, treating Adolf Hitler as a unique actor in a culture without any familiarity with public speech. To the contrary, Kopperschmidt argued, "Hitler did not meet with a totally rhetorically immature audience." Weimar Germany was a hotbed of political oratory before, during, and after WWI, and Hitler certainly didn't have to cultivate a brand-new rhetorical culture where none had existed.

This paper contends that there was not just a robust tradition of political oratory in the Weimar Republic, but in fact, that many political orators pulled explicitly from rhetorical traditions—both ancient and contemporary. Drawing on original and secondary research, I contend that after a general diffusion of rhetoric in the nineteenth century in Germany, it re-emerged in the early twentieth century as an important strand of public and cultural discourse precisely because it was well suited to unique social conditions that included cutting-edge mass communication technologies, universal human rights movements, and heightened global tensions.

In Germany, the adoption of the Weimar Constitution marked a major intercession of skillful oratory and rhetoric into German politics. Whereas rhetoric before the war was primarily consigned to public and cultural events, it took on new salience after the war in democratic political theory and discourse. Major political parties, civic and social groups, universities, and cultural organizations re-incorporated rhetorical theory into their beliefs and practices in response to shifts in political, technological, and social conditions, some of which have important resonances with our current moment. This paper will chart some of those important resonances and suggest lessons we might draw from history to inform rhetoric in the digital age.



**Linda Söderlindh, Waldemar Petermann**

## **Digital Delivery – towards a digital understanding of action**

When the pandemic hit in 2020 and universities moved to digital teaching in e.g. Zoom, it naturally also led to an increase in digital student presentations. The rhetorical situation as originally formulated by Bitzer (1968; 1987) does not include digital environments, which entail different constraints than physical environments, where speaker and audience are in the same physical space. Unfamiliar technical solutions, lack or excess of eye-contact can negatively impact performance. The audience's attention can also be affected (Bailenson, 2021).

At the KTH - Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, engineering students can take elective courses in rhetoric. The students are primarily studying other, technical subjects, but add the rhetoric course in order to enhance their ability to present in front of a physical audience, but were now forced to carry out their oral assignments via Zoom instead.

The sudden transition from analog to digital spaces raised questions about how traditional rhetorical practices can be understood in the digital format. Based on Eyman's (2015) definition of digital rhetoric as the application of rhetorical theory, as well as Gelang's (2014) theory of actio capital, this case study examines the rhetorical strategies chosen by 12 engineering students in 20 speeches at KTH during the period 2020 - 2021. The study aims at expanding the definition of actio in a digital rhetorical situation, and is limited to the students' use of their actio resources and the actio qualities (energy, dynamics, rhythm and tempo) that they have at their disposal in a digital environment.

The observations suggest that success in translation from physical to digital space relies on action qualities being understood based on digital constraints. In our presentation, we therefore propose a principle for digital actio as an extended concept of actio that we hope will benefit both teachers and students of rhetoric.

### **References**

- Bailenson, Jeremy N. "Nonverbal Overload: A Theoretical Argument for the Causes of Zoom Fatigue", *Technology, mind, and behavior* 2:1, 2021.
- Bitzer, Lloyd F. "The Rhetorical Situation", *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, Vol. 1 no 1, Pennsylvania State U. P. 1986.
- Bitzer, Lloyd F. "Functional Communication – A Situational Perspective", In White, Eugene (ed.), *Rhetoric in Transition: Studies in Nature and Studies in Rhetoric*, Pennsylvania State U. P. 1987.
- Eyman, Douglas. *Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Method, Practice*, University of Michigan Press, 2015.
- Gelang, Marie. "Actio i teori och praktik. Om retorikens ickeverbala kommunikation", In Fischer, O, Mehrens, P & Viklund, J (eds.), *Retorisk kritik. Teori och metod i retorisk analys*, Retorikförlaget, 2014.



**Davor Stanković**

## **Rhetorical playground: Principles of Teaching Rhetoric to Elementary School Children**

The rapid advancement of technology and media in the 21st century has transformed communication, significantly shaping the thinking and speaking abilities of younger generations. In an era dominated by visual and digital interaction, the ability to articulate ideas confidently and persuasively is an increasingly critical component of personal and intellectual development. This paper explores foundational principles for teaching rhetoric to children aged 6 to 10, a pivotal period for linguistic and cognitive growth. The proposed framework emphasizes simplicity, playfulness, and relatability to ensure age-appropriate engagement while drawing on classical rhetorical theory, contemporary pedagogical strategies, and insights from developmental psychology.

A key contribution of this work is the development of *Rhetoric for Children*, a workbook that adapts classical rhetorical concepts into engaging formats such as comics, games, and mock commercials. Case studies of classroom implementations demonstrate the transformative potential of rhetorical training in fostering confidence, critical thinking, and social skills. By embedding rhetoric into early education, this approach empowers children to become effective communicators and thoughtful participants in their communities. This presentation invites educators, researchers, and policymakers to reimagine rhetoric as a vital component of elementary education.



Hartmut Stöckl

## **‘Going Places’: Multimodal Argument (Re-)Construction in Travel and Leisure Ads**

Travel/leisure advertising appears as a special case of commercial persuasion. Rather than promote a commodity with concrete use value, these ads seek to sell destinations, time and activities. Even though discourse analysis (THURLOW/JAWORSKI 2010; MESSNER 2023) and tourism research (HUNTER 2014) have devoted some attention to the genre, little is known about its argumentative patterns. Given that graphically dominant, aesthetically pleasing imagery is key in travel/leisure ads, their arguments must be reconstructed multimodally (see STÖCKL/TSERONIS 2024).

Using a corpus of 221 graphically outstanding and award-winning travel/leisure ads of worldwide distribution from 2016–2022 (Lürzer's Archive), the presentation will systematically inspect multimodal patterns of argumentation. The corpus has been annotated for several categories relevant to multimodal arguments (see STÖCKL 2025), such as, e.g., the representational meaning of the images, their visual rhetorical structure, language signalling the semantic non-redundancy of the images, cohesive ties between text and image, discourse topics in text and image, as well as argument substance and argument form (see WAGEMANS 2023: 121–125). Accumulating the results of the annotation analysis in each category, the contribution describes the genre-typical ways in which travel/leisure ads construct multimodal arguments. The corpus-analytical method allows answers to pertinent questions: What is the argumentative function of the images, which semantics do they contribute to the overall arguments how, in which way is coherence established between text and image? Preceding the cumulative look at salient features of multimodal argumentation in the entire corpus is an individual sample argument reconstruction.

The study pursues a dual purpose: It aims to make tenable statements about the argumentative-rhetorical properties of travel/leisure ads and to demonstrate how multimodal coherence is instrumental in constructing multimodal arguments.

### References

- HUNTER, W.C. (2014): Visual communication in tourism research: Seoul destination image. In: Machin, D. (ed.). *Visual Communication*. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 625–644.
- MESSNER, M. (2023): ‘Domani a quest’ora potresti essere qui’: Multimodal practices for representing temporality in destination advertising. *Visual Communication*.
- STÖCKL, H. (2025): Moving the multimodal into the argumentative limelight: A heuristic for practical multimodal argument reconstruction. In: Stöckl, H./Tseronis, A./Wildfeuer, J. (eds.). *Multimodal Argumentation*. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter.
- STÖCKL, H. and TSERONIS, A. (2024): Multimodal rhetoric and argumentation: Applications – genres – methods. *Journal of Argumentation in Context* 13/2 (2024), 167–176.
- THURLOW, C. and JAWORSKI, N. (2010): *Tourism discourse: Language and global mobility*. Basingstoke/New York: MacMillan.
- WAGEMANS, J.H.M. (2023): How to identify an argument type? On the hermeneutics of persuasive discourse. *Journal of Pragmatics* 203 (2023), 117–129.



Serena Tomasi

## Rhetoric as a Bridge between Ethics and AI in Predictive Justice

The famous *Re A* case, analyzed by Neil MacCormick (2008), highlights the role of rhetoric in mediating decisions where ethics and law are in conflict. The decision to separate conjoined twins, saving one at the cost of the other's life, raised a clash between the parents' Catholic beliefs, which opposed the intervention, and the medical and legal reasoning focused on survival.

This paper uses the *Re A* case to explore the integration of ethics into AI-driven judicial systems. As AI increasingly informs legal decisions, the challenge is to ensure that algorithms, which are based on historical data, do not perpetuate patterns that lack moral sensitivity or transparency. The central question is how rhetoric can help incorporate ethical principles into predictive justice systems.

The paper unfolds in three parts: 1) analyzing the *Re A* case to understand the tension between ethical and legal rhetoric, 2) exploring the gap in predictive justice systems, which lack a rhetorical framework for addressing moral principles (Bex & Prakken, 2021; Lagioia et al., 2023), and 3) proposing a model where rhetoric guides the design of AI systems to ensure transparency, accountability, and ethical sensitivity.

The core idea is that decision-making systems should not function as a "black box" that produces final answers, but as a rhetorical interlocutor that justifies different perspectives (Tindale, 2004). This approach demonstrates how rhetoric can bridge the gap between computational logic and moral considerations, ensuring that judicial decisions, even when supported by technological tools, continue to reflect the fundamental principles of justice and equity.

### References

- MacCormick, N. (2008). The *Re A* Case: Ethical and Legal Considerations in the Separation of Conjoined Twins. In N. MacCormick, *Rhetoric and the Rule of Law: A Theory of Legal Reasoning* (pp. 121-140). Oxford University Press.
- Tindale, C. W. (2004). *Rhetorical Argumentation: A Theory of Argumentation and Its Applications*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bex, F., & Prakken, H. (2021). Can predictive justice improve the predictability and consistency of judicial decision-making? In *Proceedings of the Thirty-Fourth Annual Conference (JURIX 2021)*, Vilnius, Lithuania, 8-10 December 2021, pp. 207-214.
- Lagioia, F., Rovatti, R., & Sartor, G. (2023). Algorithmic fairness through group parities? The case of COMPAS-SAPMOC. *AI & Society*, 38(2), 459-478.





Assimakis Tseronis

## Environment memes and counter-memes: exploring the rhetorical and argumentative potential of meme templates

Communication in social media poses several challenges to rhetorical studies. Instead of an identifiable speaker or author who addresses an identifiable audience using spoken or verbal language, communication in the digital age is multimodal, networked, and anonymous. Internet memes are one of the genres of digital communication that brings some challenges of its own. Memes acquire meaning not simply through their form and complex interplay of image-text relations, but also through the intertextual associations with their source(s), and through the practice of viewing, sharing and embedding them in concrete rhetorical situations (Huntington 2016, Shifman 2013). While internet memes have been largely studied as a form of online joke that helps build group identity, their role in online advocacy regarding politics, the environment or health, among others, is also acknowledged (Gearhart et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2022; Ross and Rivers, 2019).

In this paper I explore the rhetorical and argumentative potential of internet memes, particularly in the context of environmental communication. More specifically, I study how both climate activists and skeptics employ various meme templates, such as the Third World Kid, Matrix Morpheus, and Condescending Wonka, to convey their messages. To do that, I look not only at the multimodal composition of the meme as such but also at the transformation and circulation processes that characterize them. What are the semiotic properties of memes that allow for making arguments rather than comments? How can the transformations and intertextual associations that underlie their production be understood as conveying stance rather than affect? What can their circulation in the virtual public sphere tell us about their contribution to advocacy? In answering these questions, I discuss what rhetoric and its collaboration with other research areas such as multimodality studies, pragmatics, and media can contribute to the study of communication in the digital age.

### References

- Gearhart, S., Zhang, B., Perlmutter, D. D., & Lazić, G. (2020). Exploring Political Communication and Visual Intertextuality through Meme Wars. In: S. Josephson, J. Kelly, & K. Smith (eds.), *Handbook of Visual Communication: Theory, Methods, and Media* (pp.367-379). London: Routledge.
- Huntington, H. E. (2016). Pepper spray cop and the American dream: Using synecdoche and metaphor to unlock internet memes' visual political rhetoric. *Communication Studies*, 67(1), 77-93.
- Jones, M., Beveridge, A., Garrison, J. R., Greene, A., & MacDonald, H. (2022). Tracking Memes in the Wild: Visual Rhetoric and Image Circulation in Environmental Communication. *Frontiers in Communication*, 7, 883278.
- Ross, A. S., & Rivers, D. J. (2019). Internet memes, media frames, and the conflicting logics of climate change discourse. *Environmental communication*, 13(7), 975-994.
- Shifman, L. (2013). *Memes in digital culture*. MIT press.



Hilde Van Belle

## **From *A Noi!* (1922) to *The March on Rome* (2022)**

28 October 1922: a group of fascist demonstrators and blackshirt paramilitaries marches to Rome. Two days later, King Victor Emmanuel III gives in to this intimidation and appoints Benito Mussolini as Prime Minister. The alleged report of the March on Rome is soon released in the form of a documentary film: *A Noi!* (Umberto Paradisi).

One hundred years later, director Mark Cousins undertakes an elaborate analysis of this *A Noi!* (To us!) and the key elements of fascism then and now. In this poetic prize-winning documentary *The March on Rome* (2022), historical media footage is mixed with new images of Rome, with diverse art film fragments, and with melancholic commentaries by actress Alba Rohrwacher who figures as an average sympathizing/ confounded Italian during the rise and decline of Mussolini's reign. The visual spectacle is supported by pertinent observations, suggestions and questions, spoken by Cousins in a quiet didactic-like mode.

This fascinating film deals with plain historical facts, such as the manipulated images of *A Noi!*, or the lies and atrocities of Mussolini and his allies. But the response to fascism reaches further. The associative style and hybrid genre elements of the film clearly endorse the criticism of rigid right-wing discourse. And by evoking the emotions of many ordinary Italians seduced by its promises, Rohrwacher's interventions show how history cannot be reduced to simple formulas of right or wrong. Furthermore, the film also triggers our imagination by suggesting alternatives to fascist ideology.

This paper presents a critical rhetorical analysis of *The March on Rome*. I will examine how the patterns of visual/verbal argumentation take shape. I will focus on the way Cousins works from a fairly traditional mode of enemy construction towards a different paradigm that aims at an adequate response to fascism then and now.



Charlotte van der Voort

## **A mass medium and its ambiguous message: the case of Isocrates' literate rhetoric**

Not less revolutionary than the contemporary transition into a digital age, the discipline of ancient rhetoric came into being at a time when classical Greek society transitioned from mere orality to more literacy. This not only changed the way language was conceived (Havelock, 1986, p.112-113) and catalyzed rhetorical theorizing (Thomas & Webb, 1994), but also offered a new medium to spread a message to more people over a longer period of time than oratory could do. This paper argues, echoing McLuhan's (1964) axiom 'the medium is the message', that because of this background of literacy the novel rhetorical technique of *amphibolos logos* ('ambiguous argumentation') introduced by Isocrates (Panathenaicus 236-246) could arise. With this technique, one conveys a double message, one superficial and the other hidden, to a divided audience through ambiguity (Bons, 1993; Blank, 2023).

This paper consists of two parts. Firstly, I discuss the implications of increasing literacy on the developing discipline of rhetoric, a discipline that was predominantly conceived as the 'art of speaking' throughout antiquity but incorporated more complex ideas on (written) composition when literacy spread (Enos, 2012). My main focus is on the works of Isocrates, a rhetorician who chose the written over the oral for his work and theorized about the differences between the two media (Bons, 1993; Haskins, 2001). In the second part, I elaborate on Isocrates' technique of *amphibolos logos*, in particular on its mechanisms of presenting arguments 'that could be turned in two ways' (Panathenaicus 240) to a divided audience. I argue that the rationale for using *amphibolos logos* is linked to the potential of written discourse as a mass medium, and that, in this respect, this ancient technique is not so different from present-day phenomena that are used strategically to address heterogeneous mass audiences, such as dog-whistles (Saul, 2023).

### **Bibliography**

- Blank, T. (2023). *Amphibolia and Rhetorical Criticism in Isocrates' Panathenaicus*, *Cahiers des études anciennes* 60 [online]
- Bons, J.A.E. (1993). *AMΦΙΒΟΛΙΑ: Isocrates and Written Composition*, *Mnemosyne* 46 (2), 160-171.
- Enos, R. L. (2012 [1993]). *Greek Rhetoric before Aristotle* (rev. and exp. ed.). Anderson, SC: Parlor Press.
- Haskins, E.V. (2001). Rhetoric between Orality and Literacy: Cultural Memory and Performance in Isocrates and Aristotle, *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 87 (2), pp.158-178.
- Havelock, E.A. (1986). *The Muse Learns to Write. Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding Media* (2nd edition). New York: Signet.
- Saul, J.M. (2023). *Dogwhistles and Figleaves: How Manipulative Language Spreads Racism and Falsehood*. Oxford: Oxford Academic.
- Thomas, C.G & Webb, E.K (1994). From Orality to Rhetoric: An Intellectual Transformation. In: Worthington, I. (ed.), *Persuasion: Greek Rhetoric in Action*. London & New York: Routledge, pp. 1-24.



Alma Vančura, Ana Šovagović

## English Language University Students' Attitudes on Communication Apprehension and Self-Perceived Public Speaking Competency

One of the biggest challenges faced by students who speak English as a second or foreign language is anxiety or apprehension (Ulupinar, 2017). MacIntyre and Gardner (1994, p. 284) define language anxiety as "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning." Various studies have demonstrated how different variables influence language achievement, with anxiety showing the strongest correlation to success in second/foreign language learning, acquisition, and performance. Molnar and Crnjak (2020) found that the only significant predictor of communication apprehension among Croatian university students is self-evaluation. Specifically, students who perceive themselves as less competent experience higher levels of communication apprehension.

The aim of this study was to further explore the attitudes of Croatian university students toward communication apprehension in relation to public speaking and their self-perceived public speaking competency. A total of 145 students studying English at the undergraduate and graduate levels in the Department of English Language and Literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Osijek, Croatia were assessed. Their levels of communication apprehension, public speaking anxiety, and public speaking competency were measured (Ellis, 1995; McCroskey, 1970, 1978) to determine whether differences exist between students at different academic levels. The study also investigated students' perceptions of their preparedness to deliver lectures upon graduating from university.

The results indicate that students exhibit an average level of communication apprehension and moderate levels of public speaking anxiety. Furthermore, a negative correlation was found between self-perceived public speaking competency and public speaking anxiety. Students reported feeling prepared to speak in English in front of an audience, whether for teaching or interpreting purposes.

### References

- MacIntyre, P. D. and Gardner, R. C. (1994). The subtle effects of language anxiety on cognitive processing in the second language. *Language learning*, 44(2), 283-305.
- McCroskey, J. C. (1970). Measures of communication-bound anxiety. *Speech Monographs*, 37(4), 269-277.
- McCroskey, J. C. (1978). Validity of the PRCA as an index of oral communication apprehension. *Communications Monographs*, 45(3), 192-203.
- Molnar, D. and Crnjak, G. (2020). Exploring Foreign Language Communication Apprehension among the English Language University Students in the English Language Classroom Setting. *European Journal of Social Sciences Education and Research* 5(2):27-39.
- Ulupinar, D. (2017). Foreign language anxiety among counseling students speaking English as a second language: A rationale for future research. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 40(2), 162-172.



Eirik Vatnøy

## The Rhetoric of Paperwork

From the birth certificate to the death certificate, contemporary life comes with a lot of paperwork. Still, paperwork has gotten little attention from rhetorical scholarships. The apparent reason is that paperwork seems to insist on a kind of non-rhetorical, or even anti-rhetorical form of communication. The standardized forms, the reports filled with neutral documentation, and the pre-written documents ready for signing, are all designed to reduce contingencies and situational variations that invite rhetorical action. Paperwork is “good” and “effective” only in so far as it’s devoid of errors.

On the other hand, paperwork is highly rhetorical in its own anti-rhetorical way. It gives structure to societal organization and shapes fundamental understandings of personhood and the state. It has allowed for juridical and social break throughs, but its powers have also been used to horrible ends. Throughout history, colonial powers have seen paperwork as the hallmark of civilization, and they have assumed something child-like and naïve in “the others” that do not govern themselves by paper. Many of the worst atrocities in human history, from globalized slave trade to totalitarian regimes and industrial genocide, has relied on the powers of paperwork to dehumanize through abstraction. In this sense, paperwork might be boring, but it is not innocent.

In this presentation, I discuss how paperwork could be approached by rhetorical scholarship. I draw particularly on the works of Cornelia Vismann (2008), Bruno Latour (2014), and Ben Kafka (2012) for a precise and historically anchored understanding of paperwork, which is then placed in dialogue with rhetorical theory. This allows for a better understanding of how, on the one hand, the pragmatic and ideational dimensions of paperwork shape rhetorical being, and on the other, how rhetorical constructions of ‘paperwork’ shape how we understand paperwork, and consequentially society.

### References

- Kafka, Ben (2012) *The Demon of Writing: Powers and Failures of Paperwork*, Zone Books  
Latour, Bruno (2014) *The Making of Law. An Ethnography of the Conseil D'Etat*, Polity Press  
Vismann, Cornelia (2008) *Files: Law and Media Technology*, Stanford University Press



Ana Vlah

## The Impact of the Audience on Critical Thinking

Does the presence of an audience sharpen our thinking? Do we construct better arguments when we speak for others to hear (and engage with us)? This empirical study bridges rhetoric and psychology by exploring the hypothesis that an audience elevates the quality of argumentation.

Critical thinking is the ability to analyze, evaluate, and construct arguments while considering alternative perspectives and evidence. Some authors suggest that addressing counterarguments expected in the audience – a move of rhetorical argumentation – improves critical reasoning. However, “spectators” have different effects on performances, based on the cognitive complexity of the task, and our skills. Drawing on theories of rhetorical and dialogical argumentation, this research seeks to uncover whether participants, when aware of their audience, engage more deeply with counterarguments, i.e. if in their reasons they consider both sides (pro and con) of arguments.

After receiving refutation texts and familiarizing themselves with the materials, participants are recorded while arguing out loud. Their task is to present a stance as clearly as possible, ensuring they include their arguments, which are later assessed for clarity, logic, and inclusiveness of perspectives. They also complete a critical thinking assessment.

Findings will advance both educational practices (e.g., teaching strategies for argumentative skills) and theoretical frameworks, connecting rhetorical disciplines with critical thinking. By addressing the social dimension of reasoning, this research offers practical implications for designing learning environments that enhance critical engagement. Following the study in which it was concluded that people fail to think critically because they feel like they do not have to (and not because they lack the skills), having an audience who analyses or judges them, might serve as a good motive for participants to engage in higher quality argumentation.



Viktorija Völker

## From Grim to Grin: Decoding Sergey Lavrov's Strategic Wit

Sergey Lavrov, Russia's Foreign Minister, is often perceived internationally as a stern and humorless figure. Yet at home, he is celebrated for his sharp wit and ability to spark laughter, even in tense diplomatic settings. This paper investigates the dichotomy between Lavrov's international image and his domestic reputation, exploring the rhetorical strategies that underpin his humor and its effects on digital and diplomatic contexts.

Drawing from rhetorical theory and humor studies, this analysis situates Lavrov's wit within the broader framework of strategic political communication. His humor—ranging from clever retorts to culturally grounded anecdotes—serves multifaceted purposes. Domestically, it humanizes him, strengthening his rapport with the public. Internationally, his humor challenges power dynamics, as seen when Lavrov quips about election meddling. Such remarks blur the line between earnest diplomacy and performative rhetoric.

Through examples from Russian and international media, the paper illustrates how Lavrov's humor acts as a rhetorical tool to navigate tensions, assert dominance, and foster solidarity. However, this dual image is not without risks. In the digital age, where soundbites travel far, humor can easily misfire, leading to misunderstandings or undermining credibility. Lavrov's case challenges assumptions about humorless authoritarian figures, showcasing how strategic wit can operate within and reshape traditional power narratives.



Marina Vujnović, Michael Phillips-Anderson

**Sympathy is an Out-of-Network Benefit:  
An Examination of Digital Rhetoric and Dark Humor  
following the Death of UnitedHealthcare's CEO**

The December 4, 2024 murder of Brian Thompson was one of five in New York City that week. Given that Thompson was essentially unknown to the American public it was surprising how much media attention and public discourse was generated. This paper examines a burst of online rhetoric that followed the murder of Brian Thompson, the now-deceased CEO of UnitedHealthcare (UHC), the largest health insurer in the United States. The crime served as an exigence for people to express their deep anger, resentment, and fury toward the health insurance industry. Many posters used dark humor, irony, and sarcasm to express their feelings, seemingly celebrating the murder and murderer. Legacy media and corporate responses, on the other hand, were generally characterized by indignation toward the public reaction, particularly the mockery of Thompson's death in the first phase after the murder, and the glorification of the accused murderer Luigi Mangione in the second phase, after his arrest. UHC shut off their Facebook after their post memorializing Thompson received thousands of angry posts, including laughing emojis. We examine the righteous indignation and righteous blame reflected in commenters' posts on legacy and social media, relying on the work of philosopher David Shoemaker, particularly his idea that humor and morality are deeply connected concepts. We are analyzing to what extent dark humor, mockery, and sarcasm function rhetorically as forms of moral criticism, are motivated by the desire to hold corporations responsible, and to point to corporate depravity. As Shoemaker (2024, para. 2) himself points out, "They are schadenfreude-ing the pain caused to a company that is taken not to care about pain." Additionally, we ask, to what extent does the motivation of the posters lie in their potential lack of empathy and narcissism that is often emblematic of social media and online rhetoric?

**Reference**

Cornell University. (2024, December 6). Ethics expert on dark discourse around death of UnitedHealthcare CEO. <https://as.cornell.edu/news/ethics-expert-dark-discourse-around-death-unitedhealthcare-ceo>





Elizabeth Weiser

## Material Witness: The Counter-Statement of Objects in a Virtual Age

Why do material objects still wield rhetorical power in the world's public spaces? In an age of digitization, global networks, and the elevation of "intangible heritage," why are battles over who can display a ritual mask, a marble statue, a feathered headdress (or the skull it rests on) still so fierce? After the pandemic's rush to create virtual museums, why do people again crowd in-real-life galleries?

This talk explores the evolving nature of Perelmanian presence, particularly in public museums run by marginalized communities. Unlike traditional museums, which originated as repositories for artifact collections, community museums arise because marginalized groups have stories to tell. Often, few artifacts remain to them—indeed, their stories are often of heritage destroyed, stolen, or "collected" by dominant cultures. Those artifacts that survive are frequently too imperfect, too "ordinary" to meet traditional "museum quality" standards.

I argue, though, that as virtual access to virtually everything expands, the rhetorical power of material presence has shifted from augmenting an argument (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*) to embodying authenticity—a kind of Burkean counter-statement. Burke suggests in *Counter-Statement* that in an age preoccupied with data, the psychology of information, audiences yearn for emotive impact, the psychology of form. The marginalized artifact, then, today does more than confirm or enhance a narrative; it anchors the counter-narrative of the subaltern community in an authority derived from its emotive nature as local, incomplete, imperfect.

Paradoxically, the virtual world's ubiquity intensifies the struggle over audiences who yearn for the real. It is this tension that fuels global battles over objects but also our general fascination with the material. In an era of virtual polish, the authenticity of the imperfectly ordinary—in museums but also in politics, in writing, in relationships—becomes an ever more powerful presence.



David Williams

## **Circulation Rhetorics: Foregrounding Algorithmic Knowledge in Digital Composition Pedagogy**

Digital rhetoric has become a key feature of composition courses, mine included. However, while much attention has been paid to the dynamic ways of using digitality to share ideas—whether it's video-making, podcasting, or infographics—less research has been devoted to the rhetorical practices in digital publication. This is a missed opportunity, given that digital creators can now act as authors, editors, and publishers all at once. In my presentation, I argue that digitally-based pedagogy, particularly in rhetoric and composition courses, must include teaching algorithmic literacy—i.e., an understanding of what algorithms are, how they function, and their attendant power dynamics—if students are to gain a more critical understanding of digitally mediated communication and how it can be wielded effectively.

Drawing from Safiya Noble's *Algorithms of Oppression* (2018), I argue that manipulating algorithms is a unique rhetorical practice in and of itself—one that entails considerations of audience, tone, and word choice—and which can be used to counter the influence of hegemonic institutions. As the public sphere moves increasingly online, it is crucial that students understand that the digital spaces they occupy are hardly neutral in design and function. Understanding how algorithms work can thus help students become more aware of the unseen influences that shape the digital world, a necessary goal given that algorithmic indexing in search engine optimization (SEO) has been shown to disproportionately marginalize and misrepresent demographics based on race and gender. In sum, if we are going to teach students that they can use digital rhetoric to become agents of change, then we must consider algorithmic awareness as a legitimate part of the composition process.

As an example in support of my claim, I also draw from my dissertation research into how algorithmic circulation has impacted Holocaust representation in the 21st century.



Ramy Younis

## **Steel man: experimental evidence on rhetorical effects of faithful reformulations**

Within normative frameworks of argumentation, attacking an opponent's position based on misrepresentations is a violation of dialectical requirements (see van Eemeren & Snoeck Henkemans, 2017). Such violation of normative standards is known as the straw man fallacy (Aikin & Casey, 2022; Walton, 1996). In recent years, the straw man has been the focus of extensive theoretical and empirical research (Macagno & Walton, 2017; Oswald & Lewiński, 2014; Schumann, 2022). However, little research has focused on the obverse practice, sometimes termed the steel man, which involves presenting the most faithful, accurate, and charitable representation of an opponent's position before attempting to refute it.

Dennett identifies this approach as one of four rules for composing "a successful critical commentary" (2004, p. 33), drawing from an earlier formulation of similar principles by game theorist Rapoport (1960, 1961). In line with Dennett, the strategy involves providing a clear, vivid, and fair re-expression of one's target position that the original speaker would find no fault with (2004, p. 33). Note that such a practice, as it is understood in this context, differs from the iron man subtype of the strawman, which mainly refers to "unreasonably or overly charitable [emphasis added] interpretations of arguments" (Aikin & Casey, 2016, p. 435).

The present paper presents two experimental studies that investigate the rhetorical effects of the steel man practice. Specifically, the experiments use pre-tested items to contrast messages that contain faithful reformulations of an opponent's positions with comparable contributions that either contain straw man arguments or lack reformulation. Study 1 measures the impact of the steel man practice on persuasiveness, while Study 2 employs a 7-point semantic differential scale to assess how these reformulations impact perceived trustworthiness. Through the investigation of the steel man, the experimental studies seek to provide insight into how representational practices affect persuasive outcomes and credibility judgments.



**Maria Załęska**

## **Controversies over freedom of speech in online discussions**

The purpose of this paper is to analyze selected metacommunication discussions on the Internet about freedom of speech. The concept of freedom of speech is understood here in Emerson's terms, that is, as a cultural and political system. People can perform their freedom by participating in this system. The conditions for participation are also defined by information technology. The digital environment was intended to be a system that promotes freedom of speech by default. However, the ways of practising the freedom of speech have also led to negative phenomena such as hate speech or silencing the others, i.e. excluding them from the system of freedom of speech.

The theoretical framework for analyzing these metacommunication utterances on the Internet includes two concepts stemming from ancient rhetoric, both often translated as 'freedom of speech.' However, the careful theoretical distinction between the concept of *isegoria* (equal right of citizens to speak in a public assembly) and the concept of *parrhesia* (free or frank speech, i.e. the license to say what, to whom and how one pleases) makes it possible to grasp two qualitatively different aspects of freedom of speech, addressed in the Internet polemics. The analysis of Internet postings through the concepts of *isegoria* and *parrhesia* covers not only the issue of the right to freedom of speech, but also the values of freedom of speech. The theoretical framework of epideictic rhetoric makes it possible to distinguish the different value clusters associated with freedom of speech understood as *isegoria*, as opposed to the values attributed to the concept of *parrhesia*.

The results of the study show that multi-level differences regarding the nuances of values (such as freedom, truth, relevance, relevance, empathy, etc.) contribute to difficult-to-solve conflicts regarding the ethics of communication related to freedom of expression in the digital environment.



Louise Zamparutti

## **Norma Cossetto's Digital Ethos: Enargeia and Prosthetic Memory in Italy's New National Heroine**

In February 2024, Giorgia Meloni, Italy's Prime Minister and leader of the right-wing populist party Fratelli d'Italia, dedicated a public park to Italy's newest heroine, Norma Cossetto. Norma Cossetto was a young Italian woman living in Istria during World War II and the daughter of a prominent Fascist official. According to the popular legend, she was tortured, raped, and murdered by Croatian communists in 1943. The story of Norma Cossetto has achieved mass popular appeal throughout Italy in recent years. Many parks, streets, and town piazzas are now named after her. Known as Italy's "Anne Frank," she is the subject of fictionalized diaries and memoirs, graphic novels, films, and social media sites, all of which contribute to her character's captivating digital ethos.

Some historians argue that the Norma Cossetto story and the graphic narratives depicting her capture and murder are largely invented, based on hearsay and conjecture (Cernigoj 2012, Gobetti 2020, Tenca Montini 2023). I argue, however, that the scarcity of official documented evidence is irrelevant to the salience of her persona. Norma Cossetto is brought to life in digital rhetorical platforms that summon pathos and enact enargeia, which Ginzburg describes as the capacity to conjure realities, to make things "vivid" and "palpable" (Ginzburg 2008, 29). The enargeia in digital renditions of Norma Cossetto mobilize what Landsberg refers to as "prosthetic memory," the experience through which an individual, interacting with memorial artifacts, "sutures himself or herself into a larger history," whereby "the resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape that person's subjectivity and politics" (Landsberg 2004, 2). I analyze a variety of digital representations of Norma Cossetto and argue that enargeia creates a vivid and palpable prosthetic memory that recasts Fascist leaders as martyrs, encourages amnesia of the Fascist occupation of Istria, and energizes present-day Italy's fascist-leaning political platforms.



Aleksandra Zupančič

## **Who is Responsible for Speech Education (when should speech education begin and how good or bad examples influence speech culture)?**

In years of teaching rhetoric to adults, we recognize similar difficulties in public speaking among various speakers and identify recurring patterns in speech behavior. Participants in the study, who are included in training programs, are predominantly university-educated professionals from diverse fields. Public speaking is crucial for their career development. They regularly deliver speeches or presentations. The most common issues they report include fear of speaking in front of larger audiences, a sense of lacking persuasiveness as speakers, and the belief that they are not naturally talented in public speaking. In their opinion, education at different levels (from elementary school to university) did not adequately prepare them for effective speaking. They highlight examples from their school years that, in their view, negatively impacted their understanding of the speaker's role and their self-esteem as speakers.

A survey among Slovenian teachers indicates that their own education placed little emphasis on practical and modern speech training.

Quintilian, the Roman teacher of rhetoric from the first century, thoroughly describes a comprehensive program for speaker education in his extensive work *Institutio Oratoria* (The Orator's Education). When interpreted in the context of modern times, ancient rhetoric can be seen as a treasure trove of ideas and still offers solutions for building the foundations of effective and solid speech training. Such training should begin early and with well-trained good examples—teachers.

It is essential to respect the thought of Professor Škarić, who emphasized that rhetoric, as a scientific discipline, must not stagnate in its development. Instead, it should use modern scientific methodology to study contemporary forms of speech and create educational programs that foster speech value and promote its development rather than hinder it (Škarić, 2008).

Rhetorical education is essential for educated and reasonable individuals to effectively participate in public discourse; otherwise, we overlook them.



PANELS



## THE RHETORICAL SUBJECT IN AND AGAINST TECHNOCAPITALISM

Global capitalism has radically remapped conditions of human and planetary life. Resource extraction and exploitation have inaugurated an era of mass extinction and a struggle for diminishing resources (Malm and the Zetkin Collective) and neocolonialism has locked the nations of the Global South into enduring poverty (Manjapra). Meanwhile, the growth of surveillance, algorithmic attention (Finn), and monopolization produce a world in which liberalized, hyperindividuated subjects are predated upon by corporations with relative impunity (Doctorow, Noble). And the growing hegemony of digital, or techno-, capitalism has transformed technology and financial companies into “neo-feudal” (Durand, Varoufakis, Dean) rentiers of a vast digital estate. In all this, it is crucial to ask who today is the “rhetorical subject” of anti-capitalism? What does it mean to be more or less agentic under conditions that so thoroughly overdetermine experiences of selfhood? And how might scholars of rhetoric remap the terrain in service of more solidaristic and life-sustaining ends?

The oceanic swells and troughs of a carbon-capitalism-colonialism assemblage’s staggered collapse (Allen) too easily define the positionality and composition of the rhetorical subject with respect to prevailing political economic conditions. In such conditions, in which we are compelled by deep economic currents (Mau), how may we continue to think of the agential political subject—both in collective and individuating terms? And how can a revolutionizing subject be made rhetorically compelling?

Rhetoricians and critical theorists have long wrestled with these questions, often arriving at vastly dissimilar conclusions. For some scholars in the Marxist tradition, the proletariat endures, both as an ontic reality and as a felicitous concept for political mobilization (e.g., Davis, Eagleton, Mattos). Others, like Albenaz Azmanova and Judith Butler, have sought to invigorate notions of a precariat, a class-like structure of contingency and vulnerability in which most peoples of the globe today dwell.

Additional scholars have sought to adapt the rhetorical subject to evolving political economic conditions. Ronald Walter Greene, for instance, contends that the rise of immaterial labor necessitates a materialist reconceptualization of the rhetorical subject “beyond Marx” (60). In a similar vein, Jodi Dean’s long-evolving response to communicative capitalism’s technocratic capture of the rhetorical terrain of “democracy” foregrounds comradeship, party organizing, and a shared “communist horizon” as approaches to reconstituting the anti-capitalist subject. Still other scholars have defended divergent conceptions of agency and subjectivity uncoupled from the human subject (Cooper, Rickert), and some have sought to broker a synthesis between the new materialist framework and Marx (Chaput).

Each of these divergent approaches lays out lines of flight, but none yet have proven broadly compelling. The question of what rhetorical subject, collectively and individually, might meaningfully work toward universally liveable worlds after technocapitalism’s increasingly violent death throes remains profoundly unsettled.

This panel takes up the quandary, asking what conceptions of the subject might reasonably be hoped to foster revolutionary social movements today? Have technocapitalism’s shifts over the past few decades indeed displaced or obviated “the proletariat” as subject of history? What can rhetoricians offer?





**Ira Allen (co-chair)**

### **Taking Impossible Goods Personally: The Subject of Degrowth and Salvage Communism**

In *Discerning the Subject*, Smith observes that agency emerges at sites of competing interpellations. The subject is constituted both thus and thus (and thus and thus), and these hailings are incompatible. Both as individual subjects and as revolutionary class subject (in Badiou's Theory of the Subject sense), we develop capacities precisely where internally at odds. This paper explores non-accelerationist "heightening the contradictions" of an already collapsing global order of carbon-capitalism-colonialism (CaCaCo is my collocation in *Panic Now?*). I am interested not in a theory of revolutionary subjectivity premised on historical necessity, a wave of collapse that must be hastened, but rather in Marxist theorization of individual-collective formations for coming ruins (updating Laclau and Mouffe's Hegemony and Socialist Strategy for a catastrophic age). I ground theory by examining how we take impossible goods such as "degrowth" and "salvage communism" personally, becoming and asking others to become their subject. Where such goods name existing fissures in the horizon of CaCaCo subject-formation, they heighten contradictions present within each beneficiary of a collapsing order. With help from Jean Nienkamp's *Internal Rhetorics*, I trace out mechanisms of action whereby collective agency in a time of staggered collapse can begin with taking such impossible goods personally.

**James Rushing Daniel (co-chair)**

### **New Gods, Old Enigmas: Proletariats, Entrepreneurs, and the Rhetoric of Class Transcendence**

The distortions of technocapitalism notwithstanding, the Marxist conception of the proletariat continues to describe contemporary class relations while offering a vital site of revolutionary dynamism. However, the rhetorical efficacy of this "subject of history" (Cohen) has been long disturbed by a rival formation, the entrepreneurial subject (Pollack), a rhetorically consequential subject position, suppressive of both class consciousness and class history, that promotes social mobility as a solution to economic inequality. This formation, I suggest, strives to supplant "the proletariat" by dangling access to a vaunted Promethean core.

This paper charts the intellectual development of this figure, which I trace to Joseph Schumpeter's theorization of the entrepreneur as an innovator vested with enormous social, political, and economic consequence (Link and Hébert). I illuminate how the entrepreneurial subject, posed as capable of transcending class, took on a messianic ethos (Sørensen) at the dawn of the 21st century with figures like Elon Musk, Marc Andreessen, and Peter Thiel, who exhibit what Martin H. Krieger calls "a will to found a new kingdom" (xii). As I argue, rhetoricians, who have heretofore often celebrated entrepreneurship (Fraiberg, Spinuzzi), must endeavor to illuminate entrepreneurship's class erasure and unmask its function as a tool of capitalist domination.



Christopher W. Chagnon

### **The Obfuscating and Dangerous Language of Digital Extractivisms: electrified “clouds”, “farms” of steel, and aggrandizing the “addictive”**

As Fairclough has pointed out, the strategic use of rhetoric, semantics, and language in general is an important tool for the establishment, projection, and maintenance of power. This is evident when looking at the way language is used in relation to extractivism and has been touched on by some scholars. Dunlap has discussed how “green” energy hides the environmental damage that comes from production and mass deployment of such systems. Gudynas has taken issue with the term “extractive industries”, as industry has a connotation of creating something, while these entities only take. Castree has discussed how the use of language to conceptually divide humanity from nature allows for greater exploitation. Language is also used to support, legitimize, and expand the power of digital extractivisms, which are dependent upon and exacerbate exploitation of the proletariat, while obfuscating problems. In this we can see a bizarre world where being “addictive” is good; where the highly material nature of data is hidden by “the cloud”; and where the prioritization of “global” languages causes real damages to cultures. This paper will reflect on the use of language in relation to digital extractivisms, and the damages that can come from extractivist approaches to data.

Antti Tarvainen

### **The colonial adventures of a startup entrepreneur: from homo economicus to homo innovatus**

The Silicon Valley-led innovation economy carries within it the legacy of Schumpeterian ‘novelty tradition,’ in which the secret to economic growth and creative destruction lies inside the body. The ‘new,’ required and fetishized by the markets, grows from within the flesh and mind of an individual hero-entrepreneur—or so the story goes. In this article, I examine the genealogies of this innovative body-mind and find it deeply entangled in the racialized and civilizational myths of settler colonial expansions. Tracing this particular colonial embodiment of the homo innovatus—the innovative man—allows us to destabilize the common tale of the neoliberal subject as the homo economicus. Indeed, I argue that the contemporary capitalist subject is formed not only by the vicious cycle of deepening rationalization, alienation, and disenchantment but also by the simultaneous racialized enchantments and significances that (re)produce the Eurocentric and settler colonial worlds of capitalist modernity in the contemporary technocapitalist moment. To make this argument, the paper explores best-selling ‘innovation literature’ and delves into the tales of innovators collected through in-depth interviews in Silicon Valley and the ‘Silicon Wadi’ in Israel/Palestine.



## THE RHETORIC OF FRAUD AND SCAMS IN A DIGITAL WORLD

This panel explores the rhetorical dimensions of fraud and scams. The proliferation of scams and fraud across Europe and the rest of the world presents a significant societal and rhetorical challenge, as increasingly sophisticated schemes and new digital approaches are used to target individuals with devastating personal, emotional, and financial consequences.

Recent data highlights the alarming growth of scams and fraud across Europe, accelerated by digitalization and societal shifts. Reports from the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) and Europol reveal a surge in online scams, with romance scams alone accounting for hundreds of millions of euros in losses annually. The World Economic Forum reports that as much as \$1 trillion dollars have been lost to online scams. Romance scams, which exploit emotional vulnerability by creating fictitious romantic relationships, are among the most insidious, leaving victims not only financially drained but emotionally scarred. Although often studied from psychological or criminological perspectives, these interactions are fundamentally rhetorical in nature. Such fraud exemplifies the rhetorical sophistication of modern scams, relying on trust-building through ethos construction, the use of narratives, persuasive argumentation through technology, and emotional manipulation.

The discipline of rhetoric is poised to explore the various arguments, constructions of credibility, and use of rational and emotional appeals that are featured in the moment of an online scam. Moreover, the discourse about scams has become more and more prevalent for the public, which begs additional questions. How are victims of scams represented in public discourse? How are scams fought? And by whom? What is the rhetorical characterization of scams and their anti-scam counterparts?

In this panel we examine the rhetoric of fraud and scams by studying the rhetorical strategies of scamming, including the construction of ethos and relationships, the impersonation of public and private institutions, and the interplay of ethos as it exists between scammer, anti-scammer, and social media audiences. Our panel examines the use of persuasive rhetoric, emotional appeals, trust-building, technological affordances, and crafted narratives to deceive victims.



Jens E. Kjeldsen (chair)

### **The ethos, argumentation, emotional appeals and relation-building of a scammer**

Nete, a middle-aged, educated woman from Denmark is reading her online newspaper. She sees an ad featuring a well-known Danish businessman advising people to invest in bitcoin. Nete clicks the link, and soon she is engaged in telephone conversations with Philip Graham from the investment company Q-teck. Philip persuades her to invest. Sadly, neither the ad, the company, nor Philip exists. It is all a scam, and Nete loses almost 300.000 DKK.

However, Nete recorded her conversations with the scammer. In this presentation I analyze these real-life conversations to uncover the rhetoric of scamming that “Philip Graham” uses to defraud Nete. While most of the research in fraud and scams tend to examine and establish the psychological techniques of the fraudsters and the “psychological deficiencies” of the victim, this presentation takes a rhetorical approach looking at the persuasive reasoning of the scammer, his construction of ethos and trust, the role of his emotional appeals, and the rhetorical functions of his relation-building with his victim. The presentation also addresses the use of technology in drawing the victim into contact and conversations, and the “education-style” rhetoric the scammer uses to make the victim engage in the fake online investment platform.

Ragnhild Mølster

### **I dishonestly love you. The rhetoric of romance fraud**

Romance fraud, or love scam, is a kind of scam where criminals contact their victims through fake online identities, usually via online dating sites. Eventually, they build up trust and create an illusion of a romantic relationship with the victim. The relationships remain digital, as the scammers always present excuses for not being able to meet in real life. Eventually the criminals lure the victims to transfer money, for instance by pretending to be in a crisis situation or in economic trouble, appealing to the victim's conscience. These scams depend on the technological affordances of the communication channels, but also on appeals to basic human emotions such as the longing for love and the need to see oneself as a decent person.

This paper presents a study of the rhetorical strategies used by love scammers. Through analyses of cases of love fraud, the paper seeks to understand how the scammers build trust and rhetorically develop the relationship with their victims.



**Ida Vikøren Andersen**

### **A rhetorical citizenship perspective on fraud and scams**

Citizens' discursive encounters with public institutions shape their experiences and enactments of citizenship, influencing how they understand their rights and responsibilities and how they are granted agency within bureaucratic institutions. While previous research has explored how technical and unclear official communication can hinder rhetorical enactments of citizenship, an emerging challenge arises from increasingly sophisticated and credible scams that mimic official communication. Scammers impersonate institutions such as the police, courts, tax authorities, and social welfare agencies to deceive citizens into providing sensitive information or financial resources. How do such scams affect experiences and enactments of citizenship, institutional trust, and the ethos and rhetorical capacity of public institutions? This paper proposes a twofold approach to studying scams from a rhetorical citizenship perspective. The first component involves textual analysis investigating i) the rhetorical strategies and affordances scammers use to exploit the ethos of trusted institutions, and ii) how institutional responses – such as warnings and media coverage of scams and their victims – craft citizenship and afford agency to citizens. The second component involves audience studies, including interviews with citizens, to investigate how the risk or experience of being defrauded shapes their experiences of citizenship and trust in public institutions.

**Aaron Hess**

### **Taking the bait: Analyzing ethos in anti-scamming social media**

Although targeted by international law enforcement agencies, scammers are also thwarted by social media personalities that document both their interactions with scammers and their success in infiltrating scammers' technological systems. Hidden behind digital voice changers and a constructed character of a plausible victim, anti-scammers use sophisticated technologies and rhetorical techniques to engage scammers—also known as scambaiting—largely to waste their time and to bring awareness to how scams work. Within these interactions is a complex play of ethos and audience. In this paper, I examine the interplay of ethos as it exists between scammer, anti-scammer, and social media audiences. My analysis traces the elements of this ecosystem of ethos as it draws from social, cultural, and technological perspectives. Scammers present their own ethos of would-be tech support representatives or potential romantic partners, while anti-scammers offer characters that sound elderly or are clumsy in their understanding of technology. Outside of those interactions, however, the anti-scammers also present an ethos to their social media audiences. This ethos showcases technological prowess, goodwill through vigilantism, and expertise about scams and their processes while also expressing cultural expertise about how, why, and where scams are conducted.



## **HARD LISTENING IN THE DIGITAL SPHERE: FROM THE PERSONAL TO THE PUBLIC**

In response to the global tendency toward political polarization with its ever-spreading effects of personal, social, and political alienation and “tuning out,” better strategies for listening have become a commonly invoked remedy. There seems to be widespread agreement that listening is the key to resolving such conflicts and mediating division.

In the past two decades, rhetorical scholars have established theories and practices of listening and silence, sparking a cottage industry of scholarship (e.g., Brito Viera; Glenn; Gross; Leake; Ratcliffe; Ratcliffe and Jensen). The scholarly work of examining listening and silence is now beginning to feature studies of “hard listening,” those occasions of alienating rhetorical situations (so often tinged with political polarization) that constitute the subject of our panel.

Collectively, the panel explores various trajectories of what makes listening hard (difficult), how listening can be hard (in the sense of being unreceptive or uncharitable), and finally how practices of “hard listening” (in the sense of being attentive, open, and committed to understanding) might be cultivated.

**Chair:** Kris Rutten

**Presenter 1:**

Cheryl Glenn

In “It Starts with an Email,” Presenter 1 explores the terra incognita of emails that spark hard listening and often lead to face-to-face meetings. Despite the ubiquitous presence of email in our lives, this asynchronous medium of communication remains one of the most difficult to navigate given that tone and expression are missing, and “send” is tapped prematurely for various reasons. In response, we want to explain, defend/offend by keyboarding or talking. We do not want to listen. But listen we must. She will offer three strategies for managing hard listening that transcend critique, explanation, and defensiveness/offensiveness. These strategies include neutrality, open listening, and imperfect listening, which can lead to resolution or *détente* within the difficult situation.

**Presenter 2:**

Heather Adams

In “Cameras-off Activist Collaboration,” Presenter 2 examines a digital working group of activists who collaboratively develop and share hard-to-listen-to personal stories of stigmatized people who use drugs. This work exposes reasons for cultural non-listening in the realm of harm reduction, such as the expectation that a “worthy” self-advocacy story will feature confession, self-blame, and remorse. Presenter 2 discloses her obstacles in hard listening and receptivity as an academic ally and participant. She then analyzes how auditory listening prompts receptivity within the group’s fully digital work sessions. The group’s “cameras off” practice, resulting in fully auditory sessions, sharpens listening with the ears and reduces visual “noise.” As a tactic, the practice positively shapes affective-emotional experiences (Landau and Keeley-Jonker; Papacharissi) of this work. Such considerations are key to stigma disruption (Ahmed; Kessler) through story-sharing that aims to shift entrenched attitudes and beliefs.

**Presenter 3:**

Lisa Villadsen

In “She’s Rude! No, She’s Not!,” Presenter 3 maps various conceptions of rhetorical listening before analyzing one particular episode of the Danish radio program Language Wise during which a guest accused the host of not listening to her. In response to a burgeoning discussion of the appropriateness of the guest’s reaction on the program’s Facebook page, the host invited followers to consider their experience with prejudice, shaming, and marginalization by re/listening to the program and judging the interaction for themselves. A majority of Facebook commenters called the guest “self-consumed” and “bad mannered,” while others tried to understand her reaction and explain the misunderstanding between the host and the guest. The presenter will offer the concept of “listening ideologies” as one analytical finding.

**Presenter 4:**

Jessica Enoch

Presenter 4 explores the commemorative project Talking Statues, a worldwide public memory campaign in which audiences to monuments can scan a QR code at the commemorative site and then listen to a story from the figure remembered. Started in Copenhagen in 2013, Talking Statues has now layered its listening project onto monuments around the world. Building on feminist scholarship in rhetorical and memory studies (Mandziuk, Dubriwny and Poirot, Coker, Shim), Presenter 4 explicitly considers questions of gender and listens to the digital stories of the figures on display within the Boston Women’s Memorial: Phyllis Wheatley, Abigail Adams, and Lucy Stone. Presenter 4 employs feminist rhetorical analysis and listening strategies to consider how this digital listening experience animates the gendered commemorative project.



## **MOBILIZING BAD FEELINGS: THE RHETORICAL CIRCULATION OF AFFECT IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE**

The affective turn within the humanities and social sciences has created renewed interest in the emotional and embodied dimensions of rhetoric (Chávez, 2018; Edbauer, 2004; Hawhee, 2015; Johnson, 2016). Despite the heterogeneous aims and ontological differences that shape contemporary critical scholarship on affect, the exploration of how affect shapes and/or is shaped by the social is central. Rhetorical scholarship is uniquely positioned to intervene in questions regarding affect's circulation in public discourse, and how affect comes to have persuasive and constitutive effects.

Treating affect rhetorically can simultaneously highlight and problematize the instrumentality of affect: it allows us to understand how individual rhetors deploy affect strategically, while also demonstrating how affect circulates widely, generating public feelings seemingly disconnected from a single origin or intention. The autonomous and performative effects of affect are especially crucial in the context of an increasingly digital and global public sphere, where affect's reach and possibility for reproduction are amplified.

The four papers in this panel take as their point of departure the complex affective landscape that shapes today's political struggles, and they focus on how affect circulates and shapes the very foundations of our beliefs and deliberations. The presenters seek to understand how affect functions rhetorically, with particular attention to negative affects, or "bad feelings" such as anger, fear, sadness, anxiety, and hatred. Each engages with a specific context of public discourse—critiques of the counterproductivity of anger as a tactic of activism, the conservative weaponization of transgender youth, the negotiation of legacies of Nordic exceptionalism, and the circulation of fear in the rise of populism. But the panelists' arguments also extend beyond their particular case studies to speak to larger questions of rhetoric's affective role in global trends of nationalism, imperialism, political polarization, and resistance in the digital age.

Taken as a whole, this panel demonstrates that rhetoric is a crucial means through which affect is expressed, generated, performed, transformed, and circulated, and that "bad feelings" can be mobilized toward a variety of ends. But the panelists also show how scholarly attention to affect shapes the way we understand rhetoric and public discourse themselves: they challenge us to reimagine the rhetorical production of the subjects and objects of discourse, they push us to rethink our assessments of rhetoric's persuasiveness and productivity, they encourage us to revisit foundational rhetorical concepts through the lens of emotion and affect, and they urge us to return to classical traditions to understand the digital circulation of affect in the present and future.





**Frida Hviid Broberg**

### **Deconstructing the Myth of Anger's Counterproductivity**

Activists and social movements are often criticized for public displays of anger (Broberg, 2024; Jasper, 2014; Srinivasan, 2018). Critics argue that anger – even when morally justified – is destructive, and hence, victims of injustice ought to refrain from expressing anger (see e.g. Nussbaum, 2019; Zagacki & Boleyn-Fitzgerald, 2006). This leads to what philosopher Amia Srinivasan (2018) labels the counterproductivity critique of anger: the assumption that victims of injustice should not express anger because doing so is counterproductive to their cause. Through analysis of the rhetorical circulation of examples of ‘angry activism’, this paper aims to deconstruct the myth of anger’s counterproductivity. Drawing on affect theory conceptualizing affect as performative as well as intersectional feminist thinking, it becomes apparent how anger is not simply something activists choose to use (as the critique implies). Instead, anger sticks to some (marginalized) bodies more than others (Ahmed, 2009). Further, I suggest understanding anger as productive – not despite the backlash that ‘angry activists’ often face: Instead of relying on an understanding of activism as persuasive (Murray, 2021), I explore how the criticism of anger might better be understood as central to the ‘productivity’ of angry rhetoric.

**Kendall R. Phillips (chair)**

### **The Subjunctive Rhetoric of Fear**

Fear is ubiquitous in contemporary politics and seems to be one of the forces driving the rise of nationalism and populism. This paper seeks to examine the rhetorical nature of fear with particular attention to the way the feeling of fear circulates. Drawing upon Aristotle’s early writings about fear, I focus on the ambiguous and subjunctive nature of the rhetoric of fear. In my estimation, the rhetoric of fear can be condensed to the sentiment that: “It is coming for you.” In this phrasing, the threat is ambiguous and open to interpretation. “It” could be any group, object, change in condition. As well, the “you” in the phrase can be an individual, a family, a community, a nation. More pressing, is the subjunctive temporality of the phrase – “is coming.” The rhetoric of fear frames the threat as always approaching and imminent, even though not yet actually present. This subjunctive temporality is particularly powerful in the digital age where fragments of information circulate asynchronously. In seeking to understand the subjunctive and ambiguous nature of contemporary fear, I hope to identify new ways of managing these feelings.



Erin J. Rand

### **Affective Weapons: Polarizing Politics through Anti-Trans Rhetorics**

Political leaders around the world increasingly deploy affective rhetorics to motivate their constituents to act. This project focuses on the process by which rhetoric can produce certain groups of people as what I call “affective weapons.” These populations are imagined not as legitimate political subjects with the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, but as objects—weapons—to be deployed aggressively by others. My case study in this project is the political discourse about transgender youth in the United States from 2015 to 2024; trans youth, introduced as affective weapons by conservative spokespeople, are not viewed as minors whose health and safety deserve protection, but as flashpoints for rightwing grievances. I understand affective weapons in political discourse as the inverse of Sara Ahmed’s (2010) notion of “happy objects”: rather than objects around which positive affect accumulates, affective weapons are objects treated as sticking points for bad feelings which drift from other anxieties (Hsu 2022), and through which social relations based in fear and hatred are produced and strengthened. Affective weapons proliferate within their rhetorical ecologies (Edbauer Rice 2005), working destructively not just to dehumanize the group so constituted but also to polarize public sentiment and to erode democratic deliberation.

Louise Schou Therkildsen

### **Dwelling in Emotions: Transformative Anger and Communal Dwelling Places in Mats Jonsson’s *When we were Sami***

Contemporary challenges to the dominant idea of Nordic exceptionalism – the perception that the scale and impact of Nordic colonialism has been less extensive than other European empires – indicate a new impetus to address colonial wrongdoings in the Nordics. We see this tendency at the political level (reconciliation commissions, official apologies) but also culturally with literature and cinema narrating the complex stories of Nordic colonialism. In this paper, I zoom in on the Swedish context and explore Mats Jonsson’s graphic novel *When we were Sami* (2021), focusing on how the novel dwells in emotions often perceived as uncomfortable such as anger and sadness. This kind of emotional dwelling can be viewed as a response to the political effort ‘to close the book’ on colonialism through efforts at reconciliation. In contrast, Jonsson explicitly seeks to keep the book open through what we may conceptualise as expressions of transformative anger (Hviid Broberg 2024). I suggest adding an emotional layer to the concept of rhetorical dwelling places (Stillion Southard 2018) and that this practice can be viewed as an enactment of ethos as a communal dwelling place (Hyde 2004; Isager & Halstrøm forthcoming; Wilson 2020).



## RHETORICAL EFFECTS OF ARGUMENTATION (ECA PANEL)

While a rich Aristotelian tradition in the study of persuasive effects exists at the interface between rhetoric and argumentation theory, relatively little work has addressed other types of rhetorically relevant effects which are not, strictly speaking, necessarily persuasive, but which still relate to ethos, pathos or logos, and which can be observed in argumentative practices. This panel is devoted to documenting, describing, assessing, and explaining a range of rhetorical effects that arise during argumentative exchanges, and which have received fewer attention in the scholarly literature.

Rhetorical effects can be of different kinds, depending on their scope and their role in the argumentative process. As a consequence, they do not always straightforwardly correspond to classical Aristotelian categories. A cursory glance at rhetorical effectiveness (e.g., de Oliveira Fernandes & Oswald, 2022) indeed shows that these can impact the speaker, the audience, the message or the dynamics of the argumentative exchange altogether. Known effects on the arguer, of course, involve phenomena related to ethos, but not all of them are necessarily connected to persuasion: for instance, some rhetorical effects of argumentation are meant to impact the positioning of the speaker in the interaction, but not so much their perceived trustworthiness. Other effects target the audience, with pathetic phenomena as a case in point, but these effects are not limited to the modification of the affective dispositions of the audience in view of increasing adherence, as sometimes the effect that is sought might, on the contrary, consist in silencing or undermining the conversational legitimacy of parts of the audience, including the addressee (see e.g., Bondy, 2010 on argumentative injustice). While effects on the message may concern its believability, arguers might also merely attempt to make a message overwhelmingly salient, regardless of its epistemic value, in such a way that it occupies the conversational floor, thereby obfuscating other topics of discussion. Finally, some arguments may affect the conversational dynamics of the exchange by constraining the range of possible follow-ups, thereby acting on the dialectical possibilities, rights, and obligations of arguers as a result of processing an argument – such phenomena may be hosted within the framework of Sbisà's (2006) notion of deontic modal competence, for instance, or, more broadly, in an Austinian speech-act theoretic framework that takes into account the total speech situation beyond mere illocutionary acts (see e.g., Haro Marchal, 2023).

With this in mind, each contribution of the panel will focus on one (set of) rhetorical effect(s) typically triggered in argumentative contexts, be they artificial or natural, with the goal of accounting for it within contemporary argumentation-theoretic models. In so doing, the panel will further explore the interface between rhetoric and argumentation through the lens of contemporary argumentation theory.



**Amalia Haro Marchal**

### **Social identity and rhetorical effects in conversational dynamics**

Among the range of rhetorical effects that may be produced in argumentative exchanges, some concern the conversational dynamics of the exchange (de Oliveira Fernandes & Oswald, 2022), which can be understood in terms of what Sbisà (2006) refers to as the deontic modal competence. In the case of argumentation, this encompasses the set of dialectical moves an arguer is allowed or required to carry out, such as the entitlement to ask for additional reasons, the obligation to provide them, the entitlement to raise a challenge, etc. Adopting an interactional approach to speech acts of arguing (Haro Marchal, 2023), I will argue that the ways in which conversational dynamics can be affected are conditioned by the social identity of the participants. More specifically, I will argue that the type of rhetorical effect an argument has on the set of permissible or required dialectical moves is influenced by the social position of participants in the argumentative exchange (Almagro & Haro Marchal, 2024); in power imbalance situations, certain arguments can restrict the range of moves a speaker would otherwise be entitled to make. In the most extreme cases, this can result in the silencing of the opponent, such as in instances of argumentative smothering (Henning, 2021).

**Steffen Herbold, Alexander Trautsch, Zlata Kikteva, Annette Hautli-Janisz**

### **Rhetorical effects of LLM-generated impersonations**

Large Language Models (LLMs) have the potential to pollute the public information sphere, for instance by influencing the political opinion of humans, purporting political bias and successfully generating targeted persuasive communication. In this talk we go one step further and condition an LLM in such a way that it impersonates a specific figure in the political and societal sphere of the UK. We use questions (and their responses) in one of the most famous political talk shows in the UK, BBC1's Question Time, to show that LLMs are capable of impersonating political and societal representatives in televised debate. The study shows that a cross-section of the British society judges the impersonated responses to be more authentic, coherent and relevant than the original responses, showcasing a mismatch between the rhetorical effects generated by AI and those spontaneously generated by humans. This could follow from the fact that the linguistic structure between original and impersonated responses differ; for instance, impersonated responses have a significantly higher lexical diversity and overlap with the question. We also conduct a qualitative investigation, taking into account rhetorical structures like metaphors, anecdotes and rhetorical questions and discuss their role in generating the identified rhetorical effects.



**Thierry Herman & Maud Armani**

## **Self-correction in contemporary French novels: rhetorical effects of a paradoxical ethotic strategy**

Epanorthosis, a figure of speech involving self-correction, may be seen as undermining ethos, particularly in writing, as it suggests an inability to articulate the right word initially. However, it is pervasive in everyday conversation and has been studied for its persuasive effects in pragmatics (Younis & al., 2023; Budzynska & al. 2024) and rhetoric, where it signals sincerity (Reboul, 1991; Plantin, 2009). In literature, particularly contemporary French novels, epanorthosis is very frequent and represents everyday discursive movements and thought processes (Rouayrenc, 2015), offering a lens to study its rhetorical effects. Epanorthosis can emphasize the “ethos of the communicating subject” (Herman, 2005), as a counterpoint to the speaker’s person. While it may damage the communicator’s ethos by highlighting linguistic inadequacy, it can enhance the person’s ethos by signaling authenticity. However, excessive self-correction or radical reformulations, frequently seen in French contemporary literature, risk undermining positive rhetorical effects.

This study explores the variations of epanorthosis in French novels based on factors like number of autocorrections, semantic contradictions, and reformulation types (Steuckardt, 2009) in order to investigate their positive and negative rhetorical effects. We aim to discuss these rhetorical effects in various argumentative scenarios to further explore our understanding of the rhetoric-argumentation interface.

**Steve Oswald (chair)**

## **Reformulation as concealed argumentation**

Arguers resort to reformulation for many purposes, among which clarifying, illustrating, intensifying, or generalising. Existing linguistic research on reformulation has sought to characterise this phenomenon in terms of its types and functions (see Younis, forth. for an overview), while argumentative studies of reformulation have established the high frequency and perceived persuasiveness of reformulation in argumentative texts (Koszowy et al., 2020; Younis et al., 2023). This paper seeks to extend this research by (i) discussing the status of reformulation as a concealed argument and (ii) presenting an experimental study providing evidence for its rhetorical effects.

Empirical evidence suggests that reformulation is as persuasive as an argument, but that people do not identify it as such. Based on these findings, I will characterise reformulation as a concealed argument: it does not look like one, but it behaves like one. This has at least two rhetorical advantages: its content is less likely to be critically discussed (since we take the speaker to be giving us ‘more of the same’, but not to be arguing), and the reformulation may in fact serve as a hidden argument appearing to support the segment that was reformulated, which could increase its persuasive potential.

### **References**

- Almagro Holgado, M., Haro Marchal, A. Against the Neutral View of Poisoning the Well. *Argumentation* (2024).
- Bondy, P. (2010). Argumentative Injustice. *Informal Logic*, 30(3), 263–278.
- Budzynska, K., Koszowy, M., Saint-Dizier, P. & Uberna, M. (2022). Analysing Language of the Dynamics of Ethos and Emotions in Rephrased Arguments. *The 24th International Workshop on Computational Models of Natural Argument (CMNA'24)* 2024, Paper Presented.



- De Oliveira Fernandes, D., & Oswald, S. (2022). On the Rhetorical Effectiveness of Implicit Meaning—A Pragmatic Approach. *Languages*, 8(1), 6.
- Haro Marchal, A. H. (2023). Argumentation as a speech: Two levels of analysis. *Topoi*, 42(2), 481-494.
- Henning, T.M. "Don't Let Your Mouth": On Argumentative Smothering Within Academia. *Topoi* 40, 913–924 (2021).
- Herman, T. (2005). L'analyse de l'ethos oratoire. In Ph. Lane (éd.), *Des discours aux textes : modèles d'analyse*. Presses Universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 157-182.
- Koszowy, M., Oswald, S., Budzyska, K., & Konat, B. (2020). *The Role of Rephrase in Argumentation: Computational and Cognitive Aspects*.
- Plantin, C. (2009). Les éthé, leur poids, et comment s'en débarrasser. *Rhetoric and Argumentation in the Beginning of the XXIst Century: Proceedings of the XXIst Century*, 181.
- Reboul, O. (1991). *Introduction à la rhétorique. Théorie et pratique*. Paris : PUF
- Rouayrenc, C. (2015). Figures et oralité. *Pratiques. Linguistique, littérature, didactique*, 165-166.
- Sbisà, M. (2006). Communicating citizenship in verbal interaction: Principles of a speech act oriented discourse analysis. In H. Hausendorf & A. Bora (Eds.), *Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture* (Vol. 19, pp. 151–180). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Steuckardt, A. (2009). Décrire la reformulation : Le paramètre rhétorique. *Cahiers de praxématique*, 52, 159–172.
- Younis, R. (forth.). Reformulation and argumentative structures. *Proceedings of the 2024 Ontario Society for the Study of Argumentation Conference*.
- Younis, R., De Oliveira Fernandes, D., Gyga, P., Koszowy M. & Oswald, S. (2023). Rephrasing is not Arguing, but it is still Persuasive: An Experimental Approach to Perlocutionary Effects of Re-Phrase. *Journal of Pragmatics*. 210, 12–23.



## **RHETORIC ACROSS DISCIPLINES: THE VALUE OF THE RHETORICAL PERSPECTIVE IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Aristotle was a prime example of a multidisciplinary rhetorician: not only did he contemplate rhetoric, he also wrote about natural sciences, psychology and politics. Where rhetoric had a central position in Classical Antiquity as a foundation for an education in a range of disciplines, the application of rhetorical theory in current (European) higher educational programmes other than humanities is perhaps less straightforward. Still, it can be argued that rhetoric has a key role to play in modern education; as Hauser (2004, p. 39) states, “that role is not just in the public performance of political discourse but in the education of young minds that prepares them to perform their citizenship.” With the recent emergence of AI – within and beyond the classroom setting – and increasingly interdisciplinary academic research and education, rhetoric offers a valuable perspective for students regardless of their discipline. Rhetorical concepts enable students to discern persuasive strategies, distinguish between various audiences, evaluate the effectiveness and intentions of communicators, and reflect on their own role and behaviour.

This panel comprises four presentations that discuss different approaches and practices in Dutch and Belgian higher education in which rhetorical theory offers a valuable perspective across disciplines. The panel will be concluded with a general discussion, in which the panellists reflect on what constitutes the value of rhetorical theory in higher education. Attendants are invited to share their own perspectives and educational practices, to see where we can strengthen ties in (research into) rhetorical education.

### **Reference**

Hauser, G.A. (2004). Teaching Rhetoric: Or Why Rhetoric Isn't Just Another Kind of Philosophy or Literary Criticism. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 34(3), 39-53.



Jaap de Jong (chair)

Laura van Beveren

### **Reflecting in/on social professions: the critical potential of rhetorical reflexivity**

This presentation will focus on how rhetorical concepts from the work of Kenneth Burke (terministic screen, trained incapacity) and Krista Ratcliffe (rhetorical listening) are introduced into higher education programmes in social and behavioural sciences at Ghent University, Belgium. We explore what it means to educate university students in social work, clinical psychology, and education as 'rhetorical critics' in response to increasingly technocratic approaches to professional identity and as a way to stimulate more critical and reflexive professional attitudes. It is argued that the rhetorical perspective stimulates in students an 'interpretive attitude' that can uncover the multiplicity and ambiguity that is central to social, clinical, and education practice and that offers productive ways of dealing with it. The presentation will also tackle questions such as: 'what is critical/reflexive about positioning the social, clinical, educational professional as rhetoric critic?', 'what else is needed in the social and behavioural sciences curriculum to realize rhetoric's critical potential?', 'should the rhetorical perspective be part of the curriculum via separate courses in rhetoric or can it be integrated in other ways as well?', 'what are some of the risks or limitations of rhetorical reflexivity, such as relativistic positions, 'paralysis of action', or an individualization of reflection?'

Maarten van der Meulen

### **Supporting student presenters in times of AI: the growing importance of presentation delivery**

Presentation skills are part of many university curricula. Since a presentation is an authentic performance, the speaker in student presentations is becoming increasingly important. Students could use AI to create their speech text and supporting slides, but they must still deliver the presentation themselves. Any lack of content knowledge will show in the presentation or in a subsequent question round. Therefore, it is likely that these authentic performances will become more prominent in higher education assessments, with an increased attention for the delivery of a presentation.

In this presentation, I will present the first results of my PhD research on training and assessing the fifth canon of the orator – the delivery or *actio/pronuntiatio*. A survey among over two hundred higher education lecturers in the Netherlands and Belgium was undertaken, in which they were asked about their teaching practice regarding presentation skills and their recommendations for the best books on presentation skills. Based on the responses, a corpus of the most recommended presentation advice books was established and subsequently analysed to establish delivery criteria and definitions. This study is a first step towards establishing a peer feedback instrument for delivery skills in student presentations, that could be implemented across disciplines.





Jelte Olthof

### **Teaching rhetorical public speaking: the case of the rhetoric minor in Groningen**

Since 2019, the University of Groningen in the Netherlands offers a 30 ECTS minor program in rhetoric open to students from all programs taught at the university, from Chemistry to Business Administration and Medicine to Media. My presentation will focus on the opportunities and challenges that come with teaching rhetorical public speaking to such a diverse group of students and how the teaching team has tried to cater to them over the past five years. I will focus on one class in particular (Secrets of Rhetoric) in which we try to teach rhetorical theory and public speaking simultaneously. Students deliver a speech as their final piece of assessment and have to account for how their knowledge of the rhetorical theory has informed their choices in the speech. In the course of teaching rhetorical public speaking and assessing both the quality of the speech (invention, dispositio, and elocutio) as well as the delivery (actio and memoria), the team in Groningen has developed an approach based on proprioception, peer feedback, and intervision that seeks to train students' ability to critically reflect on this and help instructors assess their progress.

Martijn Wackers

### **Integrating rhetoric into a transdisciplinary education programme: the Collaborative Science for Biomedical Breakthroughs minor**

In 2023, the minor Collaborative Science for Biomedical Breakthroughs was launched at Delft University of Technology (DUT). This 30 ECTS minor is transdisciplinary: it involves students from multiple academic disciplines (engineering, medicine, social sciences and humanities), institutions (DUT and Erasmus Medical Centre in Rotterdam) and non-academic stakeholders (e.g., patients and pharmaceutical companies). Students work in small teams on a biomedical research project, such as investigating neuromedicine to combat Alzheimer's disease, supervised by researchers and PhD students from the field. At the same time, the programme includes a skills learning line which supports students to collaborate, reflect, and communicate.

In this presentation I will focus on the value of the rhetorical theory that the teaching team introduces to students throughout this minor. Concepts such as the rhetorical situation help students to grasp genres and adapt their messages to audience and context (e.g., in a research paper or in a talk at a stakeholder symposium). Rhetorical theory provides students with a vocabulary to critically reflect on their communication and collaboration practice, both as an individual and within their group, serving as a bridge between disciplines. I will discuss students' and teachers' experiences with this approach, highlighting opportunities and challenges.



## HOSTILE DIGITAL ARCHITECTURE: RESTRICTING RHETORICAL AGENCY THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

This panel introduces the concept of Hostile Digital Architecture (HDA) through a series of abductive (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014) case studies. We define HDA as technological infrastructure that restricts the agency of interactants, causing harm for the purposes of neoliberalist gains, whether due to malfeasance or neglect. Using an affordance framework, our three panelists investigate how digital spaces are intentionally pushing individuals toward certain patterns of behavior on or offline, often ones that betray their own interests at the expense of others (Fox and McEwan, 2017).

Like hostile architecture, HDA is made up of “various structures that are attached to or installed in spaces of public use in order to render them unusable in certain ways or by certain groups” (Lynch, 2016, p. 68). For this panel, we investigate how HDA constrains rhetorical agency. As Cheryl Geisler argues (2004), “Digital technologies, by altering the human experience of space, appear to alter the sense of human potential or agency” (p.11). We position HDA alongside dark/deceptive patterns as another tool for digital rhetoricians to recognize and critique the many ways that digital infrastructure restricts behavior (Brown & Hennis, 2019; Fox & McEwan, 2017; Sparby, 2017). Unlike dark/deceptive patterns, HDA does not outright lie (York, 2023). It does not impose fake time limits or make use of false buttons. Instead, it relies on the strategic structuring of digital space to promote particular outcomes, especially those favorable to the owner (York, 2023).

Environments that make use of HDA are often intentionally opaque and have wide-reaching consequences; such that those who interface directly with the space are not always those who are affected by it. As our first two panelists will show, the constricted behavior of interactants in these digital environments materially affects the life and livelihood of individuals who encounter them offline.

For example, Melissa Guadrón examines the algorithms that undergird prior authorization processes in the United States; she investigates the role of healthcare providers and insurance employees as interactants, and how their (forced or voluntary) dealings with these technological systems harms patients via the denial of insurance claims. Next, Brittany Halley interrogates the algorithmic profiling practices of the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR). Border agents are framed as direct interactants and travelers as the ones most harmed by these automated systems. Finally, Elizabeth Velasquez looks at how interaction infrastructures on the dating app Hinge constrain micro-behaviors in communication. This final use case highlights a time when the interactants and persons being harmed are one and the same. Within the context of Hinge, individuals are both directly engaging with the infrastructure and feeling the effects of their hostility.

This panel aims to show the breadth of situations that an analytic tool like HDA can be applied to. Using case studies from health & medicine, security & surveillance studies, and digital media studies, we hope to propose a new lens through which researchers can examine or critique digital spaces and connect the consequences thereof with offline contexts.



**Melissa Guadrón (chair)**

### **“Deny, Delay, and Defend”: Hostile Digital Architecture and Health Insurance**

Recently, lawsuits have been brought against health insurance companies, Cigna and UnitedHealth, for using algorithms in the prior authorization process. In California, health insurers must “conduct and diligently pursue a thorough, fair and objective investigation” (Cal. Code Regs. tit. 10 § 2695.7) of each patient's case. However, according to the California Cigna Lawsuit Amended Complaint (Kisting-Leung, et. al. v. Cigna Corporation, 2023), Cigna used their algorithm “to enable its doctors to automatically deny payments in batches of hundreds or thousands... thereby evading the legally-required individual physician review process” (p. 1). Use of these algorithms led to the denial of health services, disproportionately affecting the elderly.

The lawsuits argue that despite knowing the algorithms have a high error rate, use persisted (Alltucker, 2023); and patients (and their families) suffered as a result. Citing these lawsuits as well as testimony from whistleblowers at Navihealth (a subsidiary of UnitedHealth that relies on the nH Predict AI Model to evaluate claims) and other companies, I abductively investigate this use of algorithms as a form of HDA which perpetuates the insidious strategy of “deny, delay, and defend” (More Perfect Union, 2023) through creating high-stakes time pressures, confusing technical standards, and unclear information requirements.

**Brittany Halley**

### **“Deployment of the Solution”: Hostile Digital Architecture and the European Border Surveillance System**

The European Union (EU) aggregates “near-real-time” data points for securitization from networks of biometric sensors, surveillance apparatuses, and human actors including border patrol agents, military personnel, and local law enforcement. One form of automated risk assessment in the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR) is algorithmic profiling, which relies on these networks to evaluate travelers' behavior in a “behind-the-scenes risk analysis” (Deloitte, 2019, p. 202). The mechanisms by which algorithmic profiling predicts an individual's risk level are often opaque—for both the border control agent and the so-called “risky” individual. The real-time inaccessibility of this technology constrains rhetorical agency in the sense that there is no “negotiating” with the algorithmically-derived conclusions. With border management systems (EUROSUR included) increasingly turning to algorithms and AI-tools for analyzing and predicting risk, the constraining of rhetorical agency is all the more pressing.

I use Clarke's (2022) Situational Analysis to understand how HDA limits rhetorical agency of border agents and travelers surveilled by EUROSUR. The hostile digital architecture of these automated securitization technologies prompts us to ask: How do the ideological assumptions about who is (dis)allowed mobility become “off-loaded” onto and encoded into this opaque technology? And how does this opacity further reify these ideological assumptions?



Elizabeth Velasquez

## **“Designed to be Deleted”: Hostile Digital Architecture and Dating Apps**

Launching in 2012, Hinge immediately marketed itself as an alternative to Tinder. Though still in its infancy, Tinder had already gained a reputation as catering to populations looking for short-term connections. Hinge, on the other hand, called itself “designed to be deleted,” targeting people looking for long-term relationships (Hinge, n.d.). Hinge maintained this distinction by redirecting interactant behaviors and recontextualizing interactions through in-app features, like embedding lengthy profiles, non-anonymous liking systems, and limiting daily matches. The affordances and constraints inherent to Hinge’s matching algorithm and messaging capabilities are, according to the app, intended to “inspire intimate, in-person connections” (Fox and McEwan, 2017; Hinge, n.d.). To facilitate those connections, Hinge makes unilateral decisions that artificially constrain the agency of online daters and bars them from any attempt to negotiate with this system. The app does this by automating compatibility checks between people based on algorithmically-determined preferences. Connections are further moderated through Hinge’s conversation starters and prompt systems, limiting conversation form and content. I argue that these and other mandates of Hinge’s digital environment exemplify HDA’s ability to nudge behavior through restrictive frames of communication.

### References

- Alltucker, K. (2023). Is your health insurer using AI to deny you services? Lawsuit says errors harmed elders. *USA Today*. Retrieved December 13, 2024.
- Brown, J. J. and G. C. Hennis. (2019). Hateware and the Outsourcing of Responsibility. in *Digital Ethics: Rhetoric and Responsibility in Online Aggression* eds J. Reyman and E. Sparby. Routledge.
- Clarke, A. E. (2005). *Situational analysis*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Deloitte. (2019). Study on the feasibility and implications of options to digitalise visa processing.
- Fox, J. and B. McEwan. (2017). Distinguishing technologies for social interaction: The perceived social affordances of communication channels scale. *Communication Monographs* 84(3), 298-318.
- Geisler, C. (2004). How Ought We to Understand the Concept of Rhetorical Agency? Report from the ARS. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 34(3), 9-17.
- Hinge. (n.d.). Our mission. Retrieved December 13, 2024
- Hirschfeld-Kroen, J. (2023). Whistleblower exposes health insurance companies' most evil scheme. *More Perfect Union*. Retrieved December 13, 2024
- Kisting-Leung, et. al. v. Cigna Corporation, 2:23-cv-01477-DAD-KJN. Amended Class Action Complaint (2023).
- Petty, J. (2016). The London Spikes Controversy: Homelessness, Urban Securitisation and the Question of ‘Hostile Architecture.’ *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, 5(1), 67-81.
- Pew Research Center. (2023, February 2). Key findings about online dating in the U.S. Retrieved December 13, 2024
- Sparby, E. M. (2017) Digital Social Media and Aggression: Memetic Rhetoric in 4chan's Collective Identity. *Computers and Composition* 45, 85-97.
- Tavory, I., & Timmermans, S. (2014). *Abductive Analysis: Theorizing Qualitative Research*. The University of Chicago Press.
- York, E. (2023). “Deceptive by Design: The Visual Rhetorical Mechanism of Dark Patterns” *Kairos*.



## **EXTREMISM IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE THROUGH A RHETORICAL AND DISCURSIVE LENS: AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN SCHOLARS IN CONVERSATION**

The 21st century has seen an intensification of discourse phenomena within the spectrum of 'extreme' and 'extremist,' which circulate amidst the backdrop of various crises—economy, war, climate change, pandemic driven—and thrive on new media affordances and practices favorable to their global spread. Discourse taken to the extreme or grounded in extremist ideologies, whether left or right leaning, prevents openness to others' beliefs and values, dismisses opposing views as worthless and opponents as intellectually and ethically lacking, and deepens identity-based, 'us-them' polarization. In some cases, extremist discourse denies the very humanity and agency of potential interlocutors. Performed by diverse public figures, mis-/disinformation, propaganda, conspiracy theory, anti-democratic populism, cancel culture, and hate speech have become the new 'normal' in (semi-)public arenas. Notably, various social and institutional actors have instrumentalized either performances of extremism or labels and accusations stemming from these practices ('woke,' 'anti-woke,' 'fake news,' 'TERFs,' and so forth) to denigrate opponents further, enhance mistrust and social divisions, and stifle dialogue. At the same time, policymakers, civil society representatives, public intellectuals, and media and political actors have been seeking to pin down the challenges of 'extreme' and 'extremism,' resulting in symbolic struggles over definitions, values, and solutions. While several recent volumes and special issues have tackled aspects related to extremist discourse and rhetoric, either by focusing on a particular area, such as populism (Kock & Villadsen, 2022) and conspiracy theory (Demata et al., 2022; Danblon & Donckier de Donceel, 2024), or on multidisciplinary analytical approaches (Patterson & Hidalgo-Tenorio, 2025), less attention has been given to the instrumentalization of 'extreme' and 'extremism' in public discourse, on the one hand, and to its problematization, on the other.

Our panel in two parts brings American and European rhetoricians, argumentation scholars, and discourse analysts into a conversation on 'extreme' and 'extremism' in public and (semi-)public discourse that we believe will be valuable to advancing research in this area. The eight contributions tackle extremism-related manifestations in various locations across the two continents, encompassing the U.S., Italy, France, the UK, Denmark, and Romania. They provide thus a relevant range of empirical case studies that could lead to fruitful comparisons. The research objects call attention to recent public events and debates, while the approaches proposed aim to expand the current theoretical and analytical frameworks in rhetoric, argumentation, and discourse studies: the strategic use of "woke" and "anti-woke" positionings in legislative hearings on public education in the U.S. (Asen); a rhetorical perspective on economic extremism in Donald Trump's new platform (Colombini); the fostering of extremist dissent on social media platforms by U.S. gun rights advocates (Howard); strategic ambiguity uses in the extremist rhetoric of the Italian contemporary right (Pietrucci); appeals to emotion for justification, legitimation or solidarity-building purposes in extremist arguments or in extremism-related debates in France and the UK (Amossy; Fairclough); oral dialogue initiatives as antidotes to digitally-spread extremist discourse in Denmark (Kock); the rhetorical construction and contestation of the legitimacy of a Romanian Constitutional Court decision through recontextualization across public arenas (Cârlan, Mădroane & Beciu).



## References

- Kock, C., & Villadsen, L. (Eds.) (2022). *Populist rhetorics: Case studies and a minimalist definition*. Springer International Publishing.
- Danblon, E., & Donckier de Donceel, L. (2024). Les discours complotistes : quelles solutions pour quels problèmes ? / Conspiracy Theory: What problems, what solutions?. *Argumentation et Analyse du Discours*, (33).
- Demata, M., Zottola, A., & Zorzi, V. (2022). *Conspiracy theory discourses*. John Benjamins.
- Patterson, K. J., & Hidalgo-Tenorio, E. (Eds.). (2024). *Multidisciplinary approaches to the discourses of extremism*. Routledge.



## Part 1

Irina Diana Mădroane, Robert Asen (co-chairs)

Ruth Amossy

### **Dissimulating Extremism in Arguments “from Love”: The Campaign Discourse of Eric Zemmour in the French Presidential Elections (2022)**

How can we define political extremism? The lexicographic definition of “extreme” is “situated at the farthest possible point from a center,” meaning that it is far removed from views grounded in consensual values. It thus departs from what is considered reasonable and ethically acceptable; in other words, it is likely to be declared illegitimate. This paper intends to show how standpoints that appear as extremist in the French landscape are legitimized in the political discourse of the far-right party's leader, Eric Zemmour. Through a discursive and argumentative analysis of his campaign speeches in the 2022 presidential elections, I will show how recourse to positive emotions and self-evidence root his party, Reconquête, in the Republican doxa. I will focus on his appeal to love and emotional communion to analyze a process of naturalization, justification, and legitimation of radical measures widely condemned in the public sphere. Far from seeing himself as situated at the farthest point from the center, Zemmour claims to be close to this center while redefining it. Meant to dismiss the accusations of hatred and racism, the argumentation from love puts in the background radical policies in order to make them go through.

Isabela Fairclough

### **Radicalised elites, radicalised publics. The framing of the 2024 riots in the context of mass-migration.**

This paper is about the framing of the August 2024 riots in the UK, following the murder of three little girls at a dance class in Southport by a young man, son of Rwandan immigrants. Riots erupted in several cities, in protest against uncontrolled mass-migration, and were swiftly put down, with hundreds of rioters imprisoned, not only for violence but simply for sharing allegedly inflammatory posts on Facebook and WhatsApp. The Labour government and the left-wing press framed the riots through the lens of racism, Islamophobia and disinformation. Opponents of the government emphasised other causes: the population's opposition to mass-migration, the impact it has on their safety and living standards. I will test my conception of how framing works, via two main mechanisms: (1) either by inviting a chain of inferences from a chosen frame to a conclusion, or (2) by altering the acceptability, relevance and weight of competing reasons in a deliberative process (Kock 2023). My discussion is placed within a critique of Britain as a country where the views of the average citizen are now considered extreme by the left-liberal elites. The UK is now ranked only in the third tier on a global index of freedom of expression due to what is described as the chilling effect of government policies, legislation and policing.





**Christian Kock**

## **Oral Dialogue as Antidote to Digitally Powered Extremism**

Digital communication undoubtedly helps promote verbal extremism. Initiatives to promote personal, oral dialogue may act as antidotes. I will discuss three such initiatives. Deutschland spricht, a project organized by German media houses, brings pairs of strongly disagreeing citizens in contact so they can meet on their own, usually with something to eat and drink. The documentation published by the project, including reports on selected meetings and participants' reflections on them, exemplifies interesting, sometimes surprising communicative results. Consensus is rare, but experiences of increased understanding and perhaps resonance are not so rare. Bridge Builders, a Danish project, likewise brings strongly disagreeing individuals together with something literally on the table, so-called "Dialogue Coffee." Its initiator, Özlem Cekic, a former MP for the Socialist People's Party (and a Muslim immigrant), originally thought of inviting herself to coffee in the homes of people who had sent her hate mail. Frirummet, a project run by Danish schools of continuing education, organizes public debates between disagreeing politicians, etc., who are to follow a set of debate rules. Among these are: "Tell me something about your personal background that helped form the views you hold" and "What do you consider your opponent's strongest argument?"

**Alexandru I. Cârlan, Irina Diana Mădroane, Camelia Beciu**

## **Countering Extremist Discourse – but at What Cost?**

### **The Rhetorical Construction and Contestation of the Legitimacy of a Constitutional Court Decision**

One of the central institutional roles of a constitutional court is safeguarding democracy against extremism. But, like any public institution, a constitutional court is not immune to allegations of political control and partisanship. Its decisions, while meant to adjudicate fundamental controversies, may, in turn, stir controversy by provoking dissent across various media and public arenas, undermining institutional legitimacy, and bringing the erosion of public trust to the fore. This is also the case of a recent decision of the Romanian Constitutional Court to remove a prominent far-right candidate from the presidential election campaign, based on a justification that was described as abusive by many. The paper analyses the ensuing debate, following the circulation of arguments in the generalist media and in specialized fields, and focusing on how they travel both within argument spheres (Thomas Goodnight) and across contexts (William Rehg) as well as on their capacity to constitute publics (Michael Warner). While the main argument in the court's decision relies on a per a contrario argumentation scheme, the public debate evaluates its consequences for the effectiveness of countering extremism, and considers the side-effect of limiting individual freedom and the possibility of challenging decisions that are ultimately political. The paper concludes with a proposal for the role of rhetoric in accounting for legitimacy, understood not only as an institutional descriptor but also as a communicative outcome of public deliberation across networked publics (Robert Asen).



**Part 2****Robert Asen, Irina Diana Mădroane (co-chairs)****Robert Asen****Extremism in Legislative Settings:  
Anti-Woke Discourse and Public Education**

Considering extremist discourse in legislative forums, my presentation addresses a September 2021 legislative hearing held in the US state of Wisconsin. Republican members of the state legislature called the public hearing, which included the participation of legislators and witnesses who testified during the hearing, to discuss a proposed bill that would prohibit “race or sex stereotyping” in public school classrooms. Right-wing participants supporting the bill asserted it would remedy the problem of extremist left-wing ideologues (e.g., teachers, administrators) seeking to indoctrinate schoolchildren in “woke” worldviews that denied individuals’ humanity and divided people against each other. In response, left-wing participants charged that the bill’s supporters acted as extremists in seeking to censor difficult yet necessary discussions while prescribing sanitized classroom curricula. In their view, the bill would salve the conscience of its supporters and the mostly white families they represented by replacing an honest account of past wrongs and present ills with a specious substitute. My presentation will address key themes of unity and division, individual and group, indoctrination and censorship, equality and inequality, neutrality and bias, and more. I will also consider how statements in this hearing modeled “anti-woke” discursive strategies and how some witnesses resisted these strategies.

**Crystal Colombini****Economic Extremity from Center to Margins**

As radical transformations pervade “centrist” spheres of existence, the challenges of conceiving, critiquing, and countering extremist thought and action gain attention from thinkers across fields, including rhetorical studies. Yet though references to extreme economic relations pervade public discourses, some find economic versions of extremity easily alleged but hard to define objectively (e.g., Yavorsky et al), suggesting that economic associations may hinder more than help efforts to productively conceptualize “extremity” for the late neoliberal political economic moment. For instance, economist Richard Davies in linking Extreme Economies to “the most difficult, pressurised and volatile circumstances on earth” reserves the lexicon of extremity for conditions in the margins, not the center, while cognitive studies observe that the stereotypical association of economic extremism with low cognitive ability misses the deviant intelligence of influencing radical attitudes (Lin and Bates). Finally, political frustrations mask slippage among economic and cultural extremism and conventionality, obscuring how political figures like Donald Trump advance agendas through oscillation (Mizruchi and Gălan). This panelist considers these and other transdisciplinary and transnational perspectives to first develop a rhetorical framework for complicating invective around economic extremism, then apply it to the rhetorical construction and critique of Trump 2.0’s economic power and platform.



**Robert Glenn Howard**

**When Gun Rights Advocates “Eat Their Own”:  
Extreme Grassroots Political Speech on Social Media in the US Context**

When a pro-gun rights persona on YouTube questioned another GunTuber's claims of military service, a shocking amount of hate speech erupted across several social media platforms. The exchange was full of bigoted tirades and threats of violence. Amid the verbal fray, one gun rights supporter lamented: “Why do we always have to eat our own?” Through a series of examples where the phrase “eat our own” appears in pro-gun social media, this paper documents how extreme discourse fosters dissent. While social media has enabled grassroots groups to form around informal leaders, the pro-gun online community often “eats its own” because social media platforms facilitate extremist communication behaviors. These platforms reward strident, provocative, and violent expression with audience attention. As one level of extremity is reached, users are compelled to push the envelope further, grasping for views, likes, and replies. This behavior creates a feedback loop of increasingly provocative discourse. In the end, this discourse undermines the cohesion of a group that imagines itself as comprised of individuals who are judicious and slow to anger. The case of gun rights advocates “eating their own” suggests some ways that grassroots political movements are undermined by the kinds of discourse social media encourages.



## **RSA @ RSE OPEN DISCUSSION PANEL RHETORIC AND THE FUTURE OF ACADEMIA: TRANSATLANTIC DIALOGUE IN A TIME OF CRISIS**

**Pamela Pietrucci, Kris Rutten (co-chairs)**

This open discussion panel invites scholars in rhetoric from both the United States and Europe to engage in a candid dialogue about the growing challenges faced by academia, particularly in light of recent U.S. political developments under Trump's policies, which increasingly target scientific institutions and academic freedom. Building on the productive encounters of past RSA conferences—where RSE @ RSA panels successfully fostered transatlantic conversations among rhetoricians—this session offers a reciprocal space at the RSE conference for continued exchange. The discussion is open to all, with no fixed agenda, and is intended as an informal and inclusive dialogue where everyone is welcome and encouraged to speak freely. Together, we will reflect, brainstorm, and explore collaborative strategies to protect and revitalize academic practices in the face of political interference.



## MANIFEST, EMBODIMENT, BACKLASH: ON DIFFERENT STAGES OF ACTIVIST RHETORIC

This panel seeks to illustrate three kinds of rhetorical labor associated with activism's challenge of the status quo (Condit 1987; Villadsen 2020). Both Foust & Alvarado (2018) and Berg, Nielsen & Buhre (2023) describe social movement activism less as the study of clearly delineated group histories and more as the process of setting "the social" into motion. If rhetorical scholars are to take this notion seriously, it requires a greater focus on and sensibility toward the various stages of activism and the rhetorical processes that they entail. The papers in this panel thus all focus on different ways that activism is rhetorically conceived, enacted or received.

The overall approach of the panel draws on a core understanding of activism as a practice distinctly different from traditional oratory, but still concerned with the change that is fundamental to rhetoric. As such, activist expressions may complicate key rhetorical notions of identity, enactment and persuasion. Activism—especially when involving civil disobedience—does not conform to the main rhetorical forms or tone found within the dominant political system (Berg & Christiansen, 2010; Murray 2018). In other words, the sense of urgency (Hawhee, 2023) and necessity that activism grows out of is consistently challenged as it clashes with mainstream societal norms for deliberation. In light of the growing number of scholars concerned with the limitation of the rhetorical form of parrhesia, i.e. speaking truth to power (see e.g., Artz, 2020; Cloud, 2020; Murray, 2021), it may be useful to investigate how certain forms of activism take to what Lee Artz has called "speaking power to truth" (Artz, 164) in assembling and enacting resistance to injustices through means beyond merely the spoken or written word.

With these assumptions about activist rhetoric in mind, the three papers of the panel take on varying approaches and perspectives in examining different stages of activist rhetoric as it plays out in a Danish political/activist context. The first paper focuses on manifesto writing as a possible way to conceive activist rhetoric or to take the role of the activist upon oneself. However, instead of analysing existing manifestos the study explores the specific creative processes of a manifesto workshop, highlighting among others the inventional stages that constitute the enactment of activism. The second paper examines a Danish climate activist group and their series of road-blocking interventions in and around Copenhagen. Drawing on participatory fieldwork, the paper asks how and with what desired effect the group uses their bodies instead of their words to oppose the government's infrastructure plan. The third paper analyses the reception of activist rhetoric, focusing on how representatives of the current political system respond to activist interventions by seeking to either discipline activists or invite them to conform to mainstream norms of decorum. Together the three papers explore activism in its different processual stages—all of which have their own part in the challenge of current systems, norms or power relations.

### References

- Artz, Lee. 2020. "Speaking the Power of Truth. Rhetoric and Action for Our Times." In *Activism and Rhetoric*, edited by Lee JongHwa and Seth Kahn, 2nd ed., 1:159–72. Routledge.
- Berg, Kristine Marie, Esben Bjerggaard Nielsen & Frida Buhre. 2023. "Att sätta det sociala i rörelse: Retoriska perspektiv på aktivism i Norden", *Rhetorica Scandinavica* no. 86, 1-7.
- Berg, Kristine Marie & Tanja Juul Christiansen. 2010. "Rhetorical Exclusion. The Party in Hyskenstræde as Rhetorical Act", *Rhetorica Scandinavica* no. 54, 4–28.



Cloud, Dana L. 2020. "[Still] The Only Conceivable Thing to Do: Reflections on Academics and Activism." In *Activism and Rhetoric*, edited by Lee JongHwa and Seth Kahn, 2nd ed., 1:213–28. Routledge.

Condit, Celeste Michelle. 1987. "Crafting virtue: The rhetorical construction of public morality", *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73: 79–97.

Foust, C.R. & Alvarado, R. 2018. "Rhetoric and Social Movements". In Nussbaum, J. F. (red). *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*, 1–19, New York: Oxford University Press.

Hawhee, Debra. 2023. *A Sense of Urgency: How the Climate Crisis Is Changing Rhetoric*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Murray, Billie. 2021. "Reimagining Activism as Combative", in *Reimagining Communication: Action*, edited by Veronika Tzankova and Michael Filimowicz, 1st ed., 15–33. United Kingdom: Routledge.

Villadsen, Lisa. 2019. "Progress, But Slow Going: Public Argument in the Forging of Collective Norms", *Argumentation* 34:3, 325–337.

**Kira Skovbo Moser**

## **Writing themselves into action: A rhetorical investigation of the manifesto as process**

The manifesto is often seen as a cornerstone in activist or revolutionary rhetorical practices and has been examined extensively across various scholarly fields since the 1980s (Abastado 1980; Yanoshevsky 2009). However, despite the diversity of these studies, and despite the genre being tightly linked with action, the far most common approach is to study the manifesto simply as a text, rather than a larger rhetorical process. Drawing on a view of the genre as (co-)constitutive of both our public spheres, and of counter publics, this paper poses the questions: What can investigating the manifesto as a process tell us about the tensions between text and action? And further, what might this process then tell us about the interventional aspects of engaging in activism?

Following Breanne Fahs' understanding of the manifesto as "a transformational pedagogical practice" (2019, 37) and Sara Ahmed's ideas of the manifesto as embodiment and enactment (2017) the paper examines different creative and rhetorical processes emerging during a four week manifesto writing workshop. Based on this, the study seeks to expand a rhetorical understanding of the manifesto (and possible subsequent activism) as not only text, but also experimental process/practice and action.

### **References**

- Abastado, C. (1980). Introduction à l'analyse des manifestes. *Littérature* (Paris. 1971), 39(3), 3–11.
- Ahmed, S. (2017). *Living a Feminist Life*. Duke University Press.
- Fahs, B. (2019). Writing with Blood: The Transformative Pedagogy of Teaching Students to Write Manifestos. *Radical Teacher*, 115, 33–38. Education Research Complete.
- Fahs, B. (2020). *Burn it down! Feminist manifestos for the revolution*. Verso.
- Gring-Pemble, L. M. (1998). Writing themselves into consciousness: Creating a rhetorical bridge between the public and private spheres. *The Quarterly journal of speech*, 84(1), 41–61.
- Lyon, J. (2018). *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern*. Cornell University Press.
- Rand, E. J. (2008). An Inflammatory Fag and a Queer Form: Larry Kramer, Polemics, and Rhetorical Agency. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 94(3), 297–319.
- Somigli, L. (2003). *Legitimizing the Artist*. University of Toronto Press.
- Yanoshevsky, G. (2009). Three decades of writing on manifesto: The making of a genre. *Poetics today*, 30(2), 257–286.



Thore Keitum Fisker

## **“If we can get 24.000 people on the road” – Bodies beyond persuasion in Danish climate activist group Nødbremsen**

Despite increasing climate disasters and demonstrations, the latest UN Gap Report (2024) contends the major insufficiencies of governments' climate policies. Faced with this reality, climate advocates are desperate to invent impactful communication strategies (see Fisher, 2024; Malm, 2021). This paper explores one such strategy. Drawing on the author's fieldwork within the climate activist group Nødbremsen, (En. The Emergency Brake) this paper argues for reconceptualizing rhetorical understandings of embodied activism. In the literature, the corporeal aspect of activism often is understood as enacting a challenge to conventional social norms (Del Gandio 2015; Harrebye 2015) or as the means to achieve a feeling of community (Kahn, 2020; Rand 2014). Through an analysis of the bodily practice of Nødbremsen's roadblocks, this paper argues for supplementing these functions of embodied activism with a conception more aligned with Billie Murray's non-persuasive “combative activism” (2021). Disrupting infrastructure, the vilified bodies in Nødbremsen function not to persuade audiences, but to become explicit adversaries (see Prenosil, 2012, 295) to the government's allegedly sustainable policy and, eventually, to take up enough space on the road to force the government to negotiate. As participants in Nødbremsen put it, “we need to do something that cannot be ignored.”

### References

- Del Gandio, Jason. 2015. “Activists, Bodies, and Political Arguments.” *Liminalities* 11 (4): 1–13.
- Fisher, Dana. 2024. *Saving Ourselves: From Climate Shocks to Climate Action. Society and the Environment*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kahn, Seth. 2020. “ON STRIKE! A Rhetorician's Guide to Solidarity-Building.” In *Activism and Rhetoric*, edited by Seth Kahn and Lee JongHwa, 2nd ed., 1:139–49. Routledge.
- Malm, Andreas. 2021. *How to Blow up a Pipeline: Learning to Fight in a World on Fire*. Brooklyn, New York: Verso Books.
- Murray, Billie. 2021. “Reimagining Activism as Combative.” In *Reimagining Communication: Action*, edited by Veronika Tzankova and Michael Filimowicz, 1st ed., 15–33. United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Prenosil, Joshua D. 2012. “The Embodied Enthymeme: A Hybrid Theory of Protest.” *JAC: A Journal of Composition Theory* 32 (1/2): 279–303.
- Rand, Erin J. 2014. “‘What One Voice Can Do’: Civic Pedagogy and Choric Collectivity at Camp Courage.” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 34 (1): 28–51.
- United Nations Environment Programme. 2024. “No More Hot Air ... Please! With a Massive Gap between Rhetoric and Reality, Countries Draft New Climate Commitments.” Emissions Gap Report 2024.



**Esben Bjerggaard Nielsen (chair)**

## **Merely Impolite or Saboteurs of Democracy? Reactions to Activism and the Rhetorics of Admonishment**

In the last few years, issues such as COVID policies, the climate crisis, and the war in Gaza have prompted activist interventions in political debates, planned events, and even everyday life. The fault lines of the political moment have led to activist expressions that have garnered a host of reactions from the political establishment. Such reactions range from the increasing amount of anti-activist laws around Europe to explicit rhetorical backlash from political operators in the media.

This paper examines the reception of activism in a Danish context, focusing on how established political voices have reacted to activism that use civil disobedience or other disruptive tactics as part of their rhetorical expression. I analyse how these reactions articulate standards for participation in public discourse based on specific notions of decorum and proper forms of deliberation that narrow the scope of debates and the potential for participation. This form of admonition of activists happens both through hard and soft disciplinary rhetoric, either expressing anger at the disruption or performing a call for dialogue. Both types of admonition, however, marginalise activists by presenting them as separate from “rational”, “polite” and “democratic” participants of public debate (Berg & Christiansen 2010, Broberg 2023).

### **References**

- Berg, Kristine Marie & Tanja Juul Christiansen (2010). “Retorisk Eksklusion: Festen i Hyskenstræde som retorisk handling”, *Rhetorica Scandinavica* nr. 54, 7-28.
- Berg, Kristine Marie, Esben Bjerggaard Nielsen & Frida Buhre (2023). “Att sätta det sociala i rörelse: Retoriska perspektiv på aktivism i Norden”, *Rhetorica Scandinavica* nr. 86, 1-7.
- Broberg, Frida Hviid (2023). “Farveblinde følelser: Den retoriske marginalisering af den danske Black Lives Matter-bevægelse”, *Rhetorica Scandinavica* nr. 86, 46-65.
- Burke, Kenneth (2018). *The War of Words*. Oakland: The University of California Press.
- Ceccarelli, Leah (2011). “Manufactured Scientific Controversy: Science, Rhetoric, and Public Debate”, *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 14.2, 195-228.
- Dahlgren, Peter (2015). “The Internet as a Civic Space” in Stephen Coleman & Deen Frenlon (eds.): *Handbook of Digital Politics*, pp. 17-34. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Hauser, Gerard A. (1999). *Vernacular Voices: The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Spheres*. University of South Carolina Press.
- Lamb, William F. et al (2020). “Discourses of Climate Delay”, *Global Sustainability* 3, e17, 1-5.
- Müller, Jan-Werner (2024). “Protest Problems”, *London Review of Books*, 46.3.
- Nielsen, Esben Bjerggaard (2021). “Generationsanklager – konflikt, følelser og ungdomsaktivisme”, *Rhetorica Scandinavica* nr. 82, 17-33.
- Schwarze, Steven (2006). “Environmental Melodrama”, *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 92.3, 239-261.



## **THE USE OF COMPETITIVE DEBATES IN ETHICAL EDUCATION: RESEARCH REPORT**

One of the key elements of ethical education is developing a method for decision-making in various life situations. A well-made decision is the result of an appropriate selection of means, ensuring the achievement of the intended goal. The ability to match means to ends in a moral dimension simultaneously requires the skill to critically resolve dilemmas accompanying human actions. We argue that competitive debates can serve as an effective tool for these educational objectives. A crucial aspect enabling a discursive reflection on resolving ethical problems lies in the debate motions and the pro and con arguments formulated based on them.

In light of these claims, research was conducted involving the preparation of questionnaires to evaluate the formulation of issues in debate motions and to assess the value of topoi used in arguments. The research field included the largest youth debate tournaments organized in Poland. The findings revealed that debating at the school level provides a platform for addressing various social and cultural issues. Additionally, the foundation for selecting debate motions is rooted in ethical problems that require reflection to resolve dilemmas. The moral factor in decision-making becomes a key aspect of motion formulation, predominantly realized in advisory topics, where argumentative reflection focuses on the feasibility of achieving a particular good.

In these papers, we aim to present the preparation to conduct this study, as well as show its results and highlight their applications.

**Anna Sędlak (chair)**

### **Methods and Approach in Studying the Competitive Debates in Poland in the Search of Ethical Elements: Research Report**

The research investigates the potential of competitive debates as a method for ethical and philosophical education, focusing on decision-making processes and the critical evaluation of moral dilemmas. My paper will cover our idea of researching this area, the methods we used, as well as the arguments, motives, questions, and concepts we were looking for.

Data was collected through detailed questionnaires aimed at evaluating the ethical framing of debate motions and the use of rhetorical topoi in argumentation. The research sample was drawn from Poland's largest youth debate tournaments, which provided a diverse range of ethical issues and argument structures. The methodology emphasizes identifying how debate motions are formulated to encourage ethical reflection and how participants engage with pro and con arguments to explore moral dimensions or how they avoid addressing them. This approach offered a systematic framework to analyze how debating can facilitate ethical reasoning and judgment skills. Our findings reveal that such methodology was useful in looking at and analyzing the argument content in developing students' moral judgment and critical thinking abilities.





**Joanna Nowakowska**

### **Analysis of the Gathered Theses in the Study of Youth Competitive Debates in Poland**

Our analysis focuses on the ethical dimensions in the debate motions and the arguments utilized during competitive youth debates. Through a detailed examination of responses from our questionnaires, we identified recurring ethical themes and patterns in argumentation strategies. My concern in this presentation is how the data highlights certain debate motions that reflect key social, cultural, and moral concerns, prompting participants to engage in nuanced ethical reasoning. We categorized the motions based on their ethical content, distinguishing between advisory and evaluative thesis, and examined how participants employed rhetorical topoi to navigate ethical dilemmas. My concern is on the sole analysis of these findings. They show that debates often address issues such as justice, responsibility, and the common good, encouraging participants to critically weigh means and ends in decision-making processes. This analysis underscores the effectiveness of debate in fostering ethical reflection and reveals how argument structures influence the development of moral reasoning skills.

**Alicja Kornicka**

### **The Potential of Competitive Debates in Ethical Education: Results and Applications of the Study**

Our research demonstrates that competitive debates serve as an effective platform for ethical education by enhancing decision-making and moral reasoning. The results indicate that debate motions rooted in ethical problems encourage even young participants to engage deeply with moral questions, particularly in advisory topics where achieving a specific good is evaluated. This ethical engagement helps students develop critical thinking and argumentation skills necessary for resolving real-life dilemmas. Additionally, debating fosters an awareness of social and cultural issues, providing a reflective space for exploring diverse perspectives. The research findings suggest that incorporating debate into ethical education curricula can enhance students' ability to make well-informed decisions and be aware of moral dilemmas' existence. These insights can be applied in educational settings to design debate motions that address contemporary ethical challenges, ultimately preparing students to navigate complex moral landscapes in their personal and professional lives.



## FEMINIST POWERS OF RHETORICAL LISTENING

This panel addresses rhetoric and politics as well as digital communication by identifying three rhetorical problems (cancel culture, climate crisis, and speed of fake news) and offering ways to address them by employing the feminist power of rhetorical listening. The first paper offers meta-modern feminist figuration as a tactic of rhetorical listening, which may be used to listen to US cancel culture and hear beyond its cultural divides. The second paper offers the feminist power of listening as a means to address the climate crisis, specifically how human animals may “hear” the agency of nonhuman animals as well as their legal status. The third paper offers rhetorical listening as the grounds for Slow Argument, a corrective to the current fetishization of speed, deep fakes, and false information.

**Krista Ratcliffe (chair)**

### **Listening Beyond Cancel Culture via Metamodern Feminist Figuration**

One problem haunting contemporary US society is cancel culture, which exists on both the political right and left. How might we figure a way out of this problem? One answer is: metamodern feminist figuration. According to Daniel Kwan, a writer-director of the Oscar-winning film *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, metamodernism is the controlling “epistemic sensibility” of this film. From such an epistemic place, the film invokes the multiverse to represent how all probable existences may actually exist “everywhere all at once.” What would it mean to imagine this “everywhere all at once” as a rhetorical figure and then apply it to the study of cultural divides and cancel culture? This paper offers one response to this question via the following moves: (1) by investigating the importance of feminist figuration as a rhetorical listening tactic (2) by exploring metamodernism as a feminist rhetorical figure, employing its elements (braiding tones/moods/ideas, overprojecting or anthropomorphizing, reimaging representation, etc.) to construct a site for “an everything” that includes both modern and postmodern feminisms, and (3) by applying what this metamodern feminist method might mean for questioning cancel culture and imagining difficult conversations.



**Roxanne Mountford**

### **Listening Beyond the Human**

An urgent problem underlying deliberation over the climate crisis is the lack of legal standing of species and habitats threatened by human actions that are warming our planet. In Western (as opposed to Indigenous) culture, nonhuman animals' desires as independent agents are excluded from broader consideration because they are thought to lack cognition, language, and self-recognition. But science has gradually knocked down these biases. Thomas and Myers are moving nonhuman animals into core concepts such as ethics and society because the thresholds against which the human and the nonhuman animal have been distinguished are falling. In the field of rhetoric, Kennedy, Davis, and Hawhee have brought nonhuman animals into rhetoric, linking their agency to our own. To "hear" the agency of nonhuman animals, this paper argues, requires making two moves at once: relearning what humans and nonhuman animals have in common, but also what so-called "animal" traits in the human frustrate human/nonhuman animal interactions. This is especially clear when human and nonhuman animals perform together, where listening requires self-recognition and negotiation. This paper aims to merge animal rhetoric, feminist ethics, and rhetorical listening, for doing so is critical to our collective survival.

**Kasey Woody**

### **Slow Argument: Teaching Ethical Rhetoric in the Midst of Speed**

Rhetorical education—its purpose, how we reform/reframe it, and how we teach it—has been the subject of many conversations in the field of Rhetoric and Writing Studies for some time now (Booth, Glenn, Glenn and Ratcliffe, Petraglia and Bahri, Enoch). Many of us have come to realize that Aristotelian rhetoric may fall short in the current world in which we live—that is, the digital world in which deep fakes and the purposeful dissemination of false information have made engaging in public discourse ethically and responsibly harder than ever. Information and arguments move at the speed of the internet now, but as teachers of rhetoric, we must find ways to intervene. This paper presents a methodology called Slow Argument as a feminist rhetorical response that relies on rhetorical listening as a primary mode of engagement for public discourse by positioning Slow Argument within the larger Slow movement, explaining the application of Slow argument in the teaching of rhetoric, and exploring the ways in which Slow argument may be a corrective to a "fetishization of speed" that impedes our ability to engage ethically in rhetorical negotiations in all places and spaces.



## THE SPECIES OF RHETORIC AS CONTEMPORARY HEURISTICS FOR THE DIGITAL AGE

The *Rhetoric in Society 9 Conference* CFP asks, “does the ancient discipline of rhetoric still have a role to play in contemporary society?” In a world dominated by digitality, RSE asks: “are classical rhetorical concepts still important”? If we take “rhetoric” to be a technical, programmatic training in the prevalent modes of speaking and writing of a time and place, then we may answer these questions with a resounding “no.” What do ancient courtrooms, festivals, and assemblies have to do with this contemporary moment? However, if we take rhetoric to be the art of seeing and responding to the available means of persuasion—an art that is essentially concerned with adaptation and invention—then we arrive at a different conclusion: we have not yet scratched the surface of what that “ancient discipline of rhetoric” can reveal and do to address the evolving contingencies of digitality.

This panel takes as its site of inquiry the three traditional species of rhetoric and the temporalities that Aristotle assigned to them: forensic rhetoric’s concern for the past; epideictic rhetoric’s concern for the present; and deliberative rhetoric’s concern for the future. In sum, the papers of this panel argue that the temporalities of rhetorical discourse remain a rich site for inquiry, useful for contending with emergent issues that continue to configure us in relation to the past, present, and future. Speaker One examines the commonplace ways in which the past is rendered as a fact suitable for judgement and reconsiders the role that judgement plays in configuring the past by examining the role that YouTube has played in a returned interest in hand tool woodworking; Speaker Two theorizes aesthetic forms of epideictic rhetoric that function as present witnessing on social media platforms such as TikTok, considering how acts of witnessing are simultaneously powerful tools for user-dissent as well as how the platform appropriates that dissent; Speaker Three argues that traditional approaches to policy fail to adequately attend to the scale and temporality of contemporary problems like climate change, calling for a reconsideration of how deliberative rhetorics co-produce “sublime ontological objects” in ways that reorient us toward futurity.

Taken together, the papers of this panel address the unavoidable and unsolvable paradox that animates rhetorical practice: how do we live in a world of complex flux using conceptual tools that make that world understandable by way of division, categorization, representation, and evaluation? This panel takes up this paradox at the intersection of time and rhetorical genre: what value is there in demarcating past from present from future when these categories are so obviously inadequate? Each of these papers gives the same answer, albeit in very different ways: one must pass through temporal categories in order to uncover the rhetorical forces that link, rather than distinguish, a past to a present to a future.



## Nathaniel Street (Chair)

### **Forensic Rhetoric and The Past: Evaluation and the Presenting of the Past**

Generally speaking, forensic rhetoric renders past events, artifacts, and practices salient for judgement. Nietzsche's insights on history, especially in his essay "The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," have made it impossible to imagine this labour as a simple discovery of past fact, but as a creative appropriation that wills a past for the sake of present life. Yet it is Gilles Deleuze's amplification of Nietzsche's thought that reveals the active role that evaluation plays in not only judging the past, but in creating it as well. "To evaluate," he writes in *Nietzsche & Philosophy*, "is to determine the will to power which gives value to a thing." This paper attends to the role evaluation plays in the production of the past by examining an unexpected historical re-emergence over the past decade: hand tool woodworking, which has emerged out of an unlikely coordination between increasingly popular YouTube "makers" and an ongoing economic reconfiguration that has repositioned woodworking as a commodity. This paper attends to this phenomenon by determining the will that gives it value. As YouTube woodworker Richard Maguire, aka "The English Woodworker" declares, "hand tools are modern." This paper seeks to answer in what sense this has become the case.

## Caddie Alford

### **Epideictic Rhetoric and the Present: Witnessing Platformization**

Scores of scholars have pointed out that the epideictic is a unique force precisely because of its strange temporality (Foley; Sheard; Nicotra). Traditionally, the epideictic audience's role is to be the-oroï—observers/spectators/witnesses—to make sense of the display of present goals and known values even as the speech was oriented to some ambiguous futurity. That temporality gets even more complicated through platformization and digital conditioning. In this presentation, I articulate the epideictic functionality of user-generated interventions on TikTok, specifically #corecore videos. Each corecore can be thought of as an epideictic witnessing because each corecore attempts to document and amplify the ecocidal fallout of ubiquitous digitality: intensified "racial capitalism" (Robinson 1983) and cyberlibertarianism (Golumbia 2024).

Framing corecore as epideictic witnessing reveals a key yet unaccounted for contemporary epideictic audience: platforms, which appropriate user-generated witnessing to serve the logics of the past. Through an analysis of TikTok's commercial livestream program by way of leaked documents, reporting, and outputs, I'll suggest that TikTok witnessed users' epideictic aesthetics through what Munster and Mackenzie term "platform seeing" (2019). TikTok warped the values of corecore, turning an already slippery temporality into a stew of present ambient anxieties, future hopes, and a platform that wants to go backwards.



**Byron Hawk**

## **Deliberative Rhetoric and the Future: Climate Change and the Ontological Sublime**

Since Aristotle, deliberative rhetorics have been concerned with the future. But as the contemporary world becomes more complex, and technology becomes more expansive, the narrow situation of a legislating body can't fully address multiple or deep futures. Climate change is a perfect example of this problematic. Our inability to address climate change is because we expect problems to be represented in a way that will clearly identify them and enable us to propose a directly effective response that will fix it. But climate change is a complex phenomenon that exceeds our total grasp, both spatially and temporally, and cannot be stopped or fixed. Rather than recoil into the modern nostalgia for representational objects, we have to embrace climate as a sublime ontological object. Sublime ontological objects are partially accessible by humans but also extend into relations far in excess of our abilities to grasp them even as we develop newer technologies to reveal them. More than fixed objects, they are in a constant co-productive process as a function of these extended relations, one that humans participate in but can never fully know or control. Rather than a modern philosophical problem or postmodern aesthetic problem, the ontological sublime becomes a rhetorical dilemma that co-produces what is to come.



## **SPEAKING WITH THE VOICE OF THE FUTURE: CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD IN CLIMATE ACTIVIST RHETORIC**

In recent years, children and young people have emerged as powerful voices in the global climate movement, wielding rhetoric that transcends traditional adult activism and resonates across generations. From Greta Thunberg's "Fridays for Future" movement and the ensuing school strikes to legal challenges to government inaction brought by young people across the globe, children are increasingly taking up the mantle of climate activism. This panel explores the role of children as rhetorical agents in the climate crisis.

Children are often perceived as the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, yet they are also uniquely positioned to challenge climate inertia, offering a compelling narrative grounded in urgency, moral responsibility, and intergenerational equity. The rhetoric of young climate activists disrupts adult discourses of power, highlighting the emotional, ethical, and scientific dimensions of the crisis while compelling audiences to confront uncomfortable truths about the environmental degradation that will affect their futures. In speeches, social media campaigns, and (legal) protests, young climate activists combines an emphasis on urgency with stark calls for adult accountability.

This panel will examine the multifaceted nature of children's rhetorical strategies in climate activism. It look at how these young activists rhetorically employ 'childhood' as a persuasive tool and how this differs from traditional adult environmental activism. How do children rhetorically position themselves in relation to older generations, calling on them to act or face the consequences of their inaction? How do children and young activists leverage their perceived innocence and vulnerability to challenge adult complacency in the face of climate change? What ethical and emotional appeals are central to their rhetoric? It also looks at the extent to which children are able to use this rhetoric to make their voices heard by exploring case studies in which youth and adults square off on climate in and outside the courtroom. How do children rhetorically speak with the voice of the future? To what extent are they perceived to do so and what does this say about their agency and ability to effect meaningful change in the climate crisis debate?

By focusing on children as key rhetorical figures in climate activism, this panel will demonstrate how young people are reshaping the discourse around environmental change and challenging traditional forms of political participation.



Luke Winslow and Eli Mangold

### **“Our Children’s Trust”: Theorizing Rhetorical Children as Climate Activists**

As Greta Thunberg’s climate activism has shown, children possess unique rhetorical potency. However, rhetorical children remain understudied and undertheorized. In our presentation, we draw on our 2024 book *Children as Rhetorical Advocates in Social Movements* to explore why children can be powerful rhetorical advocates. Our theory is built on three strands. The first centers on moral obligation—an appeal based on the justice of helping the helpless. The second on natality—an appeal built on the idea of childhood as a safe space that should not be corrupted by politics. The third on a new concept, epideictic novelty—less a formal appeal and more a mode or style involving the novel subversion of typical norms of ethos and epideictic that creates space for audience contemplation. We will also explore how these three strands can be illustrated in the central role of children as climate activists, thereby explicating the three rhetorical strands and connecting theory with practice.

Ida Vikøren Andersen

### **Youth activists’ non-listening rhetoric: conflicting norms and understandings of citizenship in the Fosen wind power controversy**

In 2021, the Norwegian Supreme Court ruled that permits for wind power plants on the Fosen peninsula violated the human rights of the Sámi people. Despite this, the turbines remained operational, sparking massive protests by young Sámi activists, Nature and Youth, and Greta Thunberg in 2023. Activists framed the court’s decision as definitive, demanding the turbines’ dismantling and rejecting further deliberation. Meanwhile, the government argued that deliberation was needed to reconcile the ruling’s implications with majority interests and balance competing priorities: energy demands and climate transition versus nature conservation and Indigenous rights.

This case reveals a tension between a juridical mindset, seeking finality in court decisions, and a democratic mindset, valuing ongoing debate among competing perspectives. It also reveals a norm collision, as activists employed a “non-listening rhetoric”, rejecting opponents’ arguments and the deliberative process itself as illegitimate.

I examine these tensions through a close reading of a confrontation between Sámi activist Ella Marie Hætta Isaksen and Minister of Energy Terje Aasland. I explore how Isaksen’s “non-listening rhetoric” was both a rhetorical enactment of citizenship and a challenge to norms of rhetorical citizenship. Moreover, I discuss how the juridical mindset reshapes understandings of citizenship and its implications for deliberative democracy.





**Jelte Olthof (chair)**

**“Your Honor, they will live far longer than you.”**

### **Youth, Presence, and Future in the Rhetoric of Young Climate Litigants**

Since the Paris Agreement of 2015, young climate activists are increasingly suing their governments for failing to guarantee a clean and healthy future living environment. In recent years, dozens of such cases have made their way through the courts globally, sometimes resulting in victory, more often in dismissal. Many of the young plaintiffs strategically employ youthfulness to emphasize their innocence and position themselves as voices of the “future.”

In my presentation I will use the rhetorical concept of presence, coined by Chaïm Perelman and Lucy Olbrecht-Tyteca, to analyze the rhetoric of youth climate activists in the and around the courtroom. Presence, according to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, occurs when a speaker endows a particular issue with such salience that it fills their audience's entire consciousness. In the New Rhetoric, they write that this is the effect of “verbal magic” alone.

Presence is a useful concept to explain how the young activists overcome the temporal challenge of climate change, the worst effects of which are still in the future, as well as in making climate change salient and proximate in an attempt to overcome the legal obstacle of standing which plagues environmental litigation in Europe and the United States since the 1970s.



## **SYMBOLIC SCREENS AND DIGITAL DREAMS: RECLAIMING AESTHETICS IN RHETORICAL INQUIRY**

The digital age has introduced a wealth of content for rhetorical analysis; however, the role of style and aesthetics is often overlooked. Relegated to philosophy or medium-specific disciplines, aesthetics is often dismissed as secondary, with a risk of limiting the scope of rhetorical inquiry. This is particularly striking in a time when online subcultures—such as cottagecore, e-girl, and dark academia—actively define their identities through aesthetic and stylistic markers, and when AI tools are able to create with predefined ‘aesthetic ideals’ in mind. These elements do more than shape digital media interactions; they influence how individuals cultivate and express personal tastes through shared practices (cf. Paßmann & Schubert, 2021; Schreiber, 2017). Neglecting these aesthetic dimensions risks producing analyses that do not capture the full complexity of producers’ rhetoric.

Aesthetics, far from being a mere 18th-century invention tied to movements like art for art’s sake, has (historically) been intertwined with rhetoric. Especially Kenneth Burke’s emphasis on identification rather than persuasion underscores this connection by urging us to analyse symbols—whether linguistic, formal, performative, or material—through their capacity to relate to us, evoke feelings and construct meaning (Foss, 2004b, pp. 4-6). On the one hand, ‘aesthetic’ can, thus, be an important criterion for considering which symbols stand out, how they are interpreted and what they make us feel. Therefore, becoming a language or a ‘rhetoric’ on its own. This way of connecting aesthetic to rhetoric invites us to consider how our perception of ‘aesthetic ideals’ engages with Burke’s concept of terministic screens, which emphasises that language and its presented form is never neutral but actively shapes our perceptions and understanding of the world (Burke, 1966). In this sense, formal aspects and more specifically, aesthetic elements become central to how individuals interact with symbols and negotiate meaning.

While aesthetics can inform our engagement with rhetoric, art and aesthetics have always been prone to debate, as Lionel Trilling reminds us: “The discussion of art is a human activity quite as natural as the creation of art.” Indeed, the ‘aesthetic experience’ is a site of rhetorical engagement, where competing perspectives emerge. Especially Burke’s methodologies, with their focus on the “dialectic of competing perspectives,” provide a framework for exploring how individuals engage with artistic artifacts, particularly through their affective and aesthetic responses (Blakesley, 2003, p.1). By bridging these dimensions, (Burkean) rhetoric offers an opportunity to critically examine the interplay of aesthetics and rhetoric, addressing how they co-construct meaning and exert influence.

This panel advocates for the (re-)integration of aesthetics into rhetorical studies, emphasising their intrinsic connections and highlighting the theoretical and practical opportunities this approach provides. By revisiting and reappreciating aesthetics within rhetorical analysis, we can better understand the symbolic and affective power of artifacts, particularly in our increasingly digital and visually driven world.

### **References**

- Blakesley, D. (2003). *The Terministic Screen: Rhetorical Perspectives on Film*. Southern Illinois University.  
 Burke, K. (1968). *Language as Symbolic Action*. Univ of California Press.



Foss, S. (2004b). *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practice* (3rd ed.). Waveland Press.

Paßmann, J., & Schubert, C. (2021). Liking as Taste Making: Social Media Practices as Generators of Aesthetic Valuation and Distinction. *New Media*, 23(10), 2861-3136.

Schreiber, M. (2017). Audiences, Aesthetics and Affordances Analysing Practices of Visual Communication on Social Media. *Digital Culture & Society*, 3(2), 143-164.

**Chair:** Kris Rutten

**Amanda Adam**

### **Navigating the Digital Abyss: Rhetorical Analysis of Teen Tech Films in the Evolving Media Landscape**

In today's digital landscape, young adults are more visibly and actively engaged with aesthetics than ever before. Driven by platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat, they craft and share online personas through visual expression, fashion choices, and lifestyle choices. This aesthetic engagement shapes how they present their personal identity and taste, often through digital subcultures like cottagecore, e-girl/-boy, and dark academia (cf. Paßmann & Schubert, 2021; Schreiber, 2017). This paper explores young adults' digital aesthetics through the lens of young adult films—a genre traditionally analysed for its sociocultural implications (Smith, 2017). Shary's exploration of the "Teen tech film" (2005) becomes a focal point, revealing how digital media platforms are incorporated in teen films and are rhetorically shaping narratives around generational gaps in media literacy. With a specific focus on the film *Home* (Troch, 2016), this paper employs Kenneth Burke's rhetorical framework to investigate the affective impact of digital media on teen audiences. By rhetorically analysing the teen tech film and especially its aesthetic dimension, this research hopes to offer insight into how digital aesthetics in teen tech films engage young audiences and shape their experiences, contributing to a broader understanding of aesthetics in the young adult (online) world and cinema.

#### **References**

Shary, T. (2005). *Teen Movies: American Youth on Screen*. Wallflower.

Smith, F. (2017). *Rethinking the Hollywood Teen Movie : Gender, Genre and Identity*. Edinburgh University Press.

Troch, F. (Director). (2016). *Home* [Film]. Prime Time & Versus Production.



Christian Kock

## Aesthetic Experience as an End in Itself

Kenneth Burke saw literature as “equipment for living” (1941). He also wrote about art as “a factor added to life” and enjoined us to see art as “ritual” rather than “revelation.” (1931). Thus, we engage with literature for the sake of that engagement in itself; but it also helps us live.

In my book *A Rhetoric of Aesthetic Power: Moving Forms* (Kock, 2024), I argue for recognizing of aesthetic experience as an end and value in itself, a component of quality of life—not just as a means to other ends. Analyzing examples from literature and music, I theorize about those formal properties of aesthetic objects that enable them to afford aesthetic experience. Rhetoricians in the past (including Aristotle and Burke) have shown the way. A third major influence on my work came from the linguist Roman Jakobson’s ideas about the “poetic function” of language.

Contemporary academics have, I argue, downplayed aesthetic experience as an end in itself and one-sidedly emphasized its “derived” functions, such as providing human wisdom. With that said, more emphasis on aesthetic experience as such may indeed serve valuable external ends, such as strengthening individuals’ rhetorical agency and contributing to a more sustainable lifestyle.

### References

- Aristotle. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. The Revised Oxford Translation. Ed. Jonathan Barnes. Vol. II. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Burke, Kenneth. *Counter-Statement*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1931.
- Burke, Kenneth. “Equipment for Living.” In *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 3rd Edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973. 293-304.
- Jakobson, Roman. “Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics”. In *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1960, 350-377. In *Selected Writings III* (1980a), 18-51.
- Kock, Christian. *A Rhetoric of Aesthetic Power: Moving Forms*. Cham: Springer Nature, 2024.



Kyle Jensen

## Identification's Dimensions: Finding Higher Ground in the Generative AI Debates

Kenneth Burke's theory of identification, as presented in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, draws a distinction between rhetorical and poetic identification (Jensen, 2022). Whereas rhetorical identification references time bound acts of persuasion that are specific to local audiences, poetic identification references the timeless relationships that exist between an artwork's constituent parts (Burke, 1969, p. 4). Burke distinguishes between rhetorical and poetic identification for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that the tension between them points toward a general set of "verbal resources" that transcend rhetoric and poetic (Burke, 1969, p. 256). This set of resources, which includes such concepts as transformation, myth, and form, help critics "observe how verbal solutions arise, and how [such solutions] in turn give rise to verbal difficulties" (256). This presentation uses the distinctions between rhetorical and poetic identification to negotiate the verbal solutions and difficulties associated with generative AI technologies (Russell, 2019; Larson, 2022). Specifically, it shows how precise distinctions between rhetorical and aesthetic identification help critics develop balanced assessments of generative AI as a digital and social technology.

### References

- Burke, Kenneth. *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.
- Jensen, Kyle. *Kenneth Burke's Weed Garden: Refiguring the Mythic Grounds of Modern Rhetoric*. State College: Penn State UP, 2022.
- Larson, Eric J. *The Myth of Artificial Intelligence: Why Computers Can't Think the Way that We Do*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2022.
- Russell, Stuart. *Human Compatible: Artificial Intelligence and the Problem of Control*. New York: Viking, 2019.



Justin Hodgson

## **Techno-Aesthetics, the Human Condition, and the Doing of Post-Digital Rhetoric**

The rise of screen mediation, algorithmic representation, generative AI, and the like are not just computational considerations, but human considerations, as they participate in the human-technology assemblage (Hodgson 2019). Put simply: shifts in one (technology or human) introduce corresponding shifts in the other: i.e., regular usage of mediating technologies can alter our very physiology (Hayles 2012). But while many scholars still give primacy to the computational dimension, rhetoricians should be weary of ignoring the aesthetic, as new forms of mediation introduce new aesthetic values and new dimensions to the human condition. These emergent changes, often made tangible through the aesthetic, have the power to introduce new (Edbauer 2008) if not full on cultural markers (Drucker 2014; Bassett 2015): i.e., providing traces and indicators that can inform the very doing of rhetoric in a post-digital world. This presentation, then, will draw attention to how technological shifts carry corresponding shifts in aesthetics, showing how humans (as part of the human-technology assemblage) internalize these aesthetics and how they can be leveraged for rhetorical purposes, and then make the case for how an attunement to techno-aesthetics may better prepare rhetorical studies for the rapid changes being introduced by AI/Generative AI platforms and productions.

### References

- Bassett, Caroline. "Not Now? Feminism, Technology, Postdigital." *Postdigital Aesthetics: Art, Computation, and Design*. Editors David M. Berry and Michael Dieter, Palgrave MacMillan, 2015, pp. 136-50.
- Drucker, Johanna. *Graphesis: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production*. Harvard UP, 2014.
- Edbauer Rice, Jenny. "Rhetoric's Mechanics: Retooling the Equipment of Writing Production." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 60, no. 2, Dec. 2008, pp. 366-87.
- Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis*. U of Chicago P, 2012.
- Hodgson, Justin. Ohio State UP, 2019.



## USING TRANSNATIONAL AND DECOLONIAL AS TECHNOLOGIES TO ADDRESS THE EPISTEMIC CRISIS OF RHETORICAL STUDIES

This panel addresses the challenges of teaching rhetorical traditions and theories in academic departments that maintain strict dichotomies between East/West and Global North/South, in spite of how these dichotomies have been troubled across the postcolonial divide. The speakers find Omedi Ochieng's work a useful technology for addressing this challenge. In *Groundwork for the Practice of the Good Life* (2017), Ochieng urges rhetorical scholars to approach both 'African' and 'North Atlantic' not as civilizational blocs, but as conversations whose resonance and discordance enables "participatory world-making" especially in times of crisis. And in *Intellectual Imagination: Knowledge and Aesthetics in North Atlantic and African Philosophy* (2018), Ochieng argues that intellectual practices are best understood as contextual, multidimensional, and thickened social ontologies (p. 2). In this panel, three speakers apply Ochieng's perspectives to the intellectual quandaries of their own fields—rhetoric, composition, and communication studies—as they are contextualised within the current social and cultural crises of higher education globally. They discuss the critical possibilities afforded by participatory world-making and argue that the future of those disciplines relies precisely on their ability to learn from Pan-African resonance and discordance, and to transcend the dichotomous stances that hinder their development of a shared global consciousness.

**Tarez Samra Graban**

### Reconciling Diversity Agendas

In *Groundwork for the Practice of the Good Life* (2017), Omedi Ochieng seeks a middle space between "ethnophilosophical essentialism" (claiming a shared philosophical worldview on the basis of uncomplicated ideas of ethnicity and race) and "professional philosophy" (celebrating a view from nowhere), cutting against both directions to suggest an improved social ontology to the "good life" (pp. 2-3). Speaker 1 identifies an opportunity for this social ontology in the tension between global rhetorical, anti-racist, and decolonising agendas, especially in university contexts. Speaker 1 articulates a two-part dilemma: (1) there is an assumption that global rhetorical work is either philosophically unresponsive to specific cultural moments, or tied to colonial matrices of power; and (2) in an era of intense globalisation, the commitment to explicitly cross-cultural topics and methods may be undervalued in US education. Speaker 1 finds that "antiracist" or "decolonial" are not always well aligned with "comparative" or "global", especially when treated as signifying agents or aligned with singular notions of justice. Drawing inspiration from Afrocentric orientations, Speaker 1 argues for recognising in global rhetorical studies a site of epistemic inclusion and a generative technology—systematic treatment, application, or set of useful traits—based on its potential to reveal tensions between diversity agendas.



**Belinda Walzer**

### **Rethinking Intellectual Resistance**

In *Intellectual Imagination* (2018), Omedi Ochieng extends his arguments on “ecological embeddedness,” arguing for a critical contextual ontology that can counter the binary tendencies of contemporary higher education to segregate knowledge and de-dichotomize higher education through introducing a rich global diversity of intellectual life (p. 3). Speaker 2 applies Ochieng’s critical contextual ontology to rhetorical studies and rhetorical practice, not only to theorize intellectual ‘resistance’ outside of dichotomous practices, but also to technologize it for institutional and curricular practices. Speaker 2 discusses how neoliberal globalisation and diversification agendas of US higher education are built upon extractive politics and policies that act as extensions of its colonial legacy. Using institutional examples and drawing on Ochieng’s work and rhetorics of resistance and human rights, Speaker 2 demonstrates the ongoing challenges of (1) practicing diversity in higher education in ways that do not reify dichotomous and static identity politics; (2) developing curriculum that supports intellectual imagination; and most importantly, (3) moving intellectual models of resistance away from spatio-temporal comparative politics that are built upon fixed notions of extractivist economic power (i.e., the “developed” world) toward an ecological rights framework that values precarity, solidarity, and sustainable politics for “participatory world-making.”

**Rebecca Dingo (chair)**

### **Tracing Rhetoric’s Imperialist Roots**

Speaker 3 calls for rhetorical studies to lay bare how colonial and imperial legacies frame out methods. Speaker 3 draws on transnational feminist scholars (TNFS) who consider how colonialism and Eurocentric structures of knowledge-production have shaped and structured our knowledge (Tambe and Thayer 18). Putting TNFS in conversation with African rhetorical scholar Omedi Ochieng who calls for “a comprehensive and in-depth account of the political, economic, and cultural structures that mark the boundaries and limits of life in the twenty-first century,” Speaker 3 argues for a re-framing of rhetorical methods away from Western imperial legacies. Speaker 3 builds on this work to show the value of laying bare legacies through an analysis of predominant feminist rhetorical methods. Speaker 3 connects the methodological politics of recovering individual speech acts within US Feminist Rhetorical Studies with US Cold War Capitalist nation-building projects of the 1980s, which sought to stymie the spread of Communism through studying and categorising populations in formerly colonised nations, especially those in Africa and South America. Ultimately, Speaker 3 offers alternative rhetorical approaches as a first step in a ‘participatory world-making’ for decolonising the field and imagining new methods and technologies that begin outside of Western legacies and commitments.





# ROUND TABLES



## PERSUASIVE ALGORITHMS: EXPLORING THE INTERSECTIONS OF RHETORIC AND GENERATIVE AI

The humanities-based study of generative AI in general and the rhetoricity of generative AI in particular raises difficult conceptual and methodological questions: Can hermeneutic-inspired methods be applied to probabilistic systems? Do rhetoricians need to become techno-literate to deal appropriately with AI? How can we (re)envision persuasiveness at the complex interface among quantitative AI systems, qualitative training data, language models' outsized rhetorical capacities, and humans' nature as symbolic animals? How does text generation with generative AI complicate the ancient rhetorical art of imitatio by creating a hybrid agency that moves communicative interactions into a liminal space between imitation and simulation? How does that affect how we think about authorship, the epistemic nature of writing, or the maintenance and erosion of common ground(s) in civic spheres?

In our roundtable "Persuasive Algorithms", we want to discuss these questions from a rhetorical point of view, explore which existing rhetorical concepts and methods can be used, and what kind of new approaches need to be developed to respond to these questions effectively. The goal is to jointly investigate the requirements for a conceptual and methodological interface that will make future collaboration with cognitive psychology, linguistics, ethics, and computer science possible to advance inter- and transdisciplinary research on generative AI in a rhetorical framework. The organizers of this roundtable began exploring these key topics at Tübingen's RHET AI Center and are keen to deepen and widen the conversation with rhetoric scholars all across Europe.

Rhetoric is a theory and practice of impact-oriented text production and media use that works with socially embedded probability calculi. As such, it is ideally suited for identifying and developing diverse conceptual frameworks necessary for high-yielding recontextualizations of understanding AI systems as a fundamentally persuasive technology. Understood as a procedural and computational techné, rhetoric provides the relevant basic concepts for precisely grasping the historical and systematic implications of automated text production (Brown Jr. 2014, Gottschling 2024). Within the framework of rhetoric, three broad and multifaceted approaches can be distinguished, which form the guidelines of our debate: Rhetorical scholarship that examines how rhetors make use of AI for communicative purposes (*rhetorica utens*), rhetorical scholarship that takes up AI as an object of criticism (*rhetorica docens*), and rhetorical scholarship that uses AI methodologically (Majdik & Graham 2024).

Accordingly, the aim of the round table is not to reproduce well-known diagnoses of the benefits or dangers of AI technologies, but to critically discuss specific aspects of AI systems' rhetorical capacities, concrete designs for studying the rhetoricity of language models, and innovative forms of applying and improving the rhetorical logics of AI use. In answering the questions we raised, we ask how existing rhetorical methodologies might be applied and advanced, or new rhetorical methodologies be designed and developed, in response to the diverse answers our queries will provoke. The format will feature five expert speakers offering concise, 3–5 minute statements to frame their perspectives, followed by a moderated open discussion. A "free seat" will allow audience members to join the conversation, fostering dynamic, participatory dialogue.

**Chair:** Olaf Kramer

**Participants:**

Christopher Basgier, Crystal Colombini, Fabian Erhardt, Zoltan Majdik



## **DIGITISING DIALOGUE AND ANIMATING ACTIO: AN INTERNATIONAL ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**

This roundtable brings into conversation scholars from around the world who research the intersection of rhetorical theory and new media technologies. Piazza and Heineman bring perspectives from the analysis of argumentation on social media platforms. They comment on how differences in social/ethnic/gender demographics affect persuasive communication online, and what this means for education, both in schools and in universities.

Kaldahl and Zmvac bring insights from research conducted with young people and their teachers. Can argumentation and critical literacy be taught effectively online? If not, how does the teaching medium affect knowledge and practice? If educational resources for introducing rhetoric to the school curriculum are made available free online, does this boost or restrict engagement vs. printed copies in schools?

Wright has collaborated with a professional creative artist consultancy to 'animate' rhetoric, by making three short animated films which disseminate the key findings of a UK-based interdisciplinary academic project on rhetoric and oracy. Given the cost involved in creating resources of this kind, what is the return on investment?

This roundtable discussion will provide a forum for knowledge exchange in which those who work at the intersection of policy and practice can share their challenges and successes. Audience members will be encouraged to participate in the conversation, especially where they bring additional international perspectives.

**Chair:** Arlene Holmes-Henderson

**Participants:**

David Heineman, Tom F Wright



## **“LOGOS DON’T CARE”: DIGITAL RHETORICS OF ACTIVISM AND DIS/INFORMATION IN THE AGE OF ALT-RIGHT POLITICS**

Taking *logos* as a conceptual starting point, this roundtable examines how rhetorical practices of dis- and mis-information shape political and social spheres for bodily life. We explore how information and disinformation circulate across the networked digital spaces of Web 2.0, directly engaging with the evolving role of rhetoric in contemporary society. As technology and media develop in the 21st century, they significantly influence how people communicate, persuasively argue, and navigate the landscape of digital rhetoric.

People engage in and practice rhetorical argumentation and persuasion in and across social and news media sites every day, with affective outcomes that extend beyond individuals' initial rhetorical messages and goals (Ames and McDuffie). This is an inevitable consequence of how fast information and disinformation travel through various technological affordances of digital-social media communication (e.g., posts, reposts, reshares, reels, etc.).

The framework of rhetorical circulation attends to the unpredictable ways digital-online communication takes on a life of its own, organically creating digital-online discourse communities as a result of increased digital connectivity (Gries). While many early advocates believed that increased interconnectivity would enhance knowledge, understanding, citizenship, and compassion, the practical realities have been decidedly less ideal. This reality stems not from specific bad actors but from the ingrained biases and limited perspectives within the uncritical proliferations of the Western, imperialist, cisheteronormative concept of “Logos,” embodied in the hardware, software, applications, and infrastructure of the digital space.

Ultimately, we argue that despite deep concerns for humanity and compassion, logos “does not care.” By this, we mean that systems created through dis- and mis-information will continue to circulate unless there is critical intervention.

The participants of this roundtable believe that as scholars and rhetoricians, we bear an ethical responsibility to critically examine and challenge how alt-right politics build digital communities designed to spread disinformation through a rhetoric of hate and violence. In this context, the roundtable has two goals:

1. To show how alt-right politics produce digital spaces and communities that circulate disinformation and create chaos through a rhetoric of hate and violence.
2. To offer a critical intervention and an active dialogue to find productive ways to learn from how digital communication builds online discourse communities and, in turn, to combat regressive, authoritarian, and bigoted perspectives that have spread through the structures of Web 2.0.

This roundtable offers a critical exploration of these issues and aims to engage with audience members in an active discussion about the significance of rhetoric in the digital age and the impact of technological developments on rhetorical practices in online-digital communication.

### **Participants:**

Whitney Jordan Adams, Victoria Houser



# BOOK PRESENTATIONS



Aaron Hess, Jens Kjeldsen, eds.

***Ethos, Technology, and AI in Contemporary Society  
– the Character in the Machine (2025)***

This session explores our current understanding of, and attitudes toward, ethos, credibility, and trust in today's changing technological landscape. Recent advancements in technology, including the development of digital technologies, the growth of algorithmic machine learning and artificial intelligence, and the circulation of disinformation in social media, necessitate a reevaluation of ethos. To explore the rhetorical concept of ethos, which is the perceived character of a speaker, contributors theorize how ethos is enabled, constrained, and constituted through new communication technologies. The session is based on the insights from the book *Ethos, technology and AI in Contemporary Society*, which address key philosophical questions concerning the rhetorical capacities of modern communicating machines such as ChatGPT, Midjourney, or other digital platforms. Through case studies, new theorizing, and critical inquiry, contributors contemplate the changing relationship between humans and technology in rhetoric and ethos, revealing contemporary tensions and insecurities regarding issues including authenticity and authorship. Panelists during this session will discuss their contributions to the volume as well as new theorizing about the relationship between AI and ethos.



Pamela Pietrucci & Leah Ceccarelli, eds.

## ***Scientists, Politics, and Public Controversy (2025)***

Public rhetoric of science is more critical than ever as we face global crises such as pandemics and climate change, and as misleading “alternative facts” proliferate in our post-truth era. This edited volume examines how scientists, as members of a broader civic community, manage their duty to communicate the significance of their research on vital questions of our day, and how science is used and abused by non-experts claiming epistemic authority in the public sphere. Bringing together scholars of rhetoric from all career stages, writing from five countries, we unpack a series of case studies from northern and southern Europe, the UK, USA, and Canada, in order to disentangle the complex relations between science and politics, and share the rhetorical lessons we extract with a broader audience.

How can science be communicated in a way that builds trust and encourages harm-reduction activities? How do politicians and non-experts attempt to co-opt or sabotage technical and scientific discourse for their own gain? How might scientists resist those derailing attempts to advocate for the public good?

These are some of the central problems that our contributors explore in this volume. Each author contributes a localized case study that teaches a broader lesson about empowering scientists to communicate and advocate in public spaces, and about empowering publics and politicians to better understand and amplify scientific advice in the public sphere, sharing the common goal of creating a more sustainable future.

As editors, we build on the past work we have done to connect scholarly conversations from the fields of rhetoric of science, political rhetoric, and local modalities of public engagement, exploring their productive encounters in the contexts of public science and activism. Advocating for the development of experts’ self-awareness as “scientist-citizens”, namely scientists that see themselves as fully integrated in public life, we work to re-imagine public science for our emerging post-pandemic and climate-altered world. With this presentation, we share the volume findings from a variety of case studies at the intersection of the rhetorics of science and politics in the public sphere.



Blake Scott

***The Rhetoricity of Philosophy – Audience in Perelman and Ricoeur after the Badiou-Cassin Debate (2025)***

Despite fundamentally disagreeing over the nature of philosophy and sophistry, Alain Badiou and Barbara Cassin both agree that rhetoric is a dead end for contemporary thought. Motivated by the incompatibility of their respective critiques, as well as a resurgence of interest in rhetoric following the rise in authoritarian politics and new forms of technologically-driven propaganda, the book argues that rhetoric remains an indispensable area of concern for philosophers. Offering a fresh take on Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's "new rhetoric" as well as the hermeneutic philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, the concept of audience is used to expose the rhetorical dimension of human action, or "rhetoricity". What emerges from this investigation, *pace* Badiou and Cassin, is a picture of rhetoric as (1) a dimension of all discourse and action and (2) a basic capacity of human beings most visible in the reception and production of arguments.





List of participants,  
their affiliations and addresses



LAST NAME	NAME	AFFILIATION	COUNTRY	E-MAIL ADDRESS
Aberdein	Andrew	Florida Institute of Technology	USA	aberdein@fit.edu
Adam	Amanda	Ghent University	Belgium	amanda.adam@ugent.be
Adamidis	Vasileios	Nottingham Trent University	United Kingdom	Vasileios.adamidis@ntu.ac.uk
Adams	Heather	University of North Carolina Greensboro	USA	hbadams@uncg.edu
Adams	Maeve	City University of New York	USA	maeve.adams@lehman.cuny.edu
Adams	Whitney	Berry College	USA	wadams@berry.edu
Alavi Nia	Maryam	University of Bergen	Norway	Maryam.Nia@uib.no
Alexander	Rob	Brock University	Canada	ralexander@brocku.ca
Alford	Caddie	Virginia Commonwealth University	USA	kalford@vcu.edu
Allen	Ira	Northern Arizona University	USA	ira.allen@nau.edu
Amossy	Ruth	Tel Aviv University	Israel	amosy@bezeqint.net
Andrychowski	Kacper	University of Warsaw	Poland	kandrychowski@uw.edu.pl
Armani	Maud	University of Neuchâtel	Switzerland	maud.armani@unine.ch
Asen	Robert	University of Wisconsin-Madison	USA	robert.asen@wisc.edu
Basgier	Christopher	Auburn University	USA	crbo085@auburn.edu
Berg	Kristine Marie	University of Copenhagen	Denmark	kristinebe@hum.ku.dk
Bjork	Collin	Massey University	New Zealand	c.bjork@massey.ac.nz
Bremer	Alicia	University of Waterloo	Canada	abremer@uwaterloo.ca
Bryła-Cruz	Agnieszka	Maria Curie-Skłodowska University	Poland	agnieszka.bryla-cruz@mail.umcs.pl
Brinch	Iben	University of Bergen	Norway	Iben.Brinch@usn.no
Broberg	Frida Hviid	University of Copenhagen	Denmark	fhb@hum.ku.dk
Brown	Kara Mae	University of California Santa Barbara	USA	kmbrown@ucsb.edu
Budzynska	Katarzyna	Warsaw University	Poland	katarzyna.budzynska@pw.edu.pl
Bunko	Gabby	Arizona State University	USA	gbunko@asu.edu
Carlan	Alexandru	National University of Political Studies and Public Administration	Romania	alex.carlan@comunicare.ro
Carter	Jonathan	Georgia Southwestern State University	USA	Jonathan.carter@gsw.edu
Ceccarelli	Leah	University of Washington,	USA	cecc@uw.edu



LAST NAME	NAME	AFFILIATION	COUNTRY	E-MAIL ADDRESS
Chagnon	Christopher	University of Helsinki	Finland	christopher.chagnon@helsinki.fi
Chari	Vipulya	City University of New York	USA	vipulya.chari@baruch.cuny.edu
Colombini	Crystal	Fordham University	USA	crbo085@auburn.edu
Corradi	Silvia	University of Palermo	Italy	silvia.corradi@unipa.it
Couvée	Johanna	Ghent University	Belgium	johanna.couvee@ugent.be
Crombie	Shane	LCC International University	Lithuania	scrombie@lcc.lt
Daniel	James	Seton Hall University	USA	james.daniel@shu.edu
Ding	Yun	Tennessee Tech University	USA	yding@tntech.edu
Dingo	Rebecca	University of Massachusetts	USA	rdingo@umass.edu
Downing	Jamie	Georgia College and State University	USA	Jamie.downing@gcsu.edu
Egglezou	Foteini	Hellenic Institute of Rhetorical and Communication Studies	Greece	fegglezou@yahoo.gr
Erhardt	Fabian	University of Tuebingen	Germany	fabian.erhardt@uni-tuebingen.de
Evangelista	Daria	Ca' Foscari University of Venice	Italy	daria.evangelista@unive.it
Fairclough	Isabela	University of Central Lancashire	United Kingdom	ifairclough@uclan.ac.uk
Ferguson	Lydia	Kennesaw State University	USA	lfergu28@kennesaw.edu
Figueiredo	Sergio	Kennesaw State University	USA	sfigueir@kennesaw.edu
Fisker	Thore Keitum	University of Copenhagen	Denmark	tkf@hum.ku.dk
Fredal	James	Ohio State University	USA	fredal.1@osu.edu
Gabrielsen	Jonas	Roskilde University	Denmark	jonasg@ruc.dk
Glenn	Cheryl	Penn State University	USA	cjg6@psu.edu
Glowka	Caroline	University of Lincoln	United Kingdom	kglowka@lincoln.ac.uk
Goggin	Peter	Arizona State University	USA	pgo@asu.edu
Graack	Julius	University of London	United Kingdom	julius.graack.2024@live.rhul.ac.uk
Graban	Tarez	Florida State University	USA	tgraban@fsu.edu
Green Waszak	Tejan	Hofstra University	USA	tejanwaszak@gmail.com
Greza	Peter Oliver	University of Tuebingen	Germany	peter-oliver.greza@uni-tuebingen.de



LAST NAME	NAME	AFFILIATION	COUNTRY	E-MAIL ADDRESS
Groarke	Leo	Trent University	Canada	leogroarke@trentu.ca
Guadrón	Melissa	Western Washington University	USA	guadrom@wwu.edu
Halley	Brittany	Ohio State University	USA	halley.94@osu.edu
Hansen	Hans Vilhelm	University of Windsor	Canada	hhansen@uwindsor.ca
Haro Marchal	Amalia	University of Granada	Spain	amaliaharo@ugr.es
Hautli-Janisz	Annette	University of Passau	Germany	annette.hautli-janisz@uni-passau.de
Hawk	Byron	University of South Carolina	USA	byron.hawk@gmail.com
Heineman	David	Commonwealth University	USA	dheinema@commonwealthu.edu
Herman	Thierry	University of Neuchâtel	Switzerland	thierry.herman@unine.ch
Hess	Aaron	Arizona State University	USA	aaron.hess@asu.edu
Hill	Heather	Northwest Missouri State University	USA	Hhill@NWMissouri.edu
Hinton	Martin	University of Łódź	Poland	martin.hinton@uni.lodz.pl
Holiday	Judy	University of La Verne	USA	jholiday@laverne.edu
Holmes-Henderson	Arlene	Durham University	United Kingdom	arlene.v.holmes-henderson@durham.ac.uk
Hoppmann	Michael	Northeastern University	USA	m.hoppmann@northeastern.edu
Houser	Victoria	University of California	USA	vhouser@ucsb.edu
Howard	Robert Glenn	University of Wisconsin-Madison	USA	rghoward2@wisc.edu
Huang	Hsuan-I	University of Wisconsin-Madison	USA	hsuani.huang@wisc.edu
Hubsch	Brooke	Pennsylvania State University	USA	bms6044@psu.edu
Isager	Christine	University of Copenhagen	Denmark	isager@hum.ku.dk
Iversen	Stefan	Aarhus University	Denmark	norsi@cc.au.dk
Jansen	Henrike	Leiden University	Netherlands	h.jansen@hum.leidenuniv.nl
Jensen	Kyle	Arizona State University	USA	dr.kjensen@asu.edu
Kiełbiewska	Anna	University of Warsaw	Poland	a.miloszewska@uw.edu.pl
Kišiček	Gabrijela	University of Zagreb	Croatia	gkisicek@ffzg.unizg.hr
Kjeldsen	Jens	University of Bergen	Norway	jens.kjeldsen@uib.no
Kobyłska	Marta	University of Rzeszow	Poland	mkobyłska@ur.edu.pl
Kock	Christian	University of Copenhagen	Denmark	kock@hum.ku.dk



LAST NAME	NAME	AFFILIATION	COUNTRY	E-MAIL ADDRESS
Kolstad	Solveig	Aarhus University	Denmark	solk@cc.au.dk
Kramer	Olaf	University of Tübingen	Germany	olaf.kramer@uni-tuebingen.de
Kraus	Manfred	University of Tübingen	Germany	manfred.kraus@uni-tuebingen.de
Krautter	Jutta	University of Tübingen	Germany	jutta.krautter@uni-tuebingen.de
Kuzmina	Alexandra	Ghent University	Belgium	alexkuzmina.work@gmail.com
Ladegaard	Louise Anna	University of Copenhagen	Denmark	louise.ladegaard@live.dk
Laurens	Vivian	University of Connecticut	USA	Vivian.laurens@uconn.edu
Lipphardt	Carmen	University of Tübingen	Germany	carmen.lipphardt@uni-tuebingen.de
Lombard	David	KU Leuven	Belgium	david.lombard@kuleuven.be
Luan	Rency	University of Waterloo	Canada	r2luan@uwaterloo.ca
Lucia	Brent	University of Connecticut	USA	brent.lucia@uconn.edu
Mădroane	Irina Diana	West University of Timișoara	Romania	irina.madroane@e-uvr.ro
Majdik	Zoltan	North Dakota State University	USA	zoltan.majdik@ndsu.edu
Majdzińska-Koczorowicz	Aleksandra	University of Łódź	Poland	aleksandra.majdzinska@uni.lodz.pl
Mamat	Annika	University of Tübingen	Germany	Annika.mamat@uni-tuebingen.de
Mangold	Eli	San Diego State University	USA	elimangold@gmail.com
Manzin	Maurizio	University of Trento	Italy	maurizio.manzin@unitn.it
Mavrodieva	Ivanka	Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"	Bulgaria	i.mavrodieva@gmail.com
McClellan	Erin	Aalborg University	Denmark	erindm@ikl.aau.dk
McKinney	Matt	Texas A&M University	USA	mmckinney@tamu.edu
Modrzejewska	Ewa	University of Warsaw	Poland	e.modrzejewska@uw.edu.pl
Mølster	Ragnhild	University of Bergen	Norway	Ragnhild.molster@uib.no
Monteiro	Carlos	University of Coimbra	Portugal	carlos_kh2fm@hotmail.com
Nielsen	Esben Bjerggaard	Aarhus University	Denmark	aestebn@cc.au.dk
Nikolić	Davor	University of Zagreb	Croatia	dnikoli@ffzg.unizg.hr
Nolsøe	Turið	University of Southern Denmark	Denmark	turidnol@gmail.com
Novak	Marko	New University	Slovenia	mnovak153@gmail.com
Nowakowska	Joanna	John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin	Poland	joanna.zu.nowakowska@gmail.com
Olthof	Jelte	University of Groningen	Netherlands	jelte.olthof@rug.nl
Oswald	Steve	University of Fribourg	Switzerland	steve.oswald@unifr.ch



LAST NAME	NAME	AFFILIATION	COUNTRY	E-MAIL ADDRESS
Paglieri	Fabio	Istituto di Scienze e Tecnologie della Cognizione	Italy	fabio.paglieri@istc.cnr.it
Perry	Miranda	University of Wisconsin-Madison	USA	mnperry@wisc.edu
Phillips	Kendall	Syracuse University	USA	kphillip@syr.edu
Phillips-Anderson	Michael	Monmouth University	USA	mphilip@monmouth.edu
Pietrucci	Pamela	University of Copenhagen,	Denmark	p.pietrucci@hum.ku.dk
Poropat Darrer	Jagoda	Croatian Catholic University	Croatia	jagoda.poropat.darrer@croatia.rit.edu
Puppo	Federico	University of Trento	Italy	federico.puppo@unitn.it
Rabon	Sara	University of Wisconsin - Madison	USA	srabon@wisc.edu
Rand	Erin	Syracuse University	USA	ejrand@syr.edu
Ratcliffe	Krista	Arizona State University	USA	krista.ratcliffe@asu.edu
Rauccio	Antonio	University of Trento	Italy	antonio.rauccio@unitn.it
Rice	Jeff	University of Kentucky	USA	j.rice@uky.edu
Roderick	Noah	Örebro University	Sweden	noah.roderick@oru.se
Roe	Dorthea	University of Bergen	Norway	dorthea.roe@uib.no
Rutten	Kris	Ghent University	Belgium	Kris.rutten@ugent.be
Růžička	Roman	University of Hradec Králové	Czech Republic	roman.ruzicka@uhk.cz
Sandvik	Margareth	Oslo Metropolitan University	Norway	margareth.sandvik@oslomet.no
Schou Therkildsen	Louise	University of Gothenburg	Sweden	louise.schou.therkildsen@lir.gu.se
Scott	Blake	KU Leuven	Belgium	bdscott.philo@gmail.com
Sędlak	Anna	John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin	Poland	anna.sedlak.lublin@gmail.com
Seitz	Lauren	University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign	USA	lseitz3@illinois.edu
Sigrell	Anders	Lund University	Sweden	anders.sigrell@kom.lu.se
Shi	Ruoyu	Leiden University	Netherlands	r.shi@hum.leidenuniv.nl
Skinell	Ryan	San José State University	USA	ryan.skinell@sjsu.edu
Skovbo Moser	Kira	Aarhus University	Denmark	kiramoser@cc.au.dk
Söderlindh	Linda	Örebro university	Sweden	lindasod@kth.se
Stanković	Davor	Vern University	Croatia	davor@retor.hr
Stöckl	Hartmut	Salzburg University	Austria	hartmut.stoeckl@plus.ac.at
Street	Nathaniel	Mount Saint Vincent University	Canada	nathaniel.street@msvu.ca



LAST NAME	NAME	AFFILIATION	COUNTRY	E-MAIL ADDRESS
Šovagović	Ana	J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek	Croatia	anaperak206@gmail.com
Taylor	Walter	Paul Quinn College	USA	wtaylor@pqc.edu
Tomasi	Serena	University of Trento	Italy	serena.tomasi_1@unitn.it
Tomić	Diana	University of Zagreb	Croatia	dtomic@ffzg.unizg.hr
Tseronis	Assimakis	Örebro University	Sweden	assimakis.tseronis@oru.se
van Belle	Hilde	KULeuven	Belgium	hilde.vanbelle@kuleuven.be
van Beveren	Laura	Ghent University	Belgium	Laura.VanBeveren@UGent.be
van der Meulen	Maarten	Leiden University	Netherlands	m.b.van.der.meulen@fgga.leidenuniv.nl
van der Voort	Charlotte	Leiden University	Netherlands	c.van.der.voort@hum.leidenuniv.nl
Vančura	Alma	J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek	Croatia	avancura@ffos.hr
Vatnøy	Eirik	University of Oslo	Norway	eirik.vatnøy@iln.uio.no
Velasquez	Elizabeth	Ohio State University	USA	velasquez.85@osu.edu
Vikøren Andersen	Ida	Norwegian Research Centre	Norway	idaa@norceresearch.no
Villadsen	Lisa	University of Copenhagen	Denmark	lisas@hum.ku.dk
Vlah	Ana	Utrecht University	Netherlands	a.vlah@uu.nl
Völker	Viktorija	Tübingen University	Germany	viktorija.voelker@uni-tuebingen.de
Vujnović	Marina	Monmouth University	USA	mvujnovi@monmouth.edu
Wackers	Martijn	Delft University of Technology	Netherlands	m.j.y.wackers@tudelft.nl
Walzer	Belinda	Appalachian State University	USA	walzerbl@appstate.edu
Wagemans	Jean	University of Amsterdam	Netherlands	J.H.M.Wagemans@uva.nl
Weiser	Elizabeth	The Ohio State University	USA	weiser.23@osu.edu
Williams	David	Clemson University	USA	dgwilli@g.clemson.edu
Woody	Cassandra	University of Oklahoma	USA	c.l.woody@ou.edu
Wright	Tom	University of Sussex	United Kingdom	Tom.Wright@sussex.ac.uk
Younis	Ramy	University of Fribourg	Switzerland	ramy.younis@unifr.ch
Załęska	Maria	University of Warsaw	Poland	m.zaleska@uw.edu.pl
Zamparutti	Louise	University of Wisconsin-La Crosse	USA	lzamparutti@uwlax.edu
Zupančič	Aleksandra	Šola retorike Ljubljana	Slovenia	aleksandra@sola-retorike.si

