Rhetor

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Editors' Introduction

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The pleasure of reading a special issue of a journal comes from seeing how the various authors illuminate, often in unexpected or mutually reinforcing ways, the different facets of a particular topic. But the pleasure of producing and reading a general issue like this one arises from seeing the breadth of one's field. For rhetoricians, that breadth is perhaps no surprise given rhetoric's nature as an art whose application isn't restricted to any particular subject matter (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1355b). Nonetheless, even given the capacious nature of rhetoric, this issue includes articles on an impressively broad range of topics, from Construction Grammar to stand-up comedy, from pop music to optical weapons systems.

The insights gained when the issue's authors bring rhetoric to bear on such varied subjects testifies to how robust and illuminating the principles and methods of rhetoric are, from those that were formulated in the classical period to those that have developed over the long history of rhetoric up to the present. The phrase "rhetoric of," prepended to innumerable (and sometimes seemingly unlikely) subjects, has led to new understandings of existing fields and phenomena. That has sometimes happened over the objections of practitioners working within a field, but as Aristotle first asserted and rhetoricians since have so often confirmed, rhetoric, sometimes held to be irrelevant or even antithetical to a particular pursuit, is inevitably found to be integral to it.

But while these applications of rhetoric to various fields expand what Chaim Perelman has called the realm of rhetoric, they also have a reciprocal effect, in that they change the nature of rhetoric itself as a field. The figure of the wandering sophist travelling from city-state to city-state might be a good analogy for the forays rhetoric makes into various fields. But while the work of the sophist changes the place he visits, the sophist, after exercising his *techne* within the specific environment he is visiting, no doubt also comes away changed, with an expanded sense of his art's possibilities and potential.

Aristotle's reference to "the means of persuasion" in his foundational definition of rhetoric (1355b) refers to the *pisteis*, but various articles here demonstrate how the means to achieve rhetorical ends can be expanded beyond the traditional tools of rhetoric. Those means may involve the strategic use of musical structures (Twomey), the incorporation of autofiction (Kaisarli), figural manipulation of time (Mehlenbacher), or insertion into optical weapon systems (Nuñez de Villavicencio). Other articles here re-frame traditional elements of rhetoric by situating them within new contexts such as Construction Grammar (Hashemi, Chen, and Harris) or notion-based grammar (Collinet). These articles are able to extend the branches of rhetoric precisely because at the same time they offer us new perspectives on its classical elements, deepening its roots.

In addition to these articles, this issue also presents two personal essays that serve as an extension of *Rhetor* special issue 8.1, in which rhetoricians reflected on how their national identity affected their rhetorical work. Issue 8.1 focused mainly on Canadian and European rhetoricians, but the two essays here are by rhetoricians who emigrated from the United States to Canada, so they offer a fascinating dual perspective on how national identity affects rhetorical scholarship.

We would like to offer our thanks to the authors and reviewers who contributed to this issue, to John Moffatt, who helped lay its foundations, and to the executive officers and members of RhetCanada, the Canadian Society for the Study of Rhetoric, who have provided a community and a context that allow research like this to flourish.

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Avant-propos

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Le plaisir de lire le numéro spécial d'une revue réside dans la découverte des différents angles adoptés par les auteurs et autrices pour éclairer, souvent de manière inattendue ou complémentaire, les différentes facettes d'un sujet donné. Le plaisir de produire et de lire un numéro général comme celui-ci réside, quant à lui, dans la prise de conscience de l'étendue d'un domaine de recherche. Pour les spécialistes de rhétorique, cette ampleur n'est guère surprenante, compte tenu de la nature même de la rhétorique, un art dont l'application n'est pas limitée à un domaine spécifique (Aristote, *Rhétorique* 1355b). Néanmoins, même au regard de la vaste étendue couverte par la rhétorique, ce numéro se distingue par la diversité impressionnante des sujets qu'il aborde : de la grammaire de construction au stand-up, de la musique pop aux systèmes d'armes optiques.

Les éclairages que permettent les auteurs de ce numéro, en mobilisant la rhétorique pour aborder des sujets aussi variés, témoignent de la robustesse et de la pertinence des principes et méthodes de la rhétorique – qu'ils soient hérités de la période classique ou qu'ils se soient développés au fil de l'histoire, longue et continue de la discipline. L'expression « rhétorique de », associée à d'innombrables sujets (parfois à première vue improbables), a permis de nouvelles avancées dans la compréhension de ces domaines et de phénomènes existants. Cela s'est parfois fait nonobstant les

réticences des praticiens de ces domaines, mais comme Aristote l'affirmait déjà – et comme les spécialistes de rhétorique l'ont souvent confirmé depuis – la rhétorique, parfois jugée non pertinente voire antithétique à une discipline donnée, se révèle inévitablement en être une composante importante.

Cependant, si ces applications de la rhétorique à divers domaines élargissent ce que Chaim Perelman a appelé « l'empire rhétorique », elles ont également pour effet réciproque de modifier la nature de la rhétorique en tant que discipline. La figure du sophiste itinérant, voyageant de cité en cité, pourrait être une analogie utile pour décrire les incursions de la rhétorique dans divers champs. Et tout comme le travail du sophiste transforme l'endroit qu'il visite, le sophiste lui-même ressort changé après avoir exercé sa *technè* dans un environnement spécifique, avec une vision élargie des possibilités et du potentiel de son art.

La référence d'Aristote aux « moyens de persuasion », dans sa définition fondatrice de la rhétorique (1355b), renvoie aux *pisteis*, mais plusieurs articles de ce numéro démontrent que les moyens pour atteindre des fins rhétoriques peuvent aller au-delà des outils traditionnels de la rhétorique. Ces moyens peuvent inclure une utilisation stratégique de structures musicales (Twomey), l'incorporation de l'autofiction (Kaisarli), la manipulation figurative du temps (Mehlenbacher), ou encore une insertion dans des systèmes d'armes optiques (Nuñez de Villavicencio). D'autres articles reconfigurent des éléments traditionnels de la rhétorique en les situant dans de nouveaux contextes tels que la grammaire de construction (Hashemi, Chen et Harris) ou la grammaire notionnelle (Collinet). Ces travaux parviennent à étendre le spectres de la rhétorique précisément parce qu'ils nous offrent, en même temps, de nouvelles perspectives sur ses éléments classiques, renforçant ainsi ses racines.

En plus de ces articles, ce numéro contient deux essais personnels qui constituent une extension au numéro spécial 8.1 de *Rhetor*, dans lequel des rhétoriciens réfléchissaient à l'influence de leur identité nationale sur leurs travaux en rhétorique. Si le numéro 8.1 portait principalement sur des rhétoriciens canadiens et européens, les deux essais inclus ici sont écrits par des rhétoriciens qui ont émigré des États-Unis vers le Canada. Ils offrent ainsi une perspective fascinante, à la croisée de deux influences, sur la manière dont l'identité nationale façonne la recherche en rhétorique.

Enfin, nous souhaitons exprimer nos remerciements aux auteurs et autrices, ainsi qu'aux évaluateurs et évaluatrices qui ont contribué à ce numéro, à John Moffatt, qui a aidé à en poser les bases, ainsi qu'aux responsables et aux membres de *RhetCanada*, la Société canadienne pour l'étude de la rhétorique, qui offre une communauté et un cadre propices à l'épanouissement de recherches comme celles-ci.

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Articles

Define Constructions Before Constructions Define You: Rhetorical Figures in the AB BEFORE BA Construction

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Abstract: Despite considerable recent attention to a few rhetorical figures (primarily the tropes metaphor and metonymy), linguists have ignored the rhetorical tradition and overlooked the many figures that could help them to explain functional meanings they have long struggled to understand; they have been especially hampered by methods that considered morphology and semantics separately. In an attempt to bridge this gap, we have turned to an emerging template-driven framework called Construction Grammar, into which figures can be incorporated quite naturally. When combined with usage-based theories of general cognition, Construction Grammar provides us with the perfect tools to capture, and make use of, hidden gems found in the figurative tradition which are often overlooked by other frameworks. In this paper, we not only demonstrate just how naturally rhetorical figures can be depicted through constructions, but also show that they are no longer just fancy linguistic décor, through an analysis of the AB BEFORE BA constructions, which prominently leverage chiastic figuration. Our formal representations draw in particular on embodied construction grammar.

Key words: Construction Grammar, rhetorical figures, chiasmus, cognitive linguistics, multi-lingual

Abstract: Bien que certaines figures rhétoriques (principalement les tropes, la métaphore et la métonymie) aient récemment bénéficié d'une attention considérable, les linguistes n'ont pas tenu compte de la tradition rhétorique et négligé de nombreuses figures qui pourraient les aider à expliquer des significations fonctionnelles qu'ils peinent à comprendre depuis longtemps. Ils ont été

particulièrement gênés par des méthodes qui envisageaient la morphologie et la sémantique séparément. Dans une tentative de combler cette lacune, nous nous sommes tournés vers un cadre émergent appelé la grammaire de construction, dans lequel les figures peuvent être naturellement intégrées. Combinée aux théories d'usage basées sur la cognition générale, la grammaire de construction nous fournit les outils parfaits pour capturer et exploiter des trésors cachés de la tradition figurative, souvent négligés par d'autres cadres. Dans cet article, nous démontrons non seulement à quel point les figures rhétoriques peuvent être représentées naturellement à travers les constructions, mais nous montrons également qu'elles ne sont plus de simples ornements linguistiques, à travers une analyse des constructions de type AB AVANT BA, qui tirent largement parti de la figuration chiasmique. Nos représentations formelles s'appuient en particulier sur la grammaire de construction incarnée.

Mots clés : grammaire de construction, figures rhétoriques, chiasme, linguistique cognitive, multilinguisme

INTRODUCTION

Construction Grammar is a new/old linguistic framework. It's new in that it arose in reaction to the dominant structuralist and generative frameworks of the twentieth century, most notably those developed by Noam Chomsky. It's old in that it has rekindled the ancient grammatical notion of the construction, distinct from any rule-based system, though it has done so with very little awareness of ancient grammar. And it is old also in that it has rekindled the form/function alignment that characterizes rhetorical figures, doing so with even less awareness. We argue, focusing on a small family of highly figured constructions, that rhetorical figures often motivate grammatical constructions and explain their communicative functions. Our evidence includes the several variations of our basic construction, some extensions, and some homologous constructions in French and Persian.

In 2018, *Twitter* user kyle g posted, "im gonna destroy the world before it destroys me" (@helvetikyle).[1]   The expression is extreme, but the form it takes is not uncommon. For example, there is a *SingularityHub* article titled, "Ray Kurzweil: We Can Control AI Before It Controls Us" (O'Keefe II), and a video on *YouTube* titled,

"Hear Them Before They Hear You! Logitech G Pro X Gaming Headset Review" (*NoNonsensePC*). Examples from as early as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries can be found: "Learne to forsake them, before they forsake you" (Bedel) and "Wherefore leave them before they leave you" (Stafford).

What these examples all have in common is that they combine the ancient rhetorical figure of chiasmus (reverse repetition, as in the famous "all for one, one for all") with a partially prefabricated grammatical construction. That is, they are essentially *both* rhetorical and grammatical. What's more, they encode a very specific set of meanings that are a necessary function of that rhetorical–grammatical fusion. Neither the rhetoric nor the grammar can account for the meaning independently.

These examples are all of the form (NP^A Aux) V^X NP^B before NP^B (Aux) V^X $NP^{(A)}$, and the structure evokes a sense of urgency about a particular action (Please see Appendix A for the abbreviation conventions and other features of our formalism). This convergence of rhetoric, grammar, and meaning is a clear indication that we have not found a few coincidentally similar expressions, but a construction in the contemporary sense of Construction Grammar, as pioneered by linguists such as Charles Fillmore, Paul Kay, George Lakoff, and Adele Goldberg (Hoffmann and Trousdale 1–2). We know constructions are memorable (Goldberg, *Explain* 7), but linguists have not been very good at explaining why they are memorable. Rhetoricians can help them with that, at least for constructions like the one we have uncovered. Why does this particular sequence of words seem to resonate so well with our brains? We believe the answer to that lies in the rhetorical figures that participate in the construction. In this paper, we analyze the construction we call the AB BEFORE BA construction using the Embodied Construction Grammar (ECG) framework to highlight just how important rhetorical figures are to this construction.

Our work develops a research programme initially proposed by Mark Turner ("Figure," "Role"), and builds on recent work at the University of Waterloo by the Rhetoricon Database research group (see Black et al.; Harris, "Grammatical," "Rules"; Gawryjolek et al.; Harris and Di Marco, "Rhetorical Figures," "The Cognitive and Computational Programme"; Tu; Wang et al.). We not only bring new data and analyses to the programme with our investigation of an unexplored family of English constructions, we also make preliminary excursions into other languages (French and Persian), finding homologous constructions.

We proceed as follows: First, we introduce the general construction and several popular variations. Next, we present the rhetorical figures manifest in the construction. Then we tie the information from the previous sections into the ECG framework to give a representation of the construction with respect to rhetorical figures and to demonstrate the advantages of including rhetorical figures in the formalism. We also include an exploration of some variations of our construction in English as well as in other languages, confirming that the impact of rhetorical figures is not limited to a single general English construction.

Those are the specifics. Our general argument is much broader and points the way toward a unified approach to meaning that leverages both the rhetorical tradition and contemporary linguistics. We use the AB BEFORE BA construction to argue that rhetorical figures play an important role in grammatical constructions and provide elegant and reusable abstractions for meaning and form that would be of considerable benefit to Construction Grammarians.

THE AB BEFORE BA CONSTRUCTION

A grammatical construction by the simplest definition is a form and meaning pair (Goldberg, *Constructions* 4). Every construction has a form pole and a meaning pole (Langacker). We will thus start by identifying the general form and meaning of the AB BEFORE BA

construction, focusing on the conceptual schemas evoked. Then we will present some variations of the construction.

General Form and Meaning

First, let us look at a few examples of the AB BEFORE BA construction:

(1) Learn AI before AI learns you (Engineering at Alberta Professional Development)

(2) I must finish this degree before it finishes me! (@elsieclara)

(3) Take control of your workspace before it takes control of you (Marryshow)

Though the syntactic structures vary, with (1) including an implicit *you*, (2) including a deontic modal auxiliary, and (3) including prepositional phrases in the direct objects, they all take the general form (NP^A Aux) V^X NP^B before NP^B V^X NP^A. All three examples also feature second clauses that evoke negative scenarios; something will happen that is bad or unpleasant for NP^A.[2] The examples take what the speaker construes as a threat—AI, psychological defeat, loss of control—to evoke fear and thereby urge their addressees to take action. The presence of *before*, in particular, gives imminence to the threat and creates a sense of urgency.

Rhetorical figures often leverage iconicity (Brinton; Fahnestock 21-22; Harris, "Chiastic"), and an important principle of iconicity, the principle of sequential order (Haiman), implies that the temporal order of the words and phrases reflects or enforces the temporal order of events; with our construction, this means that the action urged by the AB clause must precede the action threatened in the BA clause (i.e., AB < BA; see Haiman). Through this principle, the AB BEFORE BA construction implies that you have a chance to do

AB now; if you do not take that chance, BA will happen later, rhetorically (or, as linguists would say, pragmatically) creating a sense of urgency. The BA clause states the consequences of failing to enact what the AB clause expresses.

Moreover, the construction also implies that the utterance is comprehensive, since it establishes only two possible options in the decision/action space. One observation that supports this is how the AB BEFORE BA construction is commonly mistaken for the related AB OR BA construction (which also conveys a threat and urges an opposite pre-emptive action). For example, John F. Kennedy's famous line from his speech to the UN general assembly in 1961, (4), is commonly misremembered as (5):

(4)   Mankind must put an end to war or war will put an end to mankind. (Kennedy)

(5)   Mankind must put an end to war, before war puts an end to mankind. ("John F. Kennedy Quotation")

Note that Kennedy's expression depends more fully on the principle of sequential order, because *or* imposes no temporal order, while *before* does. The principle of sequential order is in play for both constructions, but the clausal connectives leverage different dimensions. The subordinator, *before*, emphasizes the opportunity to pre-empt the threat. The disjunctive, *or*, emphasizes the only-two-option decision space.

Both dimensions are operative in both cases, however: the temporal sequence and the comprehensive decision space. The temporal order indicates that the undesirable outcome is imminent. The two-out-of-two option's comprehensiveness further triggers the sense of urgency, as the addressee has only one course of action to avoid negative consequences.

To fully understand the meaning pole of this construction, it is important to look at the contexts in which it occurs. It is mainly in directives used by people who want to see a change in the world around them: politicians convincing their addressees to come together to defeat evil, activists urging their addressees to join their causes, or people who simply think the world can be a better place. This makes Twitter a popular place for the construction. But the causes are not always wholesome ones. In some cases, the construction is used to inject hateful rhetoric in the urgency; if we do not take action against *some group of people* right this moment, destruction awaits us. For example,

> (6)   Annihilate Islam before it annihilates Whites, Christians, Europeans and others (@natsocialist).

In this way, the construction can prey on people's instinct to Other and alienate those they do not like or relate to, or to demonize abstract forces, as in (7):

> (7)   We need to destroy capitalism before it destroys us (Socialist Alternative Sydney University)

This use of the construction positions the addressee, enveloped as referent in the A NPs, as separate and distinct from the referent of the B NPs. A must oppose B because B opposes A.

Since the construction commonly occurs with themes of violence, it can also be found in video games. In the 1980s, the computer game Snakebite had the following slogan:

> (8)   Eat the snake before it eats you (Orwin)

More recently, an article posted on *Blizzard Watch* had the title

> (9)   How to manage your Corruption in patch 8.3 and hug your inner tentacle beast before it hugs you (Rossi)

Combining multiple constructions with the AB BEFORE BA construction, (9) implies that the addressee needs to urgently hug their "inner tentacle beast" before it hugs them. The action of hugging would seem to ameliorate the threatening nature of the construction, but the form of the construction overrides the verb: whatever is going on (and we do not have any knowledge of the game), it is clear that being hugged by your inner tentacle beast is not a good thing.

So, this construction is not limited to negative verbs (e.g., *destroy*); it can occur with neutral verbs (e.g., *manage*) and even positive verbs (e.g., *hug*). Consequently, we can conclude that the conceptual schemas are evoked by the construction and not by the individual verbs, one of the core tenets of Construction Grammar. A list of all the verbs and verb phrases we have found with the construction is provided in Appendix B. For each verb, select examples can be found in Appendix C.

Variants of the AB BEFORE BA Construction

The AB BEFORE BA construction appears in a number of forms in our data. This section describes the most common forms of the construction and a few less common variants.

$V^X NP^B$ before $NP^B V^X NP_{2nd;1pl}$

The most common form the construction takes in our data is $V^X NP^B$ before $NP^B V^X NP_{2nd;1pl}$. This includes examples like

(10)   Stop speeding before it stops you ("Stop Speeding")

(11)   End factory farming before it ends us (Viva! Charity)

(12)   Take control of change before it takes control of you (Brown)

This variant features an IMPERATIVE construction of the form V NP (i.e., an imperative containing an explicit object) with an implicit second person (*you* or *we*) followed by the lexeme *before* and a TRANSITIVE construction of the form NP V $NP_{2nd;1pl}$. What is important about the object in the second clause is that it includes the addressee, who is being urged to take action, but can also include the speaker, a situation which we have formalized in the admittedly awkward subscript $_{X2nd;1pl}$. The imperative clause precedes a threat of total destruction, such that these examples can be effectively paraphrased as conditional warnings: *If you do not stop speeding, speeding will stop you; If we do not end factory farming, it will cause the end of us; if you don't take control of the changes in your life, they will take control of you.* Prototypical examples have first- and second-person pronouns as the isolated NP. Additionally, this variant of the construction is less compositional than the general form because the matrix clause, the first clause, is an IMPERATIVE construction and the "meaning of the IMPERATIVE construction … cannot be derived from the lexical meanings of the words alone" (Hilpert 42).

NP^A V V^X NP^B before NP^B V^X NP^A

Another common variant of our construction takes the form NP^A V V^X NP^B before NP^B V^X NP^A. Examples include,

(13)   We must destroy the Republican Party before it destroys us. (@Archonoclast)

(14)   We need to screw them before they screw us (@neilsimm)

(15)   im gonna destroy the world before it destroys me (@helvetikyle)

(16)   I'm going to take a bite out of the big apple (before it takes a bite out of me) (Quint)

(17)   You should leave her before she leaves you (8530683641)

(18)   Comcast wants to become Roku before Roku becomes
        Comcast (Levy)

This variation contains two verbs, the first one often an auxiliary. In
(13) – (15) the first clause is a declaration; (13) and (14) are
declarations of obligations, while (15) and (16) declare intentions. In
the second person, this variant takes the form of an admonition (17).
With (18), an intention is indicated but the speech act here is a
descriptive statement.

The construction commonly expresses desire or obligation, so it
occurs predominantly with deontic verbs, e.g., *need*, *must*, *should*.
There is a sense of a moral order that requires fixing or completion
in some way: NP^A is obliged to or desires to perform an action on
NP^B in order to prevent NP^B from performing that action on them.
Prototypical variants of NP^A are first- and second-person pronouns
here too, and the NP^B of the second clause in this variant is
frequently realized as a pronoun.

Like the examples of the previous variant, (13) – (17) evoke a threat
to the addressee: *If we do not screw them, they will screw us. If you do
not leave her, she will leave you.* However, (18) is interesting in that it
does not threaten the addressee. This special case of the variant
usually occurs with company names representing NP^A and NP^B.
But there is still a presumed undesirable consequence that awaits
Comcast if it does not take action. Extensions of this special case
include questions of the form Aux NP^A *become* NP^B *before* NP^B
becomes NP^A? such as (19) and (20):

(19)   Can Netflix become Disney before Disney becomes
        Netflix? (Levy)

(20)   Can Netflix become HBO before HBO becomes
        Netflix? (Asacker and Ramsey).

In both these cases, despite the verb *become* being neutral, the construction implies that if company A does not displace company B, it will be pushed out of the relevant market, presumably being rendered inconsequential or bankrupt. This construction suits the zero-sum implications of a two-option decision space very well, and not coincidentally fits the winner/loser ethos of high capitalism nicely.

Other Variants

While the two variants outlined in the previous sections are the most common, they are not the only ones. Other variations include those of the form (NP^A Aux) V^X NP^B *before* NP^B Aux V^X NP$^{(A)}$. An interesting example appears in a tweet by @NickTehShonx. In a friendly exchange with another *Twitter* user, he says,

(21)   *hugs you before you can hug me* (@NickTehShonx).

The form of this example is not especially odd: V^X NP^B before NP^B Aux V^X NP. However, what is interesting is that the tweeter leverages this construction to create an utterance that gives off a sense of competition, albeit comically, despite using a positive verb, *hug* (reminiscent of example 9). Another example from *Twitter*, this time with an explicit NP^A (*I*) and an auxiliary verb (*will*) in the first clause, as well as an auxiliary verb (*can*) in the second, is

(22)   I'll leave you before you can leave me (@Tvaninks).

The speaker declares that she will be leaving the addressee before the addressee has a chance to leave her. As such, variants of the construction that include an auxiliary verb in the second clause come off as more of a declaration than a threat, even if that declaration has competitive overtones. The sense of two inverse options that the basic construction conveys, involving two "protagonists," lends itself to this kind of competition rather well. It recalls a tagline from an old TV show (*Hill Street Blues*) about cops in a gritty precinct of an unnamed but Chicago-like city, in which

the sergeant always told the officers as he sent them out after the morning briefing to

(23)   Do it to them before they do it to you. ("Hill Street Blues")

Again, we see the zero-sum implications of inverse, mutually exclusive alternatives.

Rhetorical Figures and Construction Grammar

Existing works that look at the role of rhetorical figures in Construction Grammar include Mark Turner ("Figure"), Graeme Trousdale, and Randy Allen Harris ("Grammatical," "Rules," "Chiastic"). Harris argues, for instance, that "many rhetorical figures are constructions in the contemporary sense of Construction Grammar" and, hence, Construction Grammar supports "a rhetorical return to pre-Enlightenment views of language in which rhetoric and grammar were mutually informing disciplines" ("Grammatical" 1). In this section, we go over some of the rhetorical figures that are essential to the analysis of our construction: antimetalepsis, antimetabole, mesodiplosis, and parison. We will then show how rhetorical figures contribute to both the meaning and the form of the construction, making them vital to our arguments and ineliminable from an accurate account of the construction.

The Origin of Constructions

The attentional and mnemonic effects of rhetorical figures, in particular, serve a major explanatory dimension that is underdetermined in Construction Grammar. The core psychological model in Construction Grammar is a usage-based exemplar network (Bybee; Goldberg, *Explain*). The model suggests that language is acquired and maintained through "the universal

human capacity to recognize repeating structures [that is, ones with a lot of usage in a linguistic community] and build analogies on them" (Handl and Graf 123). Somehow, a pattern—let's say AB BEFORE BA—finds expression by a speaker. Call them Speaker1. They express that pattern. Somehow, that pattern appeals to a hearer, who becomes Speaker2 of the pattern at some future time, whereupon it lodges in other language users (Speaker3, … SpeakerN), who in turn, express it themselves, lodging it in others, and so on. Many of Speaker3 – SpeakerN are not repeating the initial pattern verbatim, with all the same lexical items, but spinning off variations to suit their contexts and intentions. Meanwhile, Speaker1 is still expressing it, spawning other spawners, to the point where trying to enumerate them is useless. We have, then, a construction propagated culturally through usage. The model for any individual "grammar" in the Constructionist framework takes the form in this theory of an exemplar network, with prototype complexes latticed in among variations.

It's a good story. But what other account might we offer of a construction like AB BEFORE BA having multiple occurrences in a community and multiple recognizable variants; indeed, in many communities, in multiple languages, in barely charted variants? They all just spontaneously occur to each speaker in a community independently? They all have their universal grammars that just coincidentally now and again exude AB BEFORE BA patterns? There's only one thing wrong with the Constructionist exemplar story: there's no real account of the features and mechanisms that might give rise to a construction or to explain why it catches on. People just happen to come up with these arrangements and other people just happen to like them enough to remember them and express them. There is only that loose appeal to analogy as a mechanism for propagation. But what is analogy? Where does it come from?

Analogy is a process satisfying our neurocognitive disposition to find similarities, not just to find *patterns*, that is, but to find *certain kinds of patterns*, and also to forge new "creative" similarities—metaphors, similes, reifications, anthropomorphisms, and so on. This disposition has been well understood since at least the time of Aristotle (e.g., *de Memoria* 451b), as have dispositions for correlation (linguistically realized as metonymy), contrast (linguistically realized as antithesis, and also at work in modes of irony), and recurrence (linguistically realized in all the figures of repetition—rhyme, parison, alliteration, antimetabole). These four principles have been robust throughout the history of thought in theories of memory, learning, and mental activity, becoming codified in the long reign of Association Psychology as the Laws of Contiguity, Similarity, Frequency, and Contrast, and all now having homes in cognitive neuroscience (see Olson and Ramírez 30ff.).

But these four are not the only principles that shape our perception, categorization, and expression of experience. Minimally central to the ways we both experience the world and communicate about our experience, the catalogue should include meronymy (part/whole associations, linguistically realized in synecdoche), sequentiality (before/after associations: incrementum, gradatio, antimetabole), scalarity (greater/lesser associations: hyperbole, meiosis, litotes, also incrementum), positionality (locative relations: rhyme, alliteration, epanaphora), and identity (sameness relations: all the figures of repetition). The experimental and observational literature on these neurocognitive pattern biases is too extensive to review here, but if we just take one of the most central to figuration and to the construction we are reporting on, repetition, landmark studies go back as far as Hermann Ebbinghaus (1885), and a major review of memory research, now almost 50 years old, concluded that "[r]epetition is one of the most powerful variables affecting memory" (Hintzman 47). Indeed, we all recognize instinctively how crucial repetition is to memory, especially linguistic memory. If we want to remember a name or a number or a few grocery items, we repeat them over and over to ourselves.

The intersection of language and neurocognitive pattern biases produced the linguistic configurations we now call *rhetorical figures* in the long, mutually reinforcing evolutionary development of human culture and language. Figures are a cognitive technology of attention and memory. That's why they are so dense in pre-literate works like *Gilgamesh*, the *Iliad*, and the Old Testament, why they structure our proverbs and heuristics and clichés, why we can so easily recall expressions like "All for one, one for all," "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country," and "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you," and why those expressions propagate so easily through our culture (Rubin). Those expressions all leverage repetition (antimetabole, mesodiplosis, parison), positionality (mesodiplosis), and sequentiality (antimetabole).

So does the AB BEFORE BA family of constructions.

Rhetorical Figures in the AB BEFORE BA Construction

There are multiple rhetorical figures present in the AB BEFORE BA construction. The most obvious is chiasmus, frequently regarded as a single figure, but which we recognize as a cluster of figures defined as the "general pattern of reverse repetition of linguistic constituents."[3] A particular member of the chiastic cluster, antimetalepsis, dominates our data. We define it as "reverse repetition of sense and/or of reference," visible in this example:

(24)   We can control AI before it controls us (O'Keefe II)

Here, the referents encoded by *We* and *AI* swap their syntactic and semantic roles from the first clause to the second clause, where they are coded by the pronouns *us* and *it*. Another example is

(25)   stop them before they stop you. (Olukoya)

In (25) the implicit *you* swaps places with *them* (referencing leg cramps) in the second clause and we get an explicit *you*. A more constrained type of antimetalepsis is antimetabole, which requires the reverse repetition of at least two lexemes (and therefore, of their sense and potentially of their reference). An example of antimetabole in a case of the AB BEFORE BA construction is

(26)   I'll finish it before it finishes me (Chatwin 234).

Figures of contrast and reversal, such as antimetabole, often collocate with parison, a form of parallelism where phrases or clauses have the same syntactic structure; in fact, Tu's analysis of eighty-six instances of antimetabole, asyndeton, epanaphora, and epiphora revealed that a third of them also contained parison (33). Another frequent collocate of antimetabole found in many instances of the AB BEFORE BA construction is mesodiplosis, or the repetition of a lexeme between landmark constituents, such as two noun phrases.

Rhetorical figures have a significant impact on the meaning of constructions. But it is not just the *presence* of rhetorical figures that mediates form and meaning, but the *collocation* of rhetorical figures. For example, antimetabole and antimetalepsis often trigger a sense of reciprocality between the referring expressions (noun phrases) that are repeated in reverse order. Combining this with parison and/or mesodiplosis essentially seals the form of the construction as soon as the clause prior to "before" has been decided. Take (17) for example: "You should leave her before she leaves you" (8530683641). When "You should leave her" has been uttered, under conditions of parison, mesodiplosis and antimetabole, we are guaranteed that the latter half must be "she leaves you" and guaranteed that reciprocal relations will hold between *you* and *her/she*. "The antimetabole guarantees two occurrences each of two distinct elements," Harris observes. "The mesodiplosis mediates their relation to each other … and [t]he parison stabilizes the syntax to ensure the mutuality of that relationship" ("Rules" 236). That mutuality means that the two noun phrases swap syntactic roles

(*you* is first a subject with the direct object *her*, and then *she* is a subject with the direct object *you*) and semantic roles (*you* is first an AGENT with the PATIENT *her*, and then *she* is an AGENT with the PATIENT you). The form drives the meaning. And, if one of the figures is not present, the expression would violate the rhetorical conditions of the construction.

Under the conditions of reciprocality, a fixed verb between the two noun phrases (mesodiplosis) and a fixed clausal structure (parison) with the temporal preposition *before* between the two reciprocal clauses, we get a call to action directed at NP^A. The order of the phrasing (iconicity of sequence) tells NP^A that there is a chance to perform the action now or else the action will be performed upon them. The ECG framework, which we explore in the following section, is particularly explanatory here since it posits that the construction triggers the hearer to run a simulation for the latter half of the sentence, which, in turn, evokes a sense of urgency and motivates the hearer to take action to avoid the undesirable consequences. We argue that the concept of reciprocality, triggered by antimetabole or antimetalepsis, and the links between the subject, verb, and object that are enforced by parison and mesodiplosis are crucial in order to simulate this type of situation. For example, look at the following examples of the partially filled STOP NP^B BEFORE NP^B STOP NP construction:

(27)   Stop the enemies before they stop you (Olukoya)

(28)   Stop them before they stop us (International Spy Museum)

(29)   Stop dust before it stops you (MineralProducts1)

As soon as the first clause is expressed, the second clause naturally implies that something else is going to stop the listener because of the evoked force dynamics of reciprocality, triggering a sense of urgency.

Next, we look at how rhetorical figures also contribute to the form. We hypothesize that one reason why this construction, in its several variants, is so common is that it is both more salient and more memorable than a blander expression with the "same" meaning. In particular, the repetition schema is evoked by all the figures found in the construction, and research shows that repetition helps us to retain pieces of information more effectively, and the collocation of figures takes advantage of exactly that (Zhan et al.). Recall that one way to define a construction is by the frequency of usage of a particular pattern (Goldberg, *Explain* 5). Since the repetitive structure of the AB BEFORE BA construction makes it easier to remember, it is more likely to be used going forward, and more likely to propagate culturally. Thus, we can see how the collocation of rhetorical figures can drive the form of a construction; the group of figures creates attention-recruiting and memory-impressing patterns that are more likely to be propagated and become constructions. Table 1 shows some of the figures that are associated with the AB BEFORE BA construction:

Table 1: Figures in Examples of the AB BEFORE BA Construction

Antimetalepsis	We must stop the climate crisis before it stops us
Antimetabole	Can Netflix become Disney before Disney becomes Netflix?
Mesodiplosis	We must stop the climate crisis before it stops us
Parison	Can Netflix become Disney before Disney becomes Netflix?

Note: Each coloured constituent represents one element of the figure.

Crossover of Rhetorical Figures and Embodied Construction Grammar

To make his argument that rhetorical figures and Construction Grammar are linked, Harris utilizes the Embodied Construction Grammar (ECG) framework to describe the chiastic A OUT OF B BUT NOT B OUT OF A construction, describing sentences like "It is easier to take the boy out of the country than the country out of the boy" ("Grammatical"). Likewise, by looking at the chiastic AB BEFORE BA construction through the ECG framework, we further develop Turner's and Harris's idea that rhetoric and Construction Grammar are intrinsically tied together (Trousdale's case is more modest). Before we develop our arguments further, we will briefly introduce Embodied Construction Grammar. Then, along the same lines as Harris, we will use ECG to analyze the AB BEFORE BA construction, further demonstrating the benefits of having rhetorical figures inform our understanding of constructions, this time from "within linguistics," rather than from "within rhetoric."

A Brief Introduction to ECG

ECG is a Construction-Grammar framework that aims to link together the cognitive aspect of language with computer science. The framework is unique in the way it uses constructions to describe language use (Chang 51). In ECG, a speaker's utterances are combined with their communicative context to account for the constructions the speaker is instantiating, and to also generate a semantic specification (semspec). The semspec has information about the conceptual schemas being evoked by the utterance and the relationship between the constructions used; it is then utilized to simulate events, actions, objects, relations, and states. After the simulation is complete, the model will update the communicative context and conceptual schemas of the language user (fig. 1). We should keep in mind that the formalism needs to be precise to allow computational implementations; however, this paper focuses more

on using the framework for constructional analysis of the AB BEFORE BA construction than for implementation.
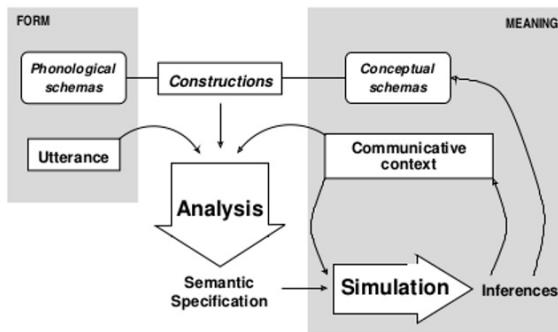
Fig. 1. Overview of the simulation–based language understanding model, consisting of two primary processes: analysis and simulation. (Bergen and Chang, "Simulation–Based Language Understanding" 2)

ECG Analysis of the AB BEFORE BA Construction

In this subsection, we employ the ECG framework and its formalism to outline the AB BEFORE BA construction and to discuss how rhetorical figures can help simplify computation when producing a semantic specification (semspec). As we have argued, there is a core AB BEFORE BA construction, a prototype in exemplar terms, that evokes a sense of urgency conditioned by a negative sentiment. In addition, there are variants of this core construction that add extra information; for example, obligation is emphasized in (13) and (14). To capture that in our analysis, we propose a general construction (fig. 2, next page) that acts as a parent to the more specific variants.

```
construction A B before B A Chiasmus
  constructional
    evokes
      TEMPORAL RELATION as tr
      Antimetalepsis as antmps
      Mesodiplosis as mes
      Parison as par
  constituents
    victim1: NULL REFERRING-EXPRESSION
    action1, action2: TRANSITIVE VERB
    victim2, victimizer1, victimizer2: REFERRING-EXPRESSION
  constraints
    mes.unit1 ↔ action1
    mes.unit2 ↔ action2
    antmps.a2, antmps.b1, antmps.b2: REFERRING-EXPRESSION
    antmps.b1 ↔victimizer1
    antmps.b2 ↔ victimizer2
    antmps.a2 ↔ victim2
    par.p1, par.p2: PHRASE
    par.p1 ← action1 victimizer 1
    par.p2 ← victimizer2 action2 victim2
    tr.time: TEMPORAL RELATION
    tr.time ← before
    theme: REFERRING-EXPRESSION
    theme.case ← object
    agent: REFERRING-EXPRESSION
    agent.case ← subject
form
  constraints
    action1_f << victimizer1_f
    victimizer1_f << before
    before << vitimizer2_f
    victimizer2_f << action2_f
    action2_f << victim2_f
meaning
  evokes
    Horative as hrt
  hrt.agent ↔ victim1_m ↔ victim2_m
  hrt.task ↔ action1_m ↔ action2_m
  hrt.recepient ↔ victimizer1_m ↔ victimizer2_m
  hrt.when ← immediately
  self.sentiment ← negative
```

Fig. 2. ECG formalism for the general ACTION NP^B before NP^B ACTION NP$^{(A)}$

Leveraging Chang's definition of the Referring-Expression construction, we have also introduced a new construction, "Null Referring-Expression" (fig. 3) to account for when the subject of the sentence is inferred, as in examples (27) – (29).

Construction Null Referring-Expression
 form: null
 meaning: Referent
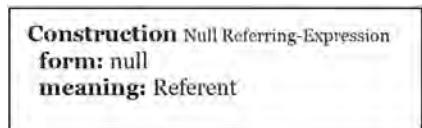
Fig. 3. Null Referring-Expression Construction

As these formal descriptions show, in the ECG formalism there are three major sections: constructional, form, and meaning. For the constructional section, everything listed under *constituents* is a child construction that this construction connects. The *evokes* section links the rhetorical figure constructions to our current construction. This is because, as Harris has demonstrated ("Grammatical"), at least some rhetorical figures behave like constructions, as each figure has a general form and a meaning that is triggered by its cognitive affinities (20). However, his suggestion that all rhetorical figures can be handled by Construction Grammar and that the ECG formalism can adequately describe all rhetorical figures is far from being established. In this paper, we are agnostic on that point but we demonstrate that the rhetorical figures we are concerned with can be so represented.

We will not reproduce ECG representations of all the relevant rhetorical figures but figure 4, for the antimetalepsis construction, exemplifies what such representations would look like. In particular, it stipulates that the two pairs of Referring Expressions (A^1, A^2 and B^1, B^2) will have the same denotation (sense and reference), but that for at least one of the pairs (the OR is inclusive) the actual words will be different.

construction $_{(R\text{-Figure})}$ Antimetalpsis
 subcase of Chiasmus
 constraints
 A^1.signatum = A^2.signatum. AND B^1.signatum = B^2.signatum
 A^1.signans ≠ A^2.signans OR B^1.signans ≠ B^2.signans

Fig. 4. The Antimetalepsis Construction

So, as represented in figure 4, then, antmps.b1 and antmps.b2 necessarily refer to one entity, and antmps.a1 and antmps.a2 refer to another. The form constraints for the Chiasmus construction (Harris, "Grammatical" 51) of which Antimetalepsis is a subcase, guarantee that the units will follow the lexical order: antmps.a1 (if non-null), antmps.b1, antmps.b2, antmps.a2. Antimetabole would, then, be defined in a similar fashion, with additional lexical requirements. As for mesodiplosis, the form constraints make sure that the predicating constituent is placed in the middle of its clause. Mesodiplosis evokes the repetition schema, which adds the constraint that every unit should have the same basic form. In this case, because mesodiplosis is teaming up with parison and antimetalepsis, it triggers a schema that causes the user to simulate a force-dynamic sense of balance. Finally, parison constrains each clausal unit to follow the same type of syntactic structure, ensuring that the grammatical and semantic roles of A^1 and B^1 are reversed for B^2 and A^2. The parison construction will activate the meaning schema in this case due to the presence of a chiastic figure (in this case antimetalepsis). As for the pivotal word *before*, it establishes a temporal relation between the two clauses which we represent through the TEMPORAL RELATION type.

Next, since a construction is a form and meaning pairing, our formalism includes corresponding form and meaning sections. The form section specifies the order of the constituents. Since NP^A can have a null form, we omit putting any constraints on it in the form section of figure 2, and instead, we introduce the constraint in figure 5 when it becomes necessary for those two variants.

Construction Imperative AB Before BA Chiasmus
  subcase of IMPERATIVE
  subcase of AB Before BA Chiasmus
    meaning
      constraints
        $victim1_n$, $victim2_m$: SECONDPERSONPRON OR FIRSTPERSONPLURALPRON
      $ds.adressee \leftrightarrow victim1_n \leftrightarrow victim2_m$
      $ds.activity \leftrightarrow action1_n \leftrightarrow action2_m$
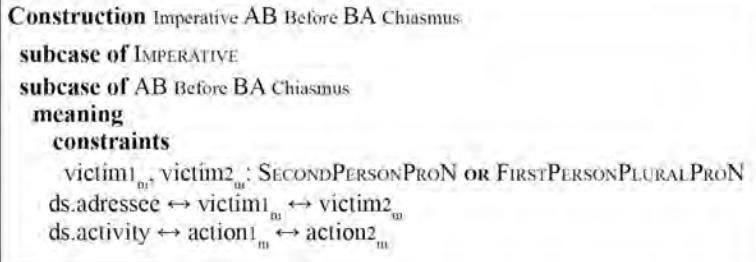
Fig. 5. ECG formalism for NP^A ACTION NP^B BEFORE NP^B ACTION NP^A with (bottom) and without (top) antimetabole

Next, the meaning section specifies the semantic information that is extracted from the construction. The Hortative schema evokes the sentiment of a "call to action" feeling that is evoked by this construction. We also detail where properties in the Hortative schema can fill certain semantic gaps like who the AGENT is, what the task is, etc. (See fig. 6.) We can see this especially clearly in examples (8) and (10) – (12). The last statement in the meaning block conveys the idea that this construction is accompanied by a negative context regardless of what verb is used, as we have seen in examples with verbs like *feel*, *call*, and *see*.

Construction Standard A B Before B A Chiasmus
  subcase of A B Before B A Chiasmus
  constructional
    constituents
      victim1: REFERRING-EXPRESSION
      aux: AUXILIARY
    constraints
      antmps.a1: REFERRING-EXPRESSION
      antmps.a1 $\leftrightarrow$ victim1
      par.p1 $\leftarrow$ victimizer1 action1 victim1
  form
    constraints
      $victim1_f \ll aux$
      $aux \ll action1_f$
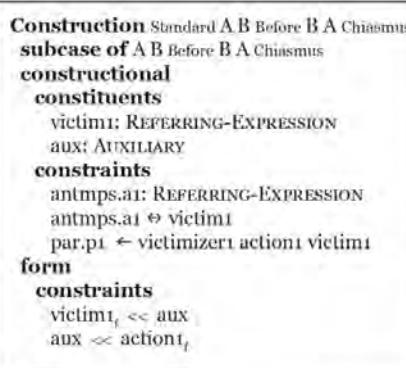
Fig. 6. ECG Formalism for Imperative ACTION NP^B BEFORE NP^B ACTION NP

Now, with the parent construction defined, we can create child constructions that will inherit all properties from the parent and can override them using the "subcase of" syntax (Chang 13).

In figures 5 and 6, we illustrate the two variants we have discussed. As we stated earlier, "subcase of" indicates the role of inheritance, and any new constraints or meanings we append to inherited values. V^X NP^B before NP^B V^X $NP_{2nd;1pl}$, because it is a command, includes the IMPERATIVE construction defined by Chang (78). One of the meaning schemas that the IMPERATIVE construction evokes is Discourse Space (ds) which allows us to reference concepts happening at the moment of the utterance. As for NP^A Aux V^X NP^B BEFORE NP^B V^X NP^A, since we require NP^A and an auxiliary, that goes into our form constraints. We overrode the constraints on par.p1 and victim1 by redefining them. For the variants that have lexical repetition, antimetabole is evoked in addition to mesodiplosis, parison, and antimetalepsis, which would give us the construction represented in figure 6.

Now that we have defined the main properties of our general construction and two prominent variants, we will show how rhetorical figures help produce a semspec and assist computation. In order to produce a semspec, one of the first steps is to search for candidate constructions that may account for an utterance. As Bergen and Chang describe it, the most typical approach is to parse bottom-up first ("Simulation-Based Language Understanding" 20); that is, to start with individual word constructions, which provide cues on what other constructions we can evoke to form the utterance.

Since the cued constructions introduce further constraints on each individual constituent, we can also start processing top-down if necessary. One issue that may occur in this process is that there might be ambiguities due to having multiple construction candidates. However, introducing these rhetorical figure constructions will add further constraints on the form and meaning,

thus potentially narrowing down the candidates. Many constructions and constraints should not be regarded as deterministic because the meanings of constructions can change over time (Bergen and Chang, "Embodied Construction Grammar" 188). However, constraints introduced by rhetorical figures can be considered more stable than others. Figural patterns are universal. They are shaped by neurocognitive pattern biases that we all share (as argued in the section "The Origin of Constructions" above). Some evidence for this appears below in the examples of constructions in other languages that are homologous to the English AB BEFORE BA construction. This universal seating of rhetorical figures can also be a helpful heuristic for the computational treatment of constructions.

Extensions and Cross-lingual Examples

Extensions of the construction and examples across different languages also employ rhetorical figures to add constraints to form and meaning.

Extensions

Extensions of the AB BEFORE BA construction occur when the construction fits into the open slot of another construction. In all such cases, the construction continues to use rhetorical figures to create a sense of urgency and lend a negative sentiment to the second clause, thus retaining its original meaning and form. Let's look at a few examples.

(30)   I hope humanity exterminates billionaires before they exterminate us. (@NYsocialist1)

Here, "humanity exterminates billionaires before they exterminate us" is a variant of the AB BEFORE BA construction and fits into the clausal complement slot of the VERB + CLAUSAL COMPLEMENT

construction, where the verb slot is filled by the verb *hope* (Goldberg, *Explain* 49). Using antimetalepsis, mesodiplosis, and parison, it still conveys the urgency of the situation, signaling that the speaker knows that if action is not taken soon, the threat of "extermination" hangs over "humanity."

Somewhat similarly, the AB BEFORE BA construction can be embedded into an iteration of the VERB + CLAUSAL COMPLEMENT construction that we will henceforth refer to as the VERB PHRASE + CLAUSAL COMPLEMENT construction. There are two examples below:

> (31) Help us exterminate cancer before it exterminates any more dear friends… (@KnitChick1979)

> (32) Let's stop covid before it stops us (Chang-kwang)

In each, a variant of the AB BEFORE BA construction, containing antimetalepsis and mesodiplosis, fills the clausal component slot of the VERB PHRASE + CLAUSAL COMPLEMENT construction. In (31), "exterminate cancer before it exterminates any more dear friends" fills the clausal component slot, and "Help us" acts as the verb phrase. Then, in (32), the verb phrase slot is filled by "Let's" and the clausal complement slot is filled by "stop covid before it stops us," which takes a form we have already seen. However, in this example, the first clause is a variant of the IMPERATIVE construction, and *let* is one of the most popular collexemes of the IMPERATIVE construction (Stefanowitsch and Gries 233), so one could also argue that "Let's stop covid" is an extension of the IMPERATIVE construction, followed by a TRANSITIVE construction.

The AB BEFORE BA construction often co-occurs with the instructional HOW TO V^X NP and X WAYS TO V^X NP constructions, which are mainly used in titles to grab the audience's attention. Examples include article titles like,

> (33) "5 ways to stop anxiety before it stops you" (Greenberg)

and book titles like,

(34) *How to Kill Stress Before It Kills You* (Culligan)

(35) *How to Control Your Anxiety Before It Controls You* (Ellis)

Similarly to the other extension examples, (33) – (35) use rhetorical figures to create a sense of urgency and compel the audience to read their article or buy their book before it is too late. As such, we can see that the AB BEFORE BA construction commonly co-occurs with myriad different constructions, without losing its meaning or form.

French and Persian

Interestingly, the AB BEFORE BA construction, or homologous constructions to the AB BEFORE BA construction, are a not uncommon cross-linguistic phenomenon.

We have found homologous constructions in two main forms in French: V^X NP^B AVANT QUE NP^B (NE) NP^A V^X and NP^A V^X NP^B AVANT QUE NP^B (NE) V^X NP^A. *Avant que* translates to *before*, and the negative particle *ne* is "formal and optional, and used after certain verbs and expressions that have a negative meaning" (Lawless), making explicit the negative sentiment that is more submerged in many of the English examples.

An example of the first instance is a translation of (35) that drops the "How to" segment of the utterance, turning it into the more familiar imperative structure, which can be translated as "Dominate your anxiety before it dominates you."

(36) Dominez votre anxiété avant qu'elle ne vous domine (Ellis)
"Dominate your anxiety before it dominates you."

domin-ez	votre	anxiété	avant	qu=elle	ne	vous	domin-e
dominate-PRS.2PL	your.PL	anxiety	before	comp=3FSG	NEG	you.PL	dominate-PRS.3SG

While this example manifests antimetalepsis, it does not manifest parison or mesodiplosis, which suggests that antimetalepsis might be the primary contributor to the meaning of the construction. It also nicely illustrates how different figures can perform the same function in different languages because of, for instance, local word order differences, since it exhibits an epanalepsis.

An example of the second instance is,

(37)　Nous détruirons le terrorisme avant qu'il ne détruise l'humanité (Ellis)
　　　"We will destroy terrorism before it destroys humanity."

nous	détruir-ons	le	terrorisme	avant	qu=il	ne	détruis-e	l=humanité
we	destroy-FUT.1PL	ART	terrorism	before	comp=3MSG	NEG	destroy-PRS.3SG	ART =humanity

The example manifests both antimetalepsis and parison, urging NP^A to take action before "terrorism" destroys "humanity."

In Persian, too, we have found two main instances of the pattern: BEFORE (NP^B) NP^A V^X, NP^A NP^B V^X and NP^B V^X BEFORE NP^B NP^A V^X. Let's look at an example of the first instance (Persian is read right-to-left, but we have put the transliteration for both Persian instances in left-to-right order for ease of understanding by English readers. In Persian writing, what might look like an epanaphora to English readers is actually an epiphora in terms of processing. The order of the glosses matches the transliteration order, i.e., is also left-to-right):

(38)　قبل از اینکه آنها شما را پیدا کنند شما آنها را پیدا کنید
　　　(@danielalefsefr)
　　　"Find them before they find you."

قبل	از	اینکه	آنها	شما	را	پیدا	کنند	شما	آنها	را	پیدا	کنید
qæbl	æz	i:n-ke	ɒ:n-hɒ:	shomɒ	rɒ:	pejdɒ:	kon-ænd	shomɒ:	ɒ:n-hɒ:	rɒ:	pejdɒ:	kon-i:d
before	from	DET-COMP	DET-PL	you.PL	DOM	find	do-PRS.3PL	you.PL	DET-PL	DOM	find	do-PRS.2PL

This example manifests antimetabole, parison, and epiphora and urges the addressee to find someone before they find them. This is another good illustration of how the functional roles of figures differ among languages. Because of basic word order differences between English and Persian, epiphora serves the same role in Persian that mesodiplosis does in English in constructions of this sort.

Amusingly, an example of the second instance is the title of the Persian translation of Ellis's book *How to Control Anxiety before It Controls You*. As in French, the "how to" is dropped, leaving us with what can be translated as "*Control Your Anxiety before It Controls You*."

(39)   اضطراب خود را کنترل کنید قبل از اینکه شما را کنترل کند (Ellis)
           "Control your anxiety before it controls you."

اضطراب	خود	را	کنترل	کنید	قبل	از	اینکه	شما	را	کنترل	کند
ezterɒːb-e	xod	rɒː	kontrol	kon-iːd	qæbl	æz	iːn-ke	shomɒː	rɒː	kontrol	kon-æd
anxiety-EZ	self	DOM	control	do-PRS.2PL	before	from	DET-COMP	you.PL	DOM	control	do-PRS.3SG

This example manifests antimetalepsis, not antimetabole, because اضطراب / ezterɒːb-e does not repeat; it is implicit in the second clause, a null pronoun very much like the missing *you* in English instances such as (3), (6), (8), and so on. It also manifests epiphora. While the grammatical roles are inverse in the two clauses, there is no parison, again because of the absence of an overt Referring Expression for اضطراب / ezterɒːb-e in the second clause, which is again parallel to English instances with null pronouns.

CONCLUSION

Our analysis of the AB BEFORE BA construction shows how rhetorical figures are essential determinants of at least some basic constructions. Much more research is called for, but in addition to the basic data of our argument (and of Harris, "Grammatical"), there are broader conceptual considerations. We know that figures

recruit attention and impress memory, which supports—in fact, enhances—the cognitive usage-based exemplar model Construction Grammar presents. The iconicity dimensions of figures can provide motivation for the form-meaning relation Construction Grammar takes as axiomatic. Further, figures are easily abstractable and describable in Construction Grammar formalisms, such as the formalism associated with ECG.

In the AB before BA Construction, antimetalepsis (or antimetabole) constrains the noun phrases so they must be repeated in reverse order, parison constrains the structure of the two clauses so they must be the same, and mesodiplosis adds an additional constraint that the verb in the middle of each clause must be the same; in this way, the form of the construction is entirely determined by the collocation of these three rhetorical figures. Given the fixed form and the temporal preposition *before*, the meaning, too, is fixed as an urgent call to action meant for the addressee. The inheritance properties of the rhetorical figure constructions also help make the AB BEFORE BA construction easily abstractable, from an ECG perspective. Additionally, we have shown that the rhetorical properties of the construction continue to influence its meaning even when it is combined with other constructions, and that variants exist among other languages as well which leverage chiasmus even if the figurative collocates are different.

The attentional and mnemonic effects of rhetorical figures, in particular, serve a major explanatory dimension that is underdetermined in Construction Grammar. Overall, we are not arguing that all constructions are figured. We are arguing rather that many constructions are figured, and that even many relatively "unfigured" constructions may reflect the neurocognitive pattern biases that figures exploit to grab our attention and burrow into our memories.

Future work on the intersection of rhetorical figures and Construction Grammar should include corpus research. For instance, corpus research on the many verbs that we have not yet tested, e.g., *punch* and *bite*, could be very revealing. Simple *Google* searches of the form *"verb" "before" "verb"* as well as *Twitter* searches of the form "*verb*" "*before*" "*verb*" would be a start; however, a more complicated endeavor could include writing scripts based on the ECG formalism to identify examples of the AB BEFORE BA construction in a tagged corpus. From there, we could perform an analysis of the statistical association between the verbs and the constructions, and we could use a resource like WordNet to look at the semantic similarity, as Ellis and Ogden did. This would further test (and, we hypothesize, validate) our abstractions. As our work shows, this kind of study is a natural extension of both rhetorical and linguistic research trajectories that have converged in exciting ways with the development of Construction Grammar and that promise greater insights into language, persuasion, perception, and cognition.

Appendix A: Legend of Symbols Used in the Formulae and Text

1	first person
2 (or 2nd)	second person
3	third person
Aux	Auxiliary verb
art	article
comp	complementizer
det	determiner
ds	discourse space
dom	direct object marker
f	feminine
ECG	Embodied Construction Grammar
fut	future tense
m	masculine
neg	negator
NP	Noun Phrase
pl	plural
prs	present tense
semspec	semantic specification
sg	singular

V	Verb
X^i	The numerical superscript indexes referential identity.
X_n	Single numerical subscripts index sequentiality; the subscript can also have the value "null" when there is no phonological (or orthographic) presence for the referent.
X_{nn}	Extended subscripts utilize abbreviations codes for the abbreviated concepts.
(X)	The constituents between the parentheses are optional; they occur in some instances, but not in all.

Note: Any constituents not occurring between parentheses are obligatory; they occur in all instances of the construction.

APPENDIX B: LIST OF VERBS WE HAVE COMMONLY FOUND WITH THE AB BEFORE BA CONSTRUCTION

annihilate	*attack*	*hug*	*isolate*
become	*call*	*kill*	*kick*
control	*destroy*	*learn*	*leave*
end	*exterminate*	*obliterate*	*sabotage*
feel	*find*	*screw*	*stop*
finish	*fuck*	*take*	*see*
get	*hear*	*manage*	

APPENDIX C: OUR DATA, INDEXED BY THE VERB

annihilate	Annihilate the past, before it annihilates you (@_adashofash)
	why is it so hard to find out ways to completely annihilate it [COVID–19] before it annihilates us? (@SincereIversxn)
attack	Attack panic before it attacks you (Leonard)
become	Uber needs to become Expedia before Expedia becomes Uber (@profgalloway)
call	I'll call it before it calls me (Walter)
control	Control your email (before it controls you) (Beveridge)
	Control your day before it controls you (Richardson)
destroy	Dear God, please destroy TikTok before it destroys us (@EricNewton2020)
	Global Warming: destroy it before it destroys you (Behera)
end	We must end the fossil fuel industry before it ends us (@ClimateHuman)
exterminate	Trump's achievement is keeping his repeated campaign promise to use military force to exterminate Isis before Isis exterminates US. (@ardishansen)
	WE should exterminate the entire Muslim race before Obama exterminates us (@LightHeart114)
feel	Feel the feelings before it feels you (Jamadar)
finish	Idk how, but I'll finish hayfever before hayfever finishes me! (@HenrieVIII)
	Afghan Elections Dilemma: Finish before it finishes you (Ghanizada)
find	Find him before he finds you (CoSMiiCBLaST; baekhyunniekso)
fuck	Fuck it before it fucks you. (Sir! No Sir!)[4]
get	We gotta get them before they get us (Terrorstorm)[5]
	I just hope I get it before it gets me (Breaking Barbi)[6]
hear	A lion can be heard from 5 miles away, so hopefully you hear it before it hears you! (@RemTheBem)
hug	*hugs you before you get a chance to hug them* (@Sir_Spokey)
isolate	Isolate insecurity before it isolates you (de Jong)
kick	Kick cancer before it kicks you (Gupta)

kill	Kill it before it kills you (Morris) "One guy said if someone looked at him the wrong way, he had a voice that said, 'Kill them before they kill you.'" (Mr.Knick 32)
learn	you better learn discipline now before discipline learns you later..... (@lawyersmitty)
leave	I better leave him before he leaves me (Melissa)
manage	Manage mass tourism before it manages you (Bakker) Manage osteoporosis before it manages you (@CarilionClinic)
obliterate	Obliterate evil from the face of the earth before it obliterates us! (@dougiemac) i will Obliterate the to do list before it obliterates me.......... (@centreskies)
sabotage	We will sabotage the presidency before the presidency sabotages the USA and its citizens. (@dsmnla) Anyone with any brains and a love for the UK wants to sabotage Brexit before Brexit sabotages the UK irrevocably. (@cazzacaz63)
see	see it before it sees us (Mayle & Della Valle)
screw	Today is your last chance to screw Brexit before it screws you (@NLebrecht)
stop	Stop malware before it stops you (Trustwave) Stop fusarium before it stops you (Alberta Agriculture and Forestry) Stop Satan before he stops you (Ewanlen) We must stop the climate crisis before it stops us (Guterres, qtd. in Todd)
take	Take control of clutter before it takes control of you (Monte)

Notes

[1] *Twitter* has rebranded as *X*, but our data was gathered prior to the name change so we use that terminology in this paper (*Twitter*, *tweet*, etc.).

[2] While we later base our arguments about attention and memory around neurocognitive pattern biases, which correlate broadly with rhetorical figures and therefore with constructions that are notably figured, we should not discount the effect of sentiment on memory, and the fact that this particular construction has a distinct affective valence.

[3] Our definitions are in line with the rhetorical tradition, but we find no single source in the tradition wholly reliable. Scholars participating in the University of Waterloo Rhetoricon Database project are developing a systematic and near-comprehensive ontology of figures, but the project has not yet been published. A beta version of the project's forthcoming website is available at https://artsresearch.uwaterloo.ca/chiastic/display/, where many of the definitions we use are stipulated and exemplified.

[4] From *The Movie Corpus*.

[5] From *The Movie Corpus*.

[6] From *The Movie Corpus*.

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On Memory and Figural Thought

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Abstract: In this article, the rhetorical figure of prolepsis serves as an illustrative case to examine how the ancient threads of memory craft can explicate the rhetorical operations of figures. In the *ars memoriae* tradition of antiquity and the medieval period, memory was the chief tool in invention. Memory craft is principled upon organization, routine, and structure. It also draws on our emotions to operate, and that which surprises us for its uniqueness or other features becomes more memorable. We recall that which is unique or perhaps the departure from the conventional language we encounter with a well-placed metaphor or the repetition of anaphora or epistrophe. Memory, through its inventive function, has much to tell us about how rhetorical figures underlie operations of the mind. Rhetorical figures reveal stylistic operations that allow for compositional activities, for invention and persuasion, and figures are rooted in the workings of memory revealed by the tradition of *ars memoriae*.

Keywords: memory, style, rhetorical figures, cognitive rhetoric, prolepsis

Résumé : Dans cet article, la figure rhétorique de la prolepse sert de cas illustratif pour examiner comment les anciennes traditions de l'art de la mémoire peuvent expliciter les opérations rhétoriques des figures. Dans la tradition de l'*ars memoriae* de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Âge, la mémoire était l'outil principal de l'invention. L'art de la mémoire repose sur l'organisation, la routine et la structure. Il s'appuie également sur nos émotions pour fonctionner, et ce qui nous surprend par son caractère unique ou ses autres propriétés devient plus mémorable. Nous nous rappelons ce qui est unique ou ce qui s'écarte du langage conventionnel que nous rencontrons, que ce soit par une métaphore bien placée ou par la répétition de l'anaphore ou de l'épiphore. La mémoire, à travers sa fonction inventive, a beaucoup à nous apprendre sur la façon dont les figures rhétoriques sous-tendent les opérations de l'esprit. Les figures rhétoriques révèlent des opérations stylistiques qui permettent des activités de composition, d'invention et de persuasion, et elles sont enracinées dans les mécanismes de la mémoire révélés par la tradition de l'*ars memoriae*.

Mots-clés : figures rhétoriques, prolepse, mémoire, *ars memoriae*, persuasion, invention

INTRODUCTION

In this article, the rhetorical canon of memory is explored through its relationship with rhetorical figures. Rhetorical figures of speech and rhetorical figures of thought have received attention for the cognitive operations that they underscore. The work of important rhetorical scholars such as Jeanne Fahnestock, Randy Allen Harris,[1] and Jordynn Jack illustrate that figures are foundational to our arguments, that figures mark cognitive affinities, and that those cognitive operations unfold across and within contexts. Memory work has interesting intersections with these programs of research, and this article explores some of those intersections. First, examining the canon of memory and its important flourishing in medieval monastic practices illustrates the complexity of the acts of memory and recollection. Then, looking at the relationship between memory and figuration, the article examines how these two traditions might mutually inform one another in the modern context of rhetorical studies of figural logic. Finally, to closely trace this relationship, the figure called prolepsis serves as an illustrative case. More specifically, the suite of figures that we might call prolepsis serves as a case. Work to untangle different figural strategies collected under the figure of prolepsis originally served to contribute to conversations about how figures could be rendered computationally tractable (Mehlenbacher, "Rhetorical Figures as Argument Schemes") and later to chart the complexity of figures for their own understanding (Mehlenbacher, "The Proleptic Suite"). To begin, the canon of memory requires some mapping.

ARS MEMORIAE: THE HIDDEN FOUNDATION

Memory is an enormously complex subject in the history of rhetoric[2] and more broadly in psychological studies. Yet, as Mary Carruthers notes, "rhetorical *memoria* remained notably under-theorized, especially in comparison to invention and style" ("Rhetorical *Memoria*" 209). Commenting on the handbook

tradition and rhetorical training, she speculates that because memory's role was understood as foundational for the other aspects of rhetoric, memory itself wasn't intensively examined. In the *Ad Herennium*, the discussion quickly turns to practical matters of *techne*, and most pre-Ciceronian accounts (here we can include the Sophistic *Dissoi Logoi* and, notably, Aristotle's *Topica*), Carruthers explains, were pedagogical in their focus and thus most attentive to the aspects of *recitatio*. Carruthers reminds us that Cicero himself did not discuss *memoria* in *De Inventione*, beyond his important linking of memory and the virtues through prudence.[3]

Further, the "pre-Ciceronian" memory techniques, notably that of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, are not so directly influential to the later traditions of *ars memoriae* as exampled by monastic practices: "in the monks' meditational craft—which they speak of as *memoria* or *memoria spiritalis*—the art of memory described by the *Ad Herennium* played no discernible role at all" (Carruthers, "Rhetorical Memoria" 213). Further, she notes that replications of the vocabulary from *Ad Herennium* in the *memoria spiritalis* tradition may rather be attributable to Quintilian's use of it in the *Institutio Oratoria*. Rhetoric, for all the significant theoretical implications of memory and its pedagogical importance among the five canons (although perhaps subordinated to the service of delivery), was not especially concerned with its underlying principles. However, medieval monastic practices embodied an important approach to the role of memory within rhetoric and so the medieval *ars memoriae* becomes of special interest when exploring the significant role of memory in the role of figurative thinking.

Figures have received considerable attention in the history of rhetoric, particularly through the so-called "handbook tradition," and they continue to interest contemporary rhetoricians, as well as linguists, philosophers, literary scholars, computer scientists, and cognitive scientists, among others. In rhetoric, Jeanne Fahnestock's essential work rejects value-added approaches, offering a model of figural logics, and Randy Harris (see Harris and DiMarco) adds to

her approach through a cognitive-rhetorical framework, with most recently Jordynn Jack situating the tradition broadly within a material-rhetorical-ecological framework. Jack sets out with a key question: "Where do rhetorical figures reside?," finding rhetoricians have offered "multiple matrices in which they [figures] may be instantiated: within the brain, within physical objects and images, and/or within organism-environment interactions" (1).

In this paper I wish to return to medieval memory craft to explore how figures are realized through acts of memory work and then build on these insights with the work of modern scholars studying figures. Although different types of figures operationalize memory activities somewhat differently, figures are rooted in the workings of memory revealed by the tradition of *ars memoriae*. Organization of perceptions in this tradition involves the recording and arrangement of sense impressions, the act of memory, and the act of recollecting (Carruthers, "Book of Memory"). Memory here has aspects of the material conditions we inhabit and engage. Memory was also understood to be influenced by our emotions. That is, we recall the unique or unusual, possibly grotesque, as the use of medieval monsters as memory aids illustrates, or as when we recall the departure from conventional language in a well-placed metaphor or a repetition such as epanaphora, for instance.[4] However, memory was also embodied, and the particulars of one's experience and mind are crucially important to the work of memory craft.

MEMORY AND FIGURES

Memory is central to how rhetorical figures function and, more broadly, to the process of rhetorical invention itself. Although here I divide the processes of memory work and rhetorical figuration for the purposes of investigation in the history of rhetoric and *ars memoriae*, they are, in fact, not so easily distinguished. In classical texts such as the *Ad Herennium*, one might find a discussion of

memory and figures. Walter J. Ong's theorizing of memory, too, provides us some account of the importance of figural constructions, notably those that we might characterize as schemes, with their morpho-lexical characterizations, and as tropes, with their semantic characterizations. "Think memorable thoughts," indeed (Ong 34; refer to note 5 for discussion). But the monastic tradition is not primarily oral, and in it the *ars memoriae* is mostly concerned with the memorization and recollection of written texts.[5] Further, beginning a study of the relationship between memory and figuration in the medieval period not only allows us to explore a more robust theory of memory, but also serves as something of an antidote to what are sometimes more speculative accounts.

Although *ars memoriae* posits a series of techniques to improve one's *memoria artificialis*, commenters on memory commonly acknowledged that the strategies must be adapted to the individual (see Carruthers, "Rhetorical *Memoria*" 219; *Book of Memory* 64). For instance, we might find that an individual tailors the visual structure of the places they construct and where to find arguments. In the venatic model Quintilian provides in the *Institutio Oratoria*, the rhetor finds the location of arguments much as one succeeds in finding the locations of "bird or beast" by knowing their *loci* (Carruthers, *Book of Memory* 62.). In this process of hunting for arguments, we create our presents and futures, as well as our pasts. Carruthers explains that our experiences of time "are mediated by the past" but that this conception of the "past" (in the tradition of medieval psychology as described and in contrast to Renaissance and contemporary understandings) "is not itself something, but rather a memory" (Carruthers, *Book of Memory* 193). Or, as Nathan R. Johnson puts matters plainly, "Memory is past, present, and future" (136). We find arguments through a process of recollective work and use that for our present and future decision-making, for example. The patterned work of memory, which, through the recombination of memory and later recollection, links the past and our collection of memory to the way our inventional work—our

arguments, anticipations, etc.—shapes our decision-making, can be examined through rhetorical figures.

Such conceptions of past as memory are essential in understanding how figures create the conditions for their suasive inducements. Consider, for instance, the figure that will serve as the illustrative case for this essay: prolepsis. Prolepsis is a figure of anticipation in which a future time is rendered in the present to induce a persuasive effect. Future times are crafted from one's experience and recollection of the past. For example, we might consider how anticipations of climate impacts are rendered through our understanding of climate trends (Mehlenbacher et al., "Proleptic Logics"; "Prolepsis and Rendering"). Fundamentally, how the persuasive inducements of a future time are brought into the present is also contingent upon past-as-recollection.

But it is not only those figures we might categorize as figures of time that illustrate the importance of memory in figuration. Indeed, timing is an essential characteristic for a repetition to be, well, a repetition. We need to be able to remember a previous instance to establish a pattern. Too much distance (rendered through syntax, visual space, or any other semiotic mode) and the repetition loses its invocation of intentional patterning. Or consider the pace of an asyndeton where conjunctions are omitted and thus change the timing of the construction. Even among those figures we can categorize as tropes, time is implicated, such as the importance of social timeliness in euphemismus: choosing when to use it and knowing the appropriate term to use in a given historical moment. Consider also the broader importance of time for theories of figures as a departure from more regular or common forms of expression or for the kairotic deployment of figures.

AN ILLUSTRATIVE CASE: THE PROLEPTIC SUITE

Memory, as a rhetorical operation, is central to the inventive work of figures we can classify under the proleptic suite, and it certainly has important implications for other figures as charted in the rich tradition of figural studies. Prolepsis illuminates the important role of memory and memory craft in rhetorical figuration, relationships supported by current research in the cognitive and psychological sciences. Prolepsis itself relies on aspects of memory for the kind of figural thought here suggested. Through a combination of experience, memory, and sense perceptions that invoke our search capacity for typifications that alert us and call for a response (cf. genre in Miller, "Genre"), prolepsis marks the movement from intuitive sense to the rhetorical worlds of self-persuasion and the persuasion of others. Figurative thinking is integral to the kinds of structuring underlying this form of memory work, as well as to the recollection and anticipatory thinking required for inventional work.

Prolepsis is a figure well-aligned with the dynamic nature of memory craft. Indeed, fundamental to the operations of this figure is navigating to different temporal locations—most notably when characterizing the figure, the future. Prolepsis is often defined by its flashforward, where the future is anticipated and then rendered through inventive work as a vision of some future time. In fiction, the figure can be found as a presaging of events to come, and in biblical and religious texts as a prescient vision of the future. In common usage a variety of prolepsis can be found in environmental warnings, for instance. Each of these varieties of prolepsis relies upon anticipation as a rhetorical strategy. And each variety pairs anticipation with a secondary feature. As a figure of anticipation, prolepsis is an important figure, but one that presents in multiple forms (hence "Proleptic Suite").[6] We might outline three subtypes of prolepsis:

- *Prolepsis-occupatio*, which pairs anticipation with rebuttal;

- *Prolepsis-ampliatio*, which pairs anticipation with a temporal disjuncture where future-is-fact; and

- *Prolepsis-praemonitio*, which pairs anticipation with a proximal urgency as well as a moral warning.

It is notable, however, that as one of many hundreds of figures, prolepsis is indeed merely one of the many forms of figural logics that could be productively examined through the lens of memory craft. What makes prolepsis instructive is partly practical insofar as subtyping has provided a detailed account of the figure's different functions to induce persuasive effects. Prolepsis, as a figure of thought, is also a hard case, as it defies easy characterization through morpho-lexical patterns, and is thus not singularly focused on features of memorization we know to be essential to *memoria verborum* (memory concerned with exactness or verbatim accounts), such as repetition. Rather, prolepsis helps chart how *memoria rerum* (memory as concerned with things or ideas) as a function of memory craft can tell us much about how figures induce rhetorical effects upon an audience and upon ourselves.[7] It might seem paradoxical that prolepsis, concerned with the future, can tell us something about memory. Memory, however, is the foundation of this figurative work, as we will see.

Reviewing the varieties of prolepsis in the proleptic suite can further illustrate how operations of memory as articulated in memory craft can contribute to the understanding of figures. Each variety of prolepsis demonstrates the complexities of the work that figures undertake and how such operations are not only cognitive processes but also constellations of complex cognitive, social-rhetorical, ecological, and material configurations. Here the understanding is by way of insights from memory craft, including those about the importance of segmentation of information (or what cognitivists might call "chunking"), of experience from the many, of emotional resonances, and of the material (sometimes embodied or tactile). While overall the argument here is that figures rely on the work of

memory craft and can thus be helpfully illuminated by its insights, there are numerous intersections of these operations entailed with one another that we will acknowledge along the way.

Prolepsis–occupatio

Of the varieties of prolepsis outlined in the Proleptic Suite, prolepsis-occupatio, or prolepsis as anticipation and rebuttal, is marked by refutational correlations (some lexicosyntactic; e.g., the conjunction *but* or *yet*, for instance, although these are not required), in that the figure anticipates and then rebuts the arguments of another speaker. As with procatalepsis, this instance of prolepsis relies upon rebuttal as a key feature of its argument strategies. The conflation of prolepsis in all its varieties and procatalepsis is largely the result of the so-called "handbook" tradition of categorizing and listing rhetorical figures while then prescribing and proscribing their use at various stylistic levels for different purposes. Although some of these handbooks were original in their systemization, many were derivative, and through a combination of the two forms, the figures of prolepsis and procatalepsis resulted in generalization of the term *prolepsis* in the rhetorical traditions.

Examples of such anticipation and rebuttal can be found in a variety of genres, from political speeches to eulogies. President Barack Obama, in his eulogy for Representative John Lewis, anticipates and rebuts arguments that attempt to ignore the critical political moment to which Representative Lewis's life of work spoke:

> Now, I know this is a celebration of John's life. There are some who might say we shouldn't dwell on such things. But that's why I'm talking about it. John Lewis devoted his time on this Earth fighting the very attacks on democracy and what's best in America that we are seeing circulate right now. (qtd. in Lantry)

In his eighteenth-century treatise on figures, Thomas Gibbons suggests that,

> By this Figure the speaker gains the reputation of foresight and care. The Prolepsis shews that the orator is master of his subject, and that he has full view of its connexions and consequences, in that he sees what may be objected against, as well as what may be alleged for his cause. (199)

Gibbons continues to account for the virtues of this figure, explaining that it "manifests the assurance of the speaker, that the truth and justice are on his side: he fears not an objection; he starts it himself, he dares to meet and encounter it, and will shew his audience how effectually he can disarm and dissolve it" (199). To do so, one will likely conclude, some understanding of the forms of arguments that might be levied in response must be considered and then accounted for in one's anticipatory rebuttal. Accomplishing this requires not only the rhetorical strategy of anticipating one's audience—a prolepsis—but anticipating and articulating those anticipations. In doing so, one brings the audience forward in time to establish with them the experience of an argument that will, when the opponent speaks, have become part of their own memory. Here we have both the rhetor's memory and the audience's memory operating together as a social memory, but the preoccupation here is with the individual experience, owing to the nature of memory craft. The craft here is the ability to recall from one's own experience the kinds of arguments likely to be raised by a certain audience on a certain subject. Having, as Gibbons suggests of "truth and justice," a constellation of knowledge from which one might draw is important to the rhetorical effect of this appeal. Without a substantive storehouse of knowledge, the anticipatory act is unnecessarily speculative, and more likely to result in rhetorical failure.

Figures, however, can also be "incorrectly" used, including prolepsis-occupatio. Gibbons gives this warning:

> But by the way, let the speaker take heed how he raises an
> objection that he cannot entirely refute: if he does this he will
> be like a man who vain-gloriously challenges an enemy to fight
> with him, and urges him to the combat, and then is shamefully
> overcome by him. And besides, if an objection is not well
> answered, the whole cause may be brought into suspicion, and
> the truth may suffer through folly. (199)

There may, too, be more than folly that undermines the virtuous
uses of prolepsis-occupatio. In some cases, the figure might be
immorally but effectively deployed. Describing techniques that
confidence tricksters use, Paul R. Wilson demonstrates the
psychological application of procatalepsis to keep a "mark" (a
victim) from doubting the story a con is selling. A common
approach, Wilson explains, "is to anticipate conflicting information
and address it *before* the mark can stumble upon it himself" (87).
Further elaborating, Wilson notes that such a technique, combined
with a victim's hopes, will encourage the victim to "ignore
contradictory information" and, thus, make the con's success more
likely. Indeed, we might also consider where such figural techniques
may be used by conspiracy theorists to pre-emptively render suspect
all countervailing arguments and data. A gloomy prognostication
for the uses of procatalepsis/prolepsis-occupatio here, but such
cautionaries are important in illustrating the strength of this figural
technique as not only crafted in our own memory, but capable of
either inoculating or infecting others.

Prolepsis–ampliatio

Chief characteristics of prolepsis-ampliatio, or prolepsis as future
anteriority, include anticipation and the presumption of future fact.
Literary examples are particularly illustrative of this variety of
prolepsis. Consider Browning's "'You're wounded!' 'Nay, … I'm
killed, Sire!'" (cited as prolepsis in Lanham 81). The death is taken to
be true, and in a literary context it is, as the narrative is
predetermined. In such literary uses of prolepsis-ampliatio, the

figure operates quite distinctly from other forms of prolepsis, where the future is always unfolding and not predetermined. Other predetermined examples of prolepsis–ampliatio are commonly found in biblical text (see Robert Harris's work on Rabbi Samuel Ben Meir and Rabbi Eliezer of Beugency's articulations of prolepsis, as well as E. W. Bullinger's *The Companion Bible*). In both cases, in literature and scripture, the operation of prolepsis implies a certainty that is impossible in most other uses. Compositionally, this technique is an important literary operation for narrative, but it is also notable how skillful an author must be in navigating places in a story to construct such temporal unfolding.

Prolepsis–praemonitio

Prolepsis–praemonitio, or prolepsis as presage, relies on the urgency of deliberation among possible futures to generate a rhetorical effect. Such a variety of prolepsis dwells in the uncertain but the (mostly) knowable. The deliberative act itself, as a rhetorical enterprise, implicates moral decision-making, and the deployment of this figure illustrates the numerous ways the figure is put to work. For example, in the midst of a pandemic, prolepsis as presage is commonplace. Epidemiologic models that project disease spread and infection rates presage several possible futures when a range of interventions are applied and, importantly, encourage particular courses of action. Indeed, the presaging of a pandemic echoes through the pages of Bonnie Henry's *Soap and Water & Common Sense*. Henry is the physician and public health officer who led the Canadian province of British Columbia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but she had previously been a critical member of the 2003 SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) coronavirus outbreak response team in Toronto, and has worked on outbreaks of TB, Ebola, and anthrax. Her experience forms an impressive storehouse for anticipatory work, for presaging future outbreaks. Henry wrote, for example,

> Some experts feel that another influenza pandemic is inevitable and that the capricious, sloppy, promiscuous influenza virus is lying in wait for the ideal circumstances to wreak havoc on populations around the world. As some have said, "The clock is ticking. We just don't know what time it is." (86–87)

Writing of H1N1 (the swine flu), Henry asks "Will this new strain be the cause of the next big pandemic or will it just fade away? For now we are watching closely and making preparations for the worst-case scenario. Only time will tell" (93).

Presaging a pandemic, the note about preparations is key to identifying this move as a case of prolepsis, but this example also comes with moral attunements. Although the particular "amoral" virus that will generate the pandemic is uncertain, the certainty of a pandemic demands preparedness, which is a practical and moral imperative. Indeed, as COVID-19 confirmed, the failure to meet this call practically can have morally and medically catastrophic consequences. It is not surprising that this figure often appears in scientific, medical, and environmental discourses, given that, as Fahnestock has noted for science, "[t]here is more pressure to turn an argument into a prediction or an action" (43).

Forensic versus Deliberative Anticipation

Not all anticipations are cases of prolepsis, however—in science or elsewhere. Superforecasters, for example, offer predictions, but these are not necessarily designed for rhetorical effect so much as to anticipate singular outcomes—to simply know the outcome (although there are certainly social-rhetorical dimensions to one's credibility based on outcomes in this community). In other words, we might characterize those anticipations as a kind of future forensic genre rather than deliberative. Although there may be various subsequent reasons some audiences would want to know the outcome, the primary goal of an accurate prediction is an end itself.

Prolepsis, as a figure, concerns rhetorical inducements in addition to the business of anticipations, predictions, presage, etc. Consider how the figure is used in environmental writing and reports such as the *IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5 °C* (see Mehlenbacher et al., "Prolepsis and Rendering Futures"). Futures are presaged, and they are knowable, but they are uncertain in that they might be changed if practical and moral action is taken. Indeed, the rhetorical inducement here is concerned with taking action, with choosing a path and its entailed consequences. Moral imperatives in such presages are perhaps made clearer nowhere more than in the Doomsday Clock. An immaterial-temporal moral warning, this figurative clock was created by the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* following the development of nuclear weapons and their material and existential moral threat to the human species. The clock functions to presage the consequences of our present and past decisions through a figurative number of "minutes to midnight," with midnight representing a catastrophic event caused by humans. The rhetorical construction of future time (minutes to midnight) is to be presently inhabited in one's decision-making (e.g., policy decisions) but shaped by the past (previous policy and technical decisions such as those around nuclear technology development) as recollected relative to current dangers or risks.

FIGURES, MEMORY, AND THE TEMPORAL ORDERINGS OF PROLEPSIS

Memory might seem an odd pairing with a future-oriented figural technique, given its chief preoccupation with the past. As noted in the previous section on memory and figures, however, it is in the temporal pockets created that the inventive potential for the figure might be uncovered or, again, in a venatic tradition, hunted. Prolepsis and its anticipatory functions, however, draw on the sense-making of experience, which in turn allows for the inventive work underlying anticipation. Prolepsis is illuminating in the case of memory and inventional work because it is distinctly not

oriented to the past. Yet prolepsis is in fact an act of memory, since we cannot know the future (setting aside here literary uses of the figure as prolepsis–ampliatio). Prolepses provide a structure for shaping the memorialized experiences an individual has had into a framework of anticipation that allows the rhetor to build a vision of futures through past impressions. This is to say that prolepsis is not in fact a function of the future, and indeed not solely the present, which has no basis alone for adjudication of the future. Rather, prolepsis is a function of the past, a product of and recollective operation of memory. Whereas figures of repetition, for instance, provide operations to improve retention, prolepsis is an operation that improves recollection. Aristotle, in *De Memoria*, may disagree, understanding recollection to be distinct from the act of memory (see Richard Sorabji's *Aristotle on Memory*). Carruthers notes this distinction, too, as well as the changes to this understanding in the medieval period where digesting of information is a key part of memory work (*Book of Memory* 62, 191). I subscribe to the latter integrated perspective, the digestive model of memory, in this articulation of how prolepsis is generated in the mind.

Let us explore this line of thinking. To recollect, an act of memory, relies upon the gathering and collecting of information we have previously known. This, however, is done not merely through rote recall, such as a computer performs, but to visit the past to address some need in the present. Prolepsis provides a figural logic where recollection happens as an inventive process in service of anticipation. Such anticipations draw from past experience to induce a rhetorical effect by rendering those experiences through the lens of the present need in anticipation of a desired future. Key to understanding the importance of prolepsis and how it illustrates critical operations of memory is an understanding of its temporal configurations.

Rhetorical figuration is traditionally placed within the canon of style, and to understand style as substantive is to locate its inventive function beyond linguistic, verbal, or visual instantiations and to

focus instead on the epistemic function of discursive invention (*pace* Francis Bacon).[8] In other words, the inventive capacities of figures are fundamental to forms of knowledge. Fahnestock makes this clear in her study of rhetorical figures in science ("Argument," *Rhetorical Figures*). Figures, she illustrates, epitomize forms of argument, even in domains of science. This is because figures are important to how we formulate not only argument but also thought. In other words, figures do not merely add flourishes, but fundamentally shape our expressive possibilities by shaping our logics.

This is, however, not only a cognitive process. Jack's question, which I raised in the introduction, about where figures reside encourages us to consider not only the cognitive but the material and the ecological (referring to the living world and our interactions with it) aspects of figurative thought. Memory craft can teach us much about how the material, the ecological, as well as the cognitive are implicated in figural logics. Here then an ecological refrain of the venatic sensibility is recalled, where novelty is not absolute but rather relational to what is known. Carolyn R. Miller explains that "Inventiveness is often associated with a rich store of prior knowledge. The utility and generativity of a *topos* as a source of patterns and relationships depends upon the richness and connectedness of the knowledge available for recombination" (Miller, "Aristotelian *Topos*" 142). The important function of memory becomes clear with this explanation, as memory allows us to combine information. But the information is patterned for such inventive work, and figuration is one indicator of how that operates. We must be able to remember where to find what is it that we wish to retrieve. Figures provide another mechanism for orienting one's mind through repetitions of various locational arrangements within syntax, for instance, or through the temporal locations marked by the figure of prolepsis. In other words, figures help us to know where to hunt for arguments in the service of compositional or inventive efforts.

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Notes

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[1] The author wishes to thank Randy Allen Harris and Jeanne Fahnestock for their suggestions on an earlier draft of this work. Harris's work was powerfully influential in the author's thinking, and the author benefited enormously from participating in projects and events Harris has directed on computational rhetoric and figuration and, of course, because his work shapes important trajectories for rhetorical scholarship. She also wishes to thank Bruce Dadey for his thoughtful and detailed feedback and insights. The arguments are stronger and more nuanced for the insightful feedback. All omissions, infelicities, and faults remain those of the author.

[2] For an overview of memory rhetorical studies as it has been cultivated in the study of public memory especially, see Bradford Vivian's "Memory: *Ars Memoriae*, Collective Memory, and the Fortunes of Rhetoric," and for an important account of memory through an infrastructural lens, see Nathan R. Johnson's *Architects of Memory: Information and Rhetoric in a Networked Archival Age*.

[3] On the matter of memory and prudence, Carruthers ("Rhetorical *Memoria*") provides an important lineage, which I will not discuss here, but I have elsewhere discussed this relationship between memory and prudence (Mehlenbacher, *On Expertise*). Johnson has also discussed the relationship between memory and values and makes an important link to contemporary accounts of public memory.

[4] If figures are a departure from what is considered common usage (acknowledging how figuration can become forgotten over time, as has been well documented in metaphor), we might ask how to define figures. Harris and the RhetFig project (Harris and Di Marco) have based some accounting of figures on Group μ's proposition of figurative language as a departure from an imagined degree zero baseline of language (Dubois et al.; cf. Chomsky's "ideal speaker–listener"). In other words, language is either figured or

unfigured (or, at least, close enough to whatever is agreed upon as "common" usage). Figured language could be stated in a more straightforward manner and the substitution of this plain manner of speaking for figured forms marks the departure (see, on this discussion, Fahnestock, *Rhetorical Figures* 15-17). This is not how language functions in actuality, which Harris also notes (refer to Harris, "Dementia," also for discussion of defining figures, 21), and is rather more of a practical manner by which to study the phenomena figures indicate.

[5] For instance, in his study *Orality and Literacy*, Ong discusses the importance of several key concepts in the study of memory, including mnemonics and recall. At the outset of this discussion, Ong's provocation is "You know what you can recall," and he emphasises the organizational aspect of recall as key to successfully knowing (33). Ong's concern is the oral thinker who is only perhaps able to externalize the processes of coming to know and knowing through *aides-mémoire* such as notched sticks but not through written texts. "Think memorable thoughts," Ong argues, is an important approach by which to preserve thoughts in a pre-literate culture, a "primary oral culture," where one must "solve effectively the problem of retaining and retrieving carefully articulated thought" that might be achieved by "thinking in mnemonic patterns" (34). Setting aside *aides-mémoire* is something of a perplexing stance, as is Ong's distinction between the oral and visual, as the latter features prominently in *ars memoriae* in ancient Greek and later accounts of memory, especially as *phantasmata* or the pervasive metaphors of wax tablets for the process of inscribing what we might call memories (see Carruthers, *Book of Memory* 16-17, especially; see also Johnathan Stern on the question of Ong's preoccupations as they relate to theories of communication).

[6] This work follows the model of Harris and Di Marco's "chiastic suite," which similarly distinguished between multiple figural devices deploying a reverse-repetition structure that have all been schematized as "chiasmus." In this tradition, efforts to delineate

figural strategies are motivated by the exigence of computational rhetoric. See also work by Nancy L. Green, Jelena Mitrović et al., and Ying Yuan.

[7] See Ignacio Brescó de Luna on collective memory.

[8] Invention also has practical rhetorical effects in its appeals to the concept of novelty and outside of epistemic commitments to novelty, too. Of prolepsis, Gibbons tells us,

> By this Figure some advantage is gained over an adversary. He is presented in his exceptions, and either confounded and silenced, or obliged to a repetition, which is not likely to be so striking and forcible as the mention of a thing fresh and untouched before. (199-200)

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De la complémentarité des associations et dissociations de notions

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Abstract: La tradition rhétorique considère généralement que l'argumentation correspond à des enchaînements de propositions (Plantin 532) ; il est plus rare que l'analyse des structures argumentatives repose sur des configurations notionnelles. C'est pourtant le choix opéré par Perelman et Olbrechts-Tyteca dans leur *Traité de l'argumentation* (1958) puisque l'ensemble des parties 2 et 3 de cet ouvrage est fondé sur la notion de *notion*. Quelles sont les conséquences engendrées par ce changement d'unité fondamentale ? Contrairement à Plantin (91), la relation entre ces parties 2 et 3 du *Traité* nous apparaît comme une articulation entre a) une grammaire fondée sur des notions dont l'argumentateur peut modifier l'extension et la compréhension et b) une rhétorique fondée sur des techniques associatives ou dissociatives permettant à l'argumentateur d'assembler ou de redécouper les notions et d'en modifier ainsi l'extension et la compréhension. Le § 44, qui marque la transition entre cette grammaire et cette rhétorique fondées sur les notions, insiste sur la complémentarité entre associations et dissociations, une complémentarité qui rappelle certains aspects du rapport entre extension et compréhension. Un des enjeux de l'article proposé est de rendre visibles par des schémas les modifications d'extension et de compréhension des notions induites par l'argumentation.

Mots-clés: Nouvelle rhétorique, argumentation, association de notions, extension, compréhension

The rhetorical tradition generally considers that argumentation corresponds to sequences of propositions (Plantin 532); it is more rare that the analysis of argumentative structures is based on notional configurations. However, this is the choice made by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca in their *New Rhetoric* (1958), since the whole of parts 2 and 3 of this work is based on the notion of notion. What are the consequences of this change of fundamental unit? Contrary to Plantin (91), the relationship between these parts 2 and 3 of the *Treatise* appears to us as an articulation between a) a grammar based on notions whose extension and comprehension can be modified by the arguer, and b) a rhetoric based on associative or dissociative techniques allowing the arguer to assemble or separate the notions and thus to modify their extension and comprehension. Paragraph 44, which marks the

transition between this notion-based grammar and rhetoric, emphasises the complementarity between associations and dissociations, a complementarity that recalls certain aspects of the relationship between extension and understanding. One of the challenges of the proposed article is to make visible through diagrams the changes in extension and understanding of notions induced by argumentation.

Keywords: New Rhetoric, argumentation, association of notions, extension, comprehension

INTRODUCTION

Dans le *Traité de l'argumentation* (désormais TA), Perelman et Olbrechts-Tyteca subordonnent l'inventaire des techniques rhétoriques traditionnelles à un principe de compositionnalité qui, à première vue, semblera banal : l'association des notions. La catégorie ainsi construite ouvre la voie à la création d'un concept complémentaire et original qui a davantage attiré l'attention des commentateurs : les dissociations argumentatives (e.g. Van Rees, Herman et Micheli, Schiappa). L'enjeu central du présent article est d'examiner la complémentarité entre les deux méthodes d'« aménagement de concepts » (TA 555). Une remarque nous servira de guide :

> « Psychologiquement et logiquement *toute* liaison [de notions] implique une dissociation et inversement : la même forme qui unit des éléments divers en un tout bien structuré les dissocie du fond neutre dont elle les détache. Les deux techniques sont complémentaires et *toujours présentes en même temps* ; mais l'argumentation grâce à laquelle le donné est modifié peut mettre l'accent sur la liaison ou la dissociation qu'elle est en train de favoriser, sans expliciter *l'aspect complémentaire* qui résultera de la transformation recherchée. Parfois les deux aspects sont simultanément présents à la conscience de l'orateur qui se demandera sur lequel il vaut mieux attirer l'attention » (TA 255-256 ; nous soulignons)[1].

Dans un tel système, l'étude de l'argumentation se fonde moins sur l'analyse des propositions que sur les éléments malléables qui la composent : les notions. Dans une argumentation donnée, l'ensemble des techniques rhétoriques est alors conçu comme un moyen de redéfinir le contour d'une notion-vedette qui se transforme au contact de notions-outils. La question qui se pose est celle de savoir si les concepts grammaticaux d'extension et de compréhension suffisent à décrire le jeu des notions et la complémentarité des associations et dissociations qui président à leurs transformations. L'opposition extension / compréhension, qui apparaît pour la première fois dans la *Logique* de Port-Royal[2], ne figure pas dans l'index du TA ; on la retrouve cependant dans la seconde partie du TA (174 et 187), celle qui, en deçà de l'utilisation des techniques argumentatives proprement dites, examine notamment les techniques grammaticales qui permettent de modifier le contour des notions (voir en particulier les § 30 à 40).

Dans la seconde partie du présent article, on tentera de schématiser ces relations entre associations et dissociations de notions en montrant l'articulation entre des opérations d'avant-plan correspondant à l'utilisation des techniques argumentatives proprement dites (Partie 3 du TA) et des opérations d'arrière-plan telles que la classification et la qualification (Partie 2 du TA). Or, le TA (174) établit explicitement un lien entre ces deux opérations et le jeu de l'extension et de la compréhension[3] ; le prototype étant l'utilisation rhétorique de l'épithète (169-170).

LES NOTIONS : ENTRE NOUVELLE RHÉTORIQUE ET SÉMANTIQUE

En 1955, Perelman concluait un article en suggérant que l'étude des notions à laquelle invite la théorie de l'argumentation pourrait être mise au service de la sémantique (131). S'agissait-il simplement d'une manière élégante de clôturer un article relevant d'une discipline voisine ou faut-il prendre cette proposition, qui apparaît

également dans le TA (189 ou 207-208), au sérieux ? L'examen de cette question impose de redéfinir, au préalable, les différentes techniques argumentatives (la contradiction, l'argument du gaspillage, l'argument pragmatique, etc.) comme des associations de notions. La dissociation de notions, quant à elle, est empruntée à Remy de Gourmont, mais le TA y insiste : chez cet auteur, « les notions associées et dissociées, semblent rester, après l'opération, telles qu'elles étaient dans leur état primitif, comme des briques intactes récupérées après la démolition » (TA 552). Si une argumentation peut simplement servir à renforcer les convictions existantes, son déploiement le plus visible se manifeste malgré tout lorsque le discours argumentatif cherche (et éventuellement parvient) à modifier notre représentation d'un problème ou d'une réalité. Les notions sont donc volontiers vues comme un matériau plus ou moins malléable, décomposable ou recomposable suite aux actions de l'argumentateur. Une question importante sera de déterminer dans quelle mesure ces aménagements de concepts recoupent et / ou prolongent le chassé-croisé entre extension et compréhension. Une restriction de l'extension entraîne en effet un enrichissement proportionnel de la compréhension (Wilmet 124). Mais comment, face aux textes concrets, isoler ce travail d'aménagement des notions opéré par l'argumentateur ? Certaines difficultés compliquent cette entreprise et la plus redoutable est peut-être celle qui consiste à prendre comme unité minimale non la proposition, mais bien la notion.

DU JUGEMENT À LA NOTION

Pour comprendre la place centrale des notions dans la nouvelle rhétorique, le TA gagne à être comparé à la *Logique* de Port Royal à laquelle Perelman semble faire allusion mais qu'il cite si rarement[4] parlant plus volontiers d'autres cartésiens tels que La Ramée ou Talon. Au-delà des différences qui sautent aux yeux, certaines continuités demeurent. Si *L'empire rhétorique* (Perelman 7) peut intéresser des linguistes mais aussi des juristes et des philosophes,

c'est qu'il s'adresse à « l'honnête homme du XXᵉ siècle », c'est-à-dire un homme qui, de par son éducation, se méfie de la rhétorique tout en se rappelant avoir découvert son existence à travers une initiation à la syllogistique et à l'étude des figures (Perelman 7).

En fin de compte, comme *L'art de penser* proposé par Port Royal, la nouvelle rhétorique peut se lire comme une adaptation aux besoins contemporains du *trivium* médiéval ; ce trivium, lui-même, réorganisait certaines pratiques éducatives des Grecs autour de trois (voire quatre) disciplines : grammaire, rhétorique, dialectique, logique (Perelman 17-21). Mais, alors que Port Royal réorganisait le système autour du couple *grammaire / logique* (au détriment de la rhétorique et de la dialectique), Perelman restreint la *logique* à la logique formelle qui sert de repoussoir à son étude de l'argumentation qui englobe, sous le nom d'empire rhétorique, tout le champ de l'argumentation sans plus distinguer rhétorique et dialectique dans la mesure où, contrairement à Aristote, sa théorie n'est pas adossée à une ontologie qui permettrait de distinguer les assertions certaines et l'opinable (TA 6-7 ; voir aussi Perelman 21). Cette étude, Perelman aurait donc pu la nommer *dialectique* mais face aux malentendus qu'aurait pu susciter ce terme, il opte pour l'appellation *rhétorique*. Il vaut la peine de s'interroger sur la place accordée, dans le *Traité*, à la grammaire, la plus fondamentale des disciplines du *trivium* et celle qui semble, aujourd'hui, la plus méprisée. Comme le remarque Amossy (153), à rebours de la linguistique et de la linguistique discursive, les présupposés perelmaniens restent bien ceux de la grammaire traditionnelle ; c'est en effet le désir de « comprendre le mécanisme de la pensée » (TA 7) qui reste au cœur du système de sorte que l'observation des mots est considérée comme le moyen d'accéder à l'analyse des idées.

Pour en revenir à Port Royal, le terme de *notion confuse* apparaît comme un renversement, une contestation des *idées claires et distinctes* des cartésiens (Dupréel 325-326) et aussi, au-delà de la remise en cause, une reprise partielle de ce système. *L'Art de penser*

(Arnauld et Nicole 59) se construit sur une bipartition très nette entre le plan des mots et le plan des idées (cf. Tableau 1)[5] :

Logique	Idée	Jugement	Raisonnement
Grammaire	Mot	Proposition	Enchaînement

Tableau 1

Dans ce tableau, la proposition (*Pierre marche*) pourra être considérée comme une expression jugement correspond à la forme *S est P* (*Pierre est marchant*) ; l'étude du jugement, qui unit donc un sujet et un prédicat, prépare à l'étude du raisonnement compris au sens de syllogisme. Si l'on projette cette bipartition sur la structure du TA, ce tableau permet d'observer les transformations opérées[6] :

Argumentation [Nouvelle Rhétorique] [Logique non formelle]	Notion(s)	–	Schèmes argumentatifs
[Grammaire]	[Mots]	–	Techniques discursives

Tableau 2

Dans le Tableau 2, la colonne des *Notions* (et, plus implicitement, des *Mots*) correspond à la deuxième partie du *Traité*. Cette deuxième partie est consacrée aux accords préalables à l'argumentation proprement dite. C'est dans cette section qu'on trouve le plus de remarques empruntées à la grammaire la plus largement partagée. D'une part, certains accords préalables à la discussion sont sous-jacents au langage commun à l'argumentateur et à son auditoire. D'autre part, l'argumentateur peut déformer une notion au moment de sa mise en discours. Cette adaptation des notions peut se faire à l'intérieur de la phrase mais aussi au-delà ; il suffit de songer aux anaphores associatives du type : *Pierre a publié un nouveau livre. Cet audacieux pamphlet dénonce implacablement les maux de la société actuelle.*

Dans ce même tableau 2, la colonne suivante, correspond, quant à elle, à la troisième partie du *Traité*. Alors que la *Logique* de Port-Royal réservait son attention au seul syllogisme, le TA présente une cinquantaine de schèmes argumentatifs et techniques discursives. Cependant, entre les notions et les techniques rhétoriques, un même principe compositionnel reste à l'œuvre : toutes les techniques argumentatives correspondent avant tout à des associations (ou des dissociations) de notions et non à des enchaînements de jugements.

Cet effondrement de la colonne *Jugement / Proposition* est plus redoutable qu'il n'y paraît car la grammaire et certaines conventions d'écriture inspirées de la logique formelle habituent à reprendre comme unité de référence la proposition et non la notion. Ce primat de la proposition se retrouve aussi chez les linguistes francophones. Par exemple, chez Ducrot (1980), l'étude de *mais* passe par l'identification des propositions *p, q, r*. De même, lorsque Berrendonner (1981) distingue L-vérité, ON-vérité et φ-vérité, c'est par rapport à des propositions du type *p* et *q*. Si l'on tente d'utiliser les outils de ces linguistes[7] pour décrire le fonctionnement d'une dissociation argumentative du type *opinion / vérité*, on aboutit alors à la formule : $p^o < q^v$: à la proposition *p*, qui n'est qu'une opinion, on préférera la proposition *q*, qui correspond à la vérité (du moins selon l'argumentateur). On peut alors inventorier les expressions de la langue qui permettent, de manière prototypique, de détecter l'apparition d'une dissociation argumentative (e.g. *Ils prétendent que* p). Le problème est que ce primat accordé à la proposition fait écran entre l'observateur et le jeu des notions. En pratique, il se peut fort bien qu'un marqueur de dissociation argumentative suffisamment prototypique pour intéresser le linguiste corresponde à une notion parfaitement périphérique du point de vue du raisonnement argumentatif. D'autre part, même si dans un texte donné, on pourra généralement reconstruire une dissociation de notions, on renonce à la possibilité d'observer la manière dont un argumentateur sélectionne les données et impose une certaine forme aux notions qu'il emploie. Ce travail d'aménagement des notions, pour l'isoler, il faudrait pouvoir le

confronter à deux configurations distinctes de la même notion. C'est pourquoi, cette proposition ambiguë empruntée à *L'Art de penser* (1970 : 174) atteint mieux l'objectif :

> *Tous les Philosophes nous assurent que les choses pesantes tombent d'elles-mêmes en bas.*

Il s'agit d'une allusion à la théorie aristotélicienne du lieu naturel. Au dix-septième siècle, cette théorie est battue en brèche par la science moderne qui bouleverse les certitudes antérieures. Chez Arnauld et Nicole, l'ambiguïté se résout par l'analyse et la hiérarchisation des propositions. La lecture naïve est du type $((p)\ q)$: la proposition *p* n'est qu'incidente ; elle se résume à étayer la seconde proposition : *Les Philosophes sont des savants dont les enseignements méritent d'être écoutés*. La lecture ironique au contraire sera du type $(p\ (q))$: l'accent est alors mis sur la proposition *p* et le locuteur invite à comprendre : *Il se peut que tous les Philosophes enseignent des choses erronées.*

Du point de vue néo-rhétorique, l'ambiguïté se résoudrait plutôt par l'observation de la déformation des notions. Dans le premier cas, l'expression *tous les Philosophes* correspond à l'ensemble des savants par opposition aux personnes moins instruites. Dans le second, l'extension de la notion *Philosophe* se trouve réduite à ceux qui défendent ce point de la *Physique* aristotélicienne, par opposition aux nouveaux philosophes. Il est remarquable que l'attention se tourne vers la notion qui a la forme d'un nom et qui se trouve en position de Sujet : à supposer que les autres termes de cette phrase correspondent aussi à des notions, il s'agit alors de notions outils subordonnées à une notion-vedette (les Philosophes / les choses pesantes). En effet, certaines notions constituent des « pièces maîtresses » (TA 256) alors que d'autres fonctionnent comme des « notions béquilles » (TA 324). Ces dernières nous informent des fluctuations subies par les contours définissant la notion maîtresse.

ETUDE DE CAS AUTOUR DE LA NOTION DE *BONHEUR*

Les énoncés ambigus correspondent cependant à un cas trop particulier. Les recueils d'extraits argumentatifs destinés aux futurs bacheliers offrent un matériau moins rare et cependant exploitable. En effet, les textes classés en groupements thématiques (la violence, le beau et l'utile, le progrès, etc.) offrent des extraits assez courts, organisés autour d'une notion-vedette envisagée selon des points de vue relativement variés. Ce type de matériaux invite dans notre esprit à un exercice qui peut intéresser le philosophe et qui consiste à s'interroger sur le sens d'une notion particulière (le corps, le bien, la connaissance, etc.) à telle ou telle époque ou dans tel ou tel système de pensée. Dans la suite du propos, parmi une vingtaine de textes rassemblés sous l'étiquette « le bonheur », on examinera le début de deux textes.

Puisque l'objectif est d'observer les déformations des notions, leurs associations et leurs dissociations, on se rappellera que les techniques argumentatives empruntées au vocabulaire de la rhétorique traditionnelle (argument d'autorité, cause / conséquence, la fin et les moyens, le syllogisme, etc.) doivent rester subordonnés aux 4 grandes familles de schèmes argumentatifs du TA, eux-mêmes subordonnés aux deux principes à l'œuvre de (dé)composition des argumentations. Dans les schémas, les quatre symboles permettront d'identifier les principaux moyens d'action sur les notions :

A. Association de notions	1. Arguments quasi-logiques	●
	2. Arguments fondés sur la structure du réel	■
	3. Arguments qui fondent la structure du réel	◆
B. Dissociation de notions	1. Dissociations argumentatives	ϕ

Tableau 3

Fragment 1 : « La pastorale de la peur »

> Les philosophes qui ont voulu affirmer la légitimité du bonheur se sont heurtés, pendant des siècles, au pessimisme des théologiens, pessimisme que Voltaire, s'en prenant à Pascal, essayait de réfuter en ces termes : « Pourquoi nous faire horreur de notre être ? Notre existence n'est point si malheureuse qu'on veut nous le faire accroire. Regarder l'univers comme un cachot, et tous les hommes comme des criminels qu'on va exécuter, est l'idée d'un fanatique » (Belloc et al. 253).

De façon très classique, le passage recourt à deux arguments d'autorité qui sont mis en compétition de manière à privilégier une des deux opinions et à dévaloriser sa concurrente. Pour analyser plus précisément le raisonnement, plaçons-nous à présent du point de vue de l'action transformatrice que ces schèmes argumentatifs font subir à la notion étudiée.

La notion de *bonheur* est de façon plus ou moins implicite insérée dans la classe générale des concepts philosophiques. Cette insertion d'une notion dans une classe *suppose* une assertion du type *S est P* : *le bonheur est un Concept philosophique*. Il s'agit, bien entendu, d'un concept parmi beaucoup d'autres (qui n'intéressent pas le présent propos) ; cette première restriction de l'extension correspond à l'effet de présence qui joue un rôle essentiel dans l'argumentation ; elle sera symbolisée par des pointillés. Dans le cas présent, cette insertion de la notion (cercle blanc) dans une classe (grand carré) ne correspond pas à l'hyperonyme le plus prototypique, celui favorisé par les lexicographes : le bonheur est *un état de conscience*. Il s'agit, au contraire, d'une classe correspondant aux accords préalables « sous-jacents au langage » d'un groupe particulier (TA 133) : pour l'école, le bonheur est un *Concept philosophique*, une de ces notions confuses dont la teneur varie en fonction des systèmes, des époques et des personnalités. Le point important est que, au contraire de la logique traditionnelle, cette insertion ne passe pas forcément par l'explicitation d'une proposition du type *S est P*. C'est pourquoi, la classe des *Concepts philosophiques* dans laquelle s'insère la notion de

Bonheur est bornée par des traits pointillés dans la mesure où l'argumentateur fait comme si elle allait de soi alors que ce n'est pas le cas :

Concepts philosophiques

Bonheur
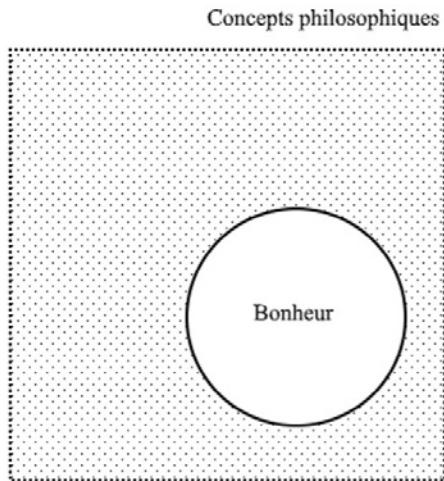
Fig. 1 Insertion de la notion-vedette dans une classe

Ensuite, il faut procéder à une restriction de l'extension : *la conception des philosophes* ou, si l'on préfère, *la conception des philosophes [du dix-huitième siècle]*. Du point de vue strictement grammatical, ces restrictions de l'extension, compensées par un enrichissement de la compréhension, sont analogues à *La maison de Pierre* ou *Le logement de Jacques*. Cependant au jeu des caractérisants indirects du grammairien (Wilmet 223) vient se superposer un schème spécifiquement argumentatif : l'invocation d'autorités.

Le traditionnel argument d'autorité peut ainsi être redéfini comme une association de notions fondée sur la liaison entre l'acte et la personne et, plus précisément encore, entre le discours et la personne (TA 739). Ce qui suppose une nouvelle restriction de l'extension :

Concepts philosophiques
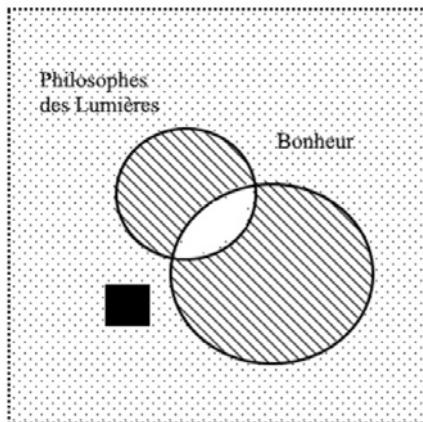
Fig. 2 Association de la notion-vedette à une notion-outil : lien
entre le discours et la personne (■) : le bonheur selon les Lumières.

On peut se demander si cette nouvelle restriction de l'extension
correspondra, ou non, à une dissociation de notions. À notre avis, le
parti le plus avantageux est de considérer chacune de ces deux
restrictions de l'extension non comme une dissociation
argumentative proprement dite, mais comme la compensation de
l'association entre l'acte et la personne. Autrement dit, il s'agirait de
l'envers de l'effet de présence. La liaison de notions se déroule au
premier plan tandis que la dissociation apparaît comme une
conséquence reléguée au second plan : les philosophies d'autres
époques ou d'autres cultures se trouvent reléguées dans l'ombre. On
s'est donc contenté de hachurer, dans la figure 2, les zones pour ne
garder que l'intersection entre les deux ensembles : *le bonheur selon
les philosophes de l'époque des Lumières.*

C'est à un autre niveau que la dissociation argumentative
proprement dite apparaît. Du point de vue graphique, le
mouvement doit être représenté en deux temps alors que l'auditoire
le perçoit plutôt comme un événement simultané ou un
mouvement continu. Tout d'abord, une association se produit entre
la notion préalablement construite et une autre conception du

bonheur. Cette association quasi-logique se révèle être, cette fois, une incompatibilité au sens propre. Le récepteur se trouve enjoint de construire, en miroir, de la notion de *bonheur* selon les philosophes [du dix-huitième siècle] une notion de *bonheur* selon les théologiens [des siècles antérieurs et leurs héritiers]. La mise en regard des deux associations de notions conduit à créer deux sous-classes à l'intérieur de l'ensemble. À nouveau, il est difficile de distinguer ici la succession des événements : est-ce la perception d'une incompatibilité qui conduit à construire une notion en miroir et à l'insérer dans une sous-classe ou est-ce, au contraire, la présence d'une notion concurrente qui nous permet de détecter l'incompatibilité ? Difficile de trancher.
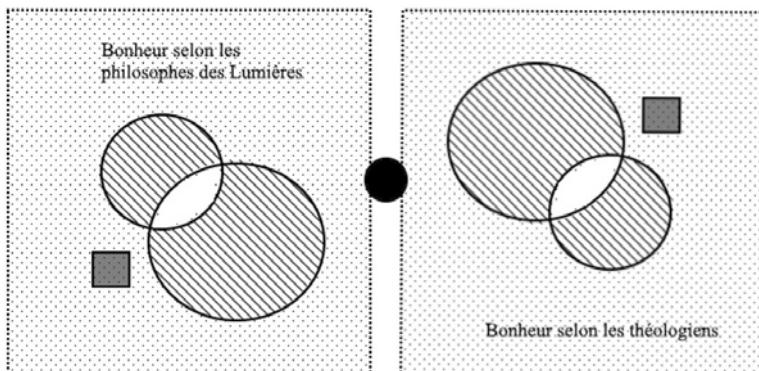
Fig. 3 Association de la notion préalablement obtenue à une notion concurrente et, du fait de leur incompatibilité (●), insertion de chacune de ces notions dans une sous-classe construite en miroir. Le petit carré représentant l'association de notions est en grisé dans la mesure où, tout en jouant un rôle actif dans la construction de la notion en miroir, il est supposé avoir été admis à l'étape précédente.

Fait remarquable : au niveau de la notion-vedette, il n'y a pas de restriction de l'extension mais dédoublement en miroir.

Une fois que le caractère désavantageux de l'incompatibilité est remarqué, la dissociation argumentative proprement dite peut s'enclencher. Le terme « pessimisme » conduit à créer une sous-classe parmi les *Concepts philosophiques* (des *Concepts philosophiques* « pessimistes ») et, pour lui faire pendant, une sous-classe de *Concepts*

philosophiques « plus optimistes ». Les contours de cette sous-classe sont également imprécis et mouvants : une manière plus efficace de la délimiter consisterait à opposer deux définitions du concept philosophique de *Bonheur*. Comme le terme *pessimiste* est négativement connoté, la nécessité de trancher devient évidente. La dissociation argumentative, ainsi annoncée, passe au premier plan alors que les associations antérieurement acceptées lui semblent subordonnées à l'exception de l'incompatibilité qui est de même rang mais qu'il s'agit de détruire. Le choix s'est fait en fonction du lieu commun auquel on a ici donné la forme non d'une prémisse, mais d'une échelle argumentative (Ducrot, 1980)[8] :
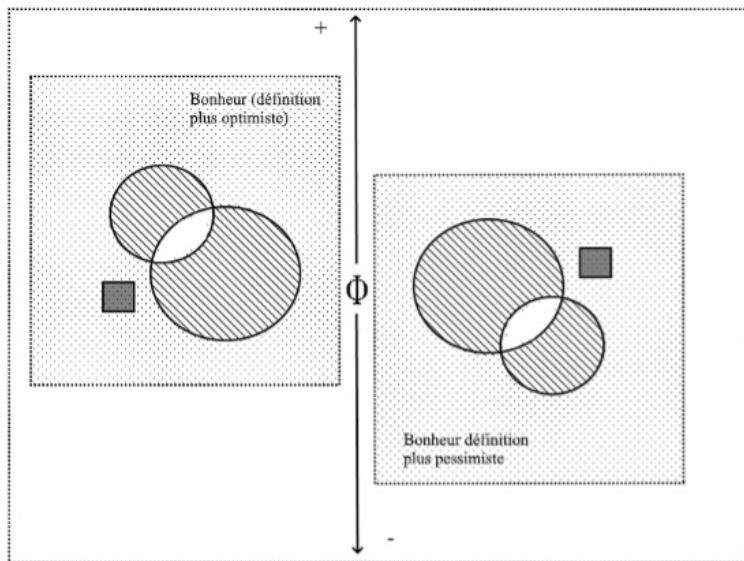
Fig. 4 La dissociation argumentative proprement dite (φ)

La dissociation ainsi obtenue n'équivaut pas, cette fois non plus, à une restriction d'extension de la notion-vedette. Comme précédemment, la notion-vedette a seulement été insérée dans une classe d'extension vague mais plus réduite que celle des *Concepts philosophiques* en général. Cette insertion est du type *S est P : Le bonheur selon les philosophes du dix-huitième siècle est un concept optimiste.* S'il y a élimination de certains éléments, c'est à un autre

niveau qu'elle se produit : en effet, en règle générale, la notion concurrente, devenue repoussoir, perdra de sa netteté au risque de disparaître du champ de l'attention. Au total, la liaison de notions incompatibles et la dissociation qui s'ensuit constituent bien les deux faces d'une même pièce. Une dissociation de notions est fondée sur une incompatibilité, technique argumentative qui suppose une association de notions. Ce n'est donc pas un hasard si les techniques de contradiction et d'incompatibilité ont été placées en tête de liste des schèmes associatifs[9].

On pourrait prolonger l'étude avec le reste du paragraphe cité : on associerait les notions de Voltaire et de Pascal aux sous-ensembles restants au titre de *liaison par les cas particuliers* (association qui fondent la structure du réel). L'incertitude concernerait alors la nécessité de créer ou non un sous-ensemble et donc une nouvelle restriction de l'extension. Si on accepte la distinction introduite par le TA entre illustration et exemple (481), la question est d'autant plus délicate que si le cas particulier est interprété non comme une simple illustration mais comme un exemple destiné à fonder une règle générale, un mouvement non pas de restriction mais d'élargissement de l'extension est lui aussi possible.

Fragment 2 : Le bonheur est fragile et relatif

Parmi les quelques textes sélectionnés, le cas le plus intéressant reste un texte qui, justement, recourt à l'argumentation par l'exemple. Dans ce texte, le thème du bonheur est précédé par celui du malheur qui lui est cependant subordonné du point de vue argumentatif :

> En dehors des cas particuliers où la mort est ressentie comme une délivrance par ceux qui vont mourir […], elle est en général considérée comme le plus grand des malheurs. Relativement à la conservation, on peut donc dire qu'échapper à la mort est un bonheur absolu. C'est un peu le sentiment de

tous ceux qui, sachant leur fin prochaine, en réchappent : le condamné à mort qui est libéré, le malade qui se croyait perdu […].

Voilà des situations extrêmes où l'on passe de 0 à 100 % de bonheur. Elles permettent de se demander si une des composantes principales à ce bonheur n'est pas liée au sentiment d'accroître son bonheur d'accroître sa conservation, qu'elle soit vitale, affective ou intellectuelle. Il s'agirait donc d'un état relatif, ce que l'expérience quotidienne démontre simplement (Auroux cité par Belloc et al. 251).

Même si elle se révèlera n'être qu'une notion-outil, la notion de *malheur* est celle qui apparaît la première dans le texte. Dans les figures qui vont suivre, on a suivi l'ordre du texte plutôt que la hiérarchie entre notion-outil (*malheur*) et notion-vedette (*bonheur*). À nouveau, l'argumentation repose sur une opération de classement implicite :

Sentiment
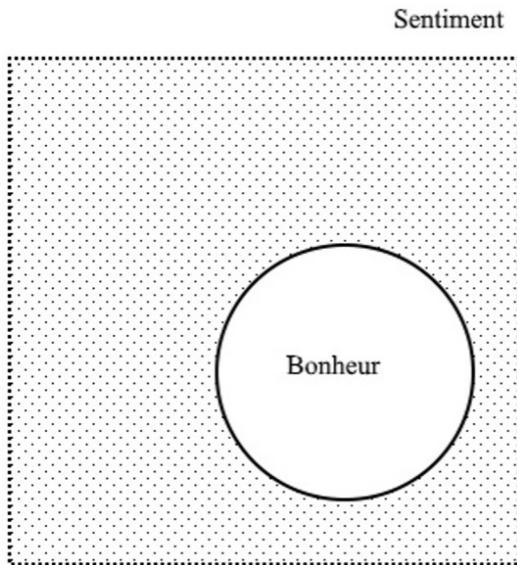
Fig. 5 Insertion d'une notion dans une classe ; dans la suite du propos, il s'avérera qu'il s'agit non de la notion-vedette mais de cette forme particulière de notion-outil qu'est la notion-miroir.

À cette opération de classement vient s'ajouter une restriction de l'extension. En effet, parmi tous les malheurs possibles, l'argumentateur propose de désigner la mort lorsqu'elle n'est pas une délivrance. Cette technique d'association relève des liaisons qui fondent la structure du réel (♦) ; il s'agit, plus spécifiquement, de l'argumentation sur les cas particuliers (parangon).
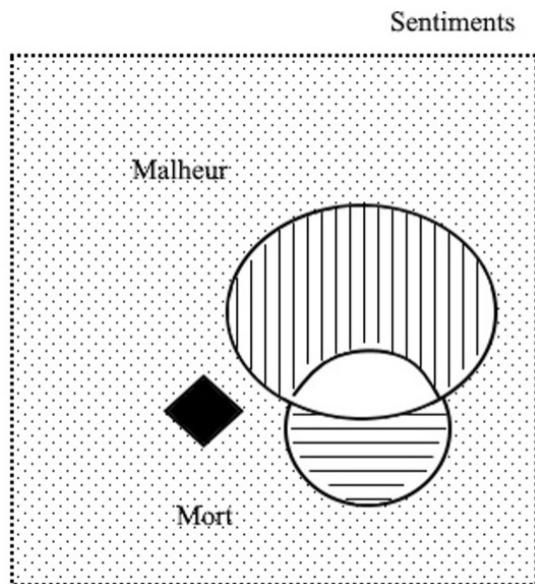
Fig. 6 Association de la notion-miroir à une autre notion-outil : fondement par le cas particulier (♦).

Comme pour le texte précédent, une dissociation de notions coïncide avec l'apparition de la notion-vedette : le bonheur et son parangon.
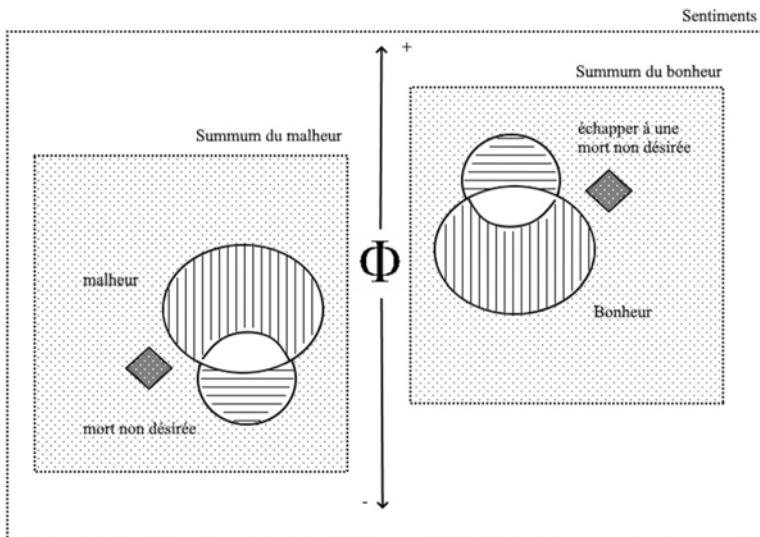
Fig. 7 : Dissociation argumentative rompant la liaison de deux associations antérieures (♦)

La formulation du parangon du bonheur qui résulte de cette dissociation doit être explicitée. Le *summum* du bonheur : c'est échapper à une mort certaine et non souhaitée. L'ensemble du mécanisme rappelle, au total, la relation des contraires telle qu'elle est présentée dans les manuels de logique. L'emploi du connecteur *donc* renforce cette impression de rigueur. Les relations quasi-logiques (●) ne sont, rappelons-le, que des approximations de la logique formelle dont elles s'efforcent de capter le prestige (Gross & Dearin 44).

Même si l'argumentateur n'y invite pas, l'ensemble du mouvement argumentatif peut se concevoir comme une liaison de notions fondant la structure du réel (♦). On peut en effet reconstruire une analogie de rapports entre les quatre éléments ainsi créés : *la mort non souhaitée est au malheur ce que le fait échapper à une mort non souhaitée est au bonheur*. Le schème ainsi construit ne coïncide cependant qu'imparfaitement avec les analogies traditionnelles du type :

$$\frac{a}{b} \equiv \frac{c}{d}$$

Par exemple : *Le grammairien est au linguiste ce que ce que le médecin de famille est au spécialiste.* Mais dans le cas qui nous occupe, la formule serait bien plutôt :

$$\frac{-b}{-a} \equiv \frac{b}{a}$$

C'est en effet le terme apparaissant en premier lieu (*–b* elle se révèlera n'être qu'une notion–outil = *la mort non souhaitée*) qui est le plus connu. Le terme à éclaircir (*a = bonheur*) n'apparaît, quant à lui, qu'en bout de course. Autrement dit, des positions du thème et du phore sont inversées. Les rapports *–b / b* et *–a / a* relèvent bien de la contradiction (association de notions annonciatrice d'une dissociation). De même, le rapport entre *–b* et *–a* puis entre *b* et *a* correspond au parangon (association de notions).

L'étape suivante consistera à relativiser la définition de la notion de *bonheur* préalablement construite pour pouvoir créer une règle supposée valable pour l'ensemble des bonheurs possibles.
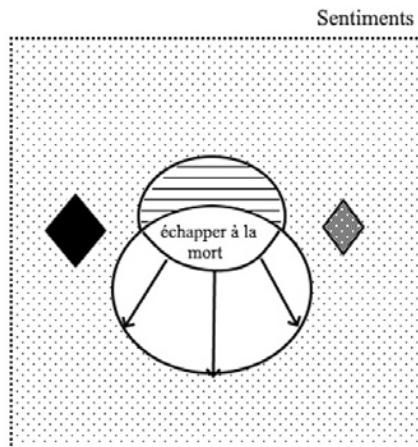
Fig. 8 Association de notions : les traits du parangon deviennent, *mutatis mutandis*, attribuables aux autres cas de *bonheur* (♦) ; c'est la technique de l'exemple fondateur d'une règle : toute situation où un individu améliore son sort participe du bonheur.

À première vue, le mouvement ainsi créé s'apparente à une extension de la notion. Mais, en fait, on pourrait aussi avoir l'impression (l'illusion) de revenir aux contours initiaux désormais mieux définis. Ce sont donc plutôt les traits propres au parangon qui sont attribués à l'ensemble des bonheurs possibles. Il y a donc bien enrichissement de la compréhension mais la probable modification d'extension qui s'ensuit reste difficile à cerner.

Quoi qu'il en soit, ce qui intéresse l'argumentateur, c'est que le bonheur est un sentiment relatif aux situations vécues et aux moments où la situation des individus connaît une amélioration notable. Il s'apprête à continuer son raisonnement en invoquant une notion nouvelle qui est celle de l'espoir… Nous ne suivrons pas les méandres de ce nouveau raisonnement : s'il reste théoriquement possible de la poursuivre, à ce stade, l'analyse rhétorico-grammaticale proposée ne gagne pas à être prolongée au-delà d'une séquence argumentative complète.

Conclusion

La réflexion qui s'achève s'est située aux confins de la logique (au sens le plus lâche du terme), de la dialectique de la rhétorique et même de la grammaire. Pour envisager les relations entre nouvelle rhétorique et grammaire traditionnelle, la véritable difficulté consistait à passer d'une logique du jugement (par exemple, celle de Port Royal) à une logique fondée sur l'étude des notions et donc à une grammaire qui place au centre le nom porteur d'une extension et d'une compréhension. L'enjeu de la réflexion était de vérifier dans quelle mesure les aménagements de notions décrits par la nouvelle rhétorique peuvent, régulièrement, se lire comme des modifications de l'extension ou de la compréhension de ces notions qu'il s'agisse de techniques grammaticales (comme l'usage des épithètes) ou de techniques argumentatives proprement dites (des schèmes associatifs ou dissociatifs).

Plus généralement, distinguer le statut des énoncés (accord préalable ou argumentation proprement dite) et celui les opérations effectuées par l'argumentateur (classement, association ou dissociation de notions) a constitué, comme l'expliques les auteurs du TA (251-52), un obstacle majeur pour la théorie de l'argumentation. En pratique, cette difficulté est perceptible dès qu'on s'intéresse à des textes qui excèdent un paragraphe et le problème devient particulièrement épineux si, comme Perelman, on a l'ambition de créer un modèle virtuellement applicable à l'argumentation en général.

Dans les quelques fragments étudiés, nous avons cru remarquer certaines régularités de nature encourageante. La mise en schéma aura aidé, on l'espère, à distinguer le statut des différents éléments dans quelques opérations typiques : a) les réductions d'extension ont été symbolisées par des fonds pointillés ou hachurés[10] ; b) l'insertion d'une notion (rond blanc) dans une classe (grand carré) ; c) l'application, de techniques d'association de différents types (●, ■ ou ♦) et de dissociation de notions (ϕ).

Si les techniques d'association semblent le plus souvent[11] localisées aux confins de la notion-vedette et de notions-outils, les dissociations argumentatives observées impliquent au contraire la construction d'une sous-classe en miroir dans laquelle viendrait s'insérer le reflet, l'image inversée des notions inscrites dans la classe initiale. Cette différence de niveau semble entrer en contradiction avec l'idée que chaque association suppose une dissociation et que chaque dissociation suppose une association ; si l'on veut maintenir cette idée, il faut donc introduire une distinction supplémentaire entre l'avant-plan et l'arrière-plan[12]. Cette opposition correspond à l'effet de présence et à son corollaire, la relégation de certains éléments dans la coulisse du hors-débat. Ce mécanisme de relégation est essentiel au jeu de l'argumentation. Tel le spectateur d'un numéro de prestidigitation, l'auditoire tend à accorder toute son attention aux notions présentes à l'avant-plan et à perdre de vue ce que les réductions d'extension successives repoussent à l'arrière-plan. Dans les exemples qui nous ont occupés, il y avait en fait deux

types de dissociations de notions : une dissociation plus discrète qui s'effectuait à l'intérieur d'une classe, dans l'ombre d'une association plus nettement perceptible. Ces dissociations locales ne sont pas de même niveau que les dissociations entre classes ; ces dernières s'appuient, semble-t-il, sur les associations qui, tout à l'heure se trouvaient à l'avant-plan et qui commencent à sortir du champ de l'attention. D'un point de vue hiérarchique, du fait de l'apparition de la dissociation, les associations antérieures se trouvent reléguées à un rang inférieur.

La transition entre les différents plans et les différents rangs est facilitée par le statut ambivalent de l'incompatibilité qui est à la fois une technique d'association (celle qui inaugure l'inventaire) et l'élément qui déclenche la mise en œuvre d'une dissociation.

L'insertion dans une classe offre un autre exemple de ces courroies de transmission unissant les différentes parties du TA ; elles sont destinées à permettre au modèle théorique de s'adapter aux besoins de l'analyse, à lui offrir un principe de continuité. L'insertion d'une notion dans une classe relève, en première analyse, des accords préalables supposés rester à l'arrière-plan. Si cette opération venait à affleurer trop nettement dans le débat, il suffirait alors à l'utilisateur du TA de la requalifier soit comme une définition, soit comme la dénonciation d'une pétition de principe. Il s'agirait donc, dans les deux cas, d'une technique argumentative proprement dite : la première serait une définition « classique », c'est-à-dire une association de type quasi-logique (TA 282) et la seconde aboutirait à une dissociation ; par exemple, une définition *dissociative* (TA 590).

L'utilisation des schémas a encore un avantage, il permet de faire apparaître comme une suite de clichés ce qui, dans le déroulement de l'argumentation, peut sembler un mouvement continu et quasi-instantané. La portée de l'analyse rhétorico-grammaticale reste cependant relativement limitée : elle peut fort bien dépasser le cap de la phrase mais, au-delà de quelques paragraphes, le modèle connaît une surcharge.

En fin de compte, le « désir éprouvé par le logicien de comprendre le mécanisme de la pensée » (TA 7) n'est peut-être pas si différent de l'attrait que Gide, enfant, éprouvait pour cette « toujours changeante rosace » nommée kaléidoscope. Intrigué, le spectateur finit par démonter l'appareil pour faire l'inventaire de ses composants : quelques pierres précieuses en toc et des miroirs enfermés dans un fourreau de carton. Les morceaux de verre coloré ressemblent aux notions capables de former des motifs mouvants ; et les miroirs ressemblent aux dissociations de notions capables de dédoubler les configurations notionnelles tout en faisant disparaître, dans les interstices du kaléidoscope, ces éléments devenus inutiles. Ce n'est qu'après avoir remis un petit nombre de verroteries démultipliées par les miroirs que l'enfant peut constater : « L'accord était pauvret ; les changements ne causaient plus de surprise ; mais comme on suivait bien les parties ! comme on comprenait bien le pourquoi du plaisir ! »[13].

Notes

¹ Van Rees (4) et Danblon (83-84) s'interrogent sur ce même passage et insistent sur la différence entre dissociation et rupture de liaison ou encore sur le fait qu'avant la dissociation on n'avait pourtant pas conscience d'une association. À notre avis, et comme on le verra dans la suite du propos, ce passage du TA parle de dissociations *lato sensu* ; il peut s'agir de toute opération de séparation de notions : les dissociations *stricto sensu* (telles que décrites au § 89 et suivants), de ruptures de liaisons, voire, au niveau pré-argumentatif, de réductions de l'extension.

² Dans une terminologie plus contemporaine mais fidèle à la conception logico-grammaticale traditionnelle, Wilmet (51) définit l'extension d'un nom N comme « l'ensemble des sujets x auxquels N peut servir d'attribut dans la proposition X est N ». Par exemple, *Pierre / Paul / Jacques / … est un homme*. Tandis que l'intension (autrement dit la compréhension) est « l'ensemble des attributs x auxquels N peut servir de sujet dans la proposition N est X ». Ainsi, la compréhension de homme est « animal + raisonnable + bipède + bimane + à station verticale + … ». L'exemple d'Arnauld et Nicole (87) concerne le triangle dont la compréhension enferme : figure + trois lignes + trois angles + égalité de ces trois angles à deux droits + … Tandis que son extension concerne les différentes familles de triangles (car *un triangle équilatéral / isocèle, /… est un triangle*) ainsi que l'ensemble des triangles individuels (*le triangle ABC/ DEF/… est un triangle*).

³ Il s'agit de la loi de Port Royal (Arnauld et Nicole 88 ; voir aussi Wilmet 124) : dans la construction des « groupes nominaux », plus la compréhension d'un nom est précise, plus son extension est limitée et inversement. Par exemple, l'extension du nom *triangle* sera moins resserrée que celle de *triangle rectangle*. À notre avis, la complémentarité entre association et dissociation de notions est sous-tendue par ce mécanisme : dans la terminologie de Perelman, l'association de la notion-maîtresse *triangle* et de la notion outil

rectangle provoque un enrichissement de la compréhension mais aussi, du fait du resserrement de l'extension, une dissociation qui fait sortir du champ de l'attention les informations considérées comme non pertinentes. Au-delà des associations grammaticales décrites dans la partie 2 du TA, le mécanisme se prolonge au niveau rhétorique dans la mesure où les schèmes traditionnels sont considérés à leur tour comme des associations de notions.

[4] On trouvera cependant dans son *Cours de logique* (Perelman 3) une mention elliptique mais située à un point névralgique de l'ouvrage.

[5] *L'Art de penser* comprend encore une quatrième partie consacrée à la méthode.

[6] Comme dans la table précédente, nous avons éliminé une section qui, chez Perelman, se nomme non pas *méthode* mais *ordre et méthode*.

[7] Van Rees utilise également la proposition comme unité pour schématiser les dissociations qu'elle étudie (56).

[8] Le TA signale l'ambiguïté du terme lieu (*topos*) : il s'agit certes de prémisses mais, de par leur caractère extrêmement général et relevant des accords préalables, elles servent davantage de *critères de choix* pour *établir des hiérarchies* (113 ; je souligne). Ces lieux communs sont du type : il faut préférer la qualité à la quantité ; il faut préférer ce qui est agréable à ce qui ne l'est pas, etc. Tout indique que, en pratique, ces lieux interviennent après que le repérage d'une incompatibilité gênante a enclenché la mise en œuvre d'une dissociation.

[9] Dans un autre contexte, Adam (159 et 160) décrit fort bien les avantages que présente une cellule argumentative qui combinerait un mouvement justificatif (*Conclusion car Argument* ou *Argument donc Conclusion*) et un mouvement dialogique ou contre-argumentatif compatible avec les propositions de Ducrot. À ce sujet, voir aussi Dominicy (1993) et Herman et Micheli (2003).

10 Dans le premier cas, il s'agit d'une insertion dans une classe et dans le second, de la réduction d'extension qui fait suite à une association.

11 On l'a vu, l'exemple (destiné à créer une règle générale) constitue de ce point de vue une exception.

12 À nouveau, ces expressions ne figurent pas dans l'index mais on les retrouve dans le texte (par exemple, TA 161-3, 169-73, 203, 207-8, 233).

13 Voir *Si le grain ne meurt*, 1926. Le texte est disponible sur www.ebooksgratuits.com. Le passage en question correspond au § 16 du chapitre 1 (Partie I).

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Figuring Out Britney: Anacoluthon, Aposiopesis, and Ambiguous Signification in "If U Seek Amy"

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Abstract: This article explores the dense web of textual and musico-textual communicative devices in Britney Spears's 2009 song "If U Seek Amy," focusing especially on the role of two rhetorical figures: aposiopesis and anacoluthon. Much of the innuendo in the song manifests as simple double entendre, but the titular phrase is more complicated, hearable either as "If you seek Amy" or "F. U. C. K. me." The song, however, does not foreground the lewd subtext at the expense of the innocuous surface, or vice versa; instead, the verbal and musical features of the song interact to simultaneously express, with roughly equal plausibility, two different meanings for the titular phrase and the song as a whole. This article demonstrates how rhetorical analysis helps to illuminate the song's complex ambiguities. In doing so, it provides evidence of how productive rhetorical (and particularly figural) analysis can be, showing how the distinct means of persuasion associated with the different media that collectively constitute the song all work together in complex ways toward a particular effect.

Keywords: Britney Spears, rhetorical figures, ambiguity, innuendo, music, rhetorical musicology

Résumé : Cet article explore la richesse de dispositifs de communication textuels et musico-textuels dans la chanson de Britney Spears, *If U Seek Amy* (2009), en se concentrant plus particulièrement sur le rôle qu'y jouent deux figures rhétoriques : l'aposiopèse et l'anacoluthe. Une grande partie des sous-entendus de la chanson se manifeste sous forme de doubles sens simples, mais la phrase titre est plus complexe, pouvant être entendue soit comme « If you seek Amy » soit comme « F. U. C. K. me ». Cependant, la chanson ne met pas en avant le sous-texte obscène au détriment du ton innocent, ou inversement ; les caractéristiques verbales et musicales interagissent pour exprimer simultanément, avec une plausibilité équivalente, deux significations différentes pour la phrase titre et la chanson dans son ensemble. Cet article montre comment l'analyse rhétorique permet d'éclairer les ambiguïtés complexes de la chanson. Ce faisant, il fournit des preuves de l'utilité de l'analyse rhétorique (et en particulier de la rhétorique figurative), en montrant comment la diversité des moyens de persuasion associés aux différents médias qui constituent

collectivement la chanson fonctionnent ensemble de manière complexe pour produire un effet particulier.

Mots-clés : Britney Spears, figures rhétoriques, ambiguïté, sous-entendu, musique, musicologie rhétorique

The 2009 song "If U Seek Amy" (Spears and Martin, Jive), written by Max Martin and sung by Britney Spears, is hardly the first work to include innuendo, subtext, or ambiguous lewdness. Upon release, "If U Seek Amy" was compared (in its lyrics' apparent spelling-out of profanities alone) to songs by Memphis Slim, R. Stevie Moore, April Wine, Poster Children, and The Script (especially their "If You See Kay") (Sheidlower). Nor are musical (or even popular) traditions the only ones to employ this particular type of subtext; the song was also compared to passages in Shakespeare and in James Joyce (Sheidlower). Whether these various artworks communicate their subtext in similar ways is a question much too broad for an article of this length.[1] But by investigating the communicative strategies of "If U Seek Amy" in particular, I hope to illustrate, in the paragraphs that follow, the striking and potentially highly figured rhetorical complexity that can be brought to bear on such ambiguities. To this end, this article uses the nomenclature of classical rhetoric (especially the inventory of figures of speech) to explore the lyrical and musical (mostly melodic and rhythmic) elements that inform either a subtextual or literal reading of the song.

Most of the innuendo in "If U Seek Amy" manifests as double entendre. Consider, for instance, the line "Can somebody take me home?" (Spears and Martin, *YouTube* 0:41–0:42). The song's speaker may be asking for help in getting back to her own residence, perhaps because she is overwhelmed by the party at which the song's scenario takes place, or she could be asking for one of the partygoers to take her to their (the other partygoer's) residence, possibly for a sexual encounter. The effect turns upon the ambiguous meaning of the common phrase "to take someone

home." The next line is "Ha ha, he he, ha ha, ho" (Spears and Martin, *YouTube* 0:43–0:44). Is each of those syllables mimetic of laughter? Or is the last an abbreviation of "whore"? These are just a few of the song's innuendos, many of which are far more complex. But perhaps none is more so than the titular phrase from the chorus (Spears and Martin, *YouTube* 0:50–0:51), which can be plausibly heard either as "If you seek Amy" or as spelling out a profanity ("F. U. C. K. me"). It would be easy for the song to present this seemingly innocuous phrase as meaningless (and thus as having a "real," lewd meaning to be uncovered), or to downplay the lewd alternative so that the innocuous surface seems robust. Instead, however, musical and textual features lend credence both to the innocuous and to the lewd meaning.

This article explores the song's dense web of communicative devices, arguing that textual, musical, and musico-textual cues build two simultaneous, incompatible cases for the meaning of the phrase, and of the song as a whole. I propose that this ultimately insoluble interpretive dilemma is practically and aesthetically useful to the creator: with an equally strong case for the innocuous and the lewd, the song can more easily slip past censors, effectively play into Spears's dichotomous image as a "sexy innocent,"[2] and provide listeners with richer enjoyment.

COMPLEX SURFACE, SIMPLE SUBTEXT: THE LYRICS

Taking the phrase "If you seek Amy" at face value produces extremely syntactically fragmented lyrics. In the terms of classical rhetoric, the phrase begins with an anacoluthon ("a change of construction in a sentence that leaves the initial construction unfinished" [Baldick 11]) and ends with an aposiopesis ("suddenly break[ing or trailing] off in the middle of a sentence, leaving the sense unfinished" [Baldick 22]):

> All of the boys and all of the girls
> are begging to— If you seek Amy…
>
> (Spears and Martin, *YouTube* 0:45–0:51, spelled and punctuated to convey surface meaning)

By contrast, the lewd version constitutes a straightforward, syntactically integrated, and conclusive statement:

> All of the boys and all of the girls
> are begging to F. U. C. K. me.
>
> (Spears and Martin, *YouTube* 0:45–0:51, spelled and punctuated to convey concealed meaning)

The phrase thus demonstrates an almost paradoxical communicative complexity. The act of mining a text for hidden meaning inherently entails greater cognitive effort than taking that text at face value; but this particular text's face-value version demands substantial cognitive effort in order to be understood.[3] Therefore, it is tempting to say that the lyric is simply *designed* to be read for hidden meaning: if its surface is so fragmentedly difficult, perhaps that is a hint that we should ignore that surface and look to the depths, to an underbelly that turns out to be coherently easy.

Indeed, such an interpretation is supported by the song's music video. The video precedes its rendition of the song with a (staged) clip of a news anchor speaking the title phrase ("If you seek Amy") very slowly (Spears et al., "Video" 0:00–0:05); the video follows the song's conclusion with another (staged) clip of the same news anchor saying, "Doesn't make any sense, does it?" (Spears et al., "Video" 2:42–2:45), with "it" presumably referring to the title phrase that had been read out at the beginning. These clips parody a report on the song by *America's Newsroom*, and many critics certainly perceived the phrase as being meaningless on the surface but meaningful (and lewd) underneath. Indeed, writing in *Entertainment Weekly*, Leah Greenblatt found it "difficult to believe

the song's real meaning will get past even the thickest listener"
(Greenblatt). I should perhaps be embarrassed that the "real"
meaning escaped my notice completely until I looked the song up
on *Wikipedia*. But this paper is not an attempt to defend the honour
of my perspicacity, nor a scandalized attempt to force an innocuous
reading onto a bawdy text, for close examination of the song shows
that it actually makes a surprisingly credible case for the phrase's
surface meaning.

I have said previously that, to take the title phrase at innocuous face
value, one must assume extremely fragmented syntax. And while
this might seem like an argument against such a reading, the lyrics
of the pre-chorus create strong precedent for fragmentary syntax
with an unambiguous anacoluthon:

> 'cos I'm so— Oh!
> I can't get her off of my brain.
>
> (Spears and Martin, *YouTube* 0:33–0:37)

Having heard this in the pre-chorus, it is not so great a leap to hear
another anacoluthon in the chorus's words:

> All of the boys and all of the girls
> are begging to— If you seek Amy…
>
> (Spears and Martin, *YouTube* 0:45–0:51, spelled and punctuated
> to convey surface meaning)

An anacoluthic surface-reading of that title phrase becomes even
more plausible if we set our view wider: the protagonist has spent
the entire song up to this point enquiring after "Amy." As I discuss
below, the very first words of the first verse are "Oh baby, baby,
have you seen Amy tonight?" (Spears and Martin, *YouTube* 0:15–
0:18).[4] Thus, since one "Amy" has been clearly established as a
character in the song's scenario, it is very plausible, come the
chorus, for the protagonist to interrupt herself with the title phrase's
innocuous, surface version ("If you seek Amy"). Perhaps she does so
in order to ask her addressee (one of her fellow patrons at the club

where the song's scenario takes place?) to search for Amy on her (the protagonist's) behalf. That is, the title phrase could be interpreted as meaning, "If you (fellow clubber) go off to look for Amy, I (protagonist) will stay here in case Amy passes this way," or "can make it worth your while," or "have some advice for you on the perils of seeking Amy out." Or perhaps it is the clubber (the former addressee) who interrupts the protagonist with the title line: "If you (protagonist) want to find Amy, I (your fellow clubber) can help you do so," "have some advice for you," "have indeed seen her tonight," or some such.

Nor do we need to look back through the whole song to make the line's surface sensical. Backtracking only to the start of the sentence, we might find ourselves questioning whether the title phrase produces anacoluthon at all, even on the surface:

> Love me, hate me,
> say what you want about me,
> but all of the boys and all of the girls
> are begging to. If you seek Amy…
>
> (Spears and Martin, *YouTube* 0:45–0:51, spelled and punctuated to convey different surface meaning)

This could be interpreted as something along the following lines: "Whether you love me or hate me, and whatever you say about me, everyone is begging to *say* that they love or hate me." In other words: "For better or worse, I am famous." Both of those formulations are complete statements. The title phrase, whether delivered by the original speaker or her original addressee, is no longer even an interruption, merely an additional statement, albeit one left incomplete itself.

The lyrics thus make a local case for the subtextual meaning, but a larger-scale, contextual one for the surface; or, to put it another way, the words of this song seem suggestive when taken in isolated chunks and more innocent when viewed in context. But songs do not live by words alone. Song lyrics are, by definition, set to music.

Again in terms of classical rhetoric, we have hitherto been exploring textual style or *elocutio*. Song, however, often goes farther than other artforms in crystallizing the *pronunciatio*, or delivery, of a text (pop songs especially, their primary source being not a set of performance instructions, but an actual recorded performance). And thanks to the surprisingly mixed messages of its musical delivery, "If U Seek Amy" becomes even more fascinatingly confusing when, beyond language alone, listeners experience the language as song.

The Music and Its Effect on the Lyrics

From the first line of the first verse, listeners are warned that something is wrong about this song's use of the name "Amy." The first time that name is heard, the music gives an accent to the second syllable rather than the first: that syllable lands on a strong beat and receives a long note, so its delivery becomes not the normal "A-my," but "a-MY" (see ex. 1):[5]

Ex. 1. Main vocal line of Spears and Martin (*YouTube* 0:15–0:18), transcribed by ear, with dots above stave to indicate beats (bold dots for strong, non-bold for weak), and box drawing attention to placement of first syllable of name "Amy" on weak beat and second syllable on strong beat.

Thus, when the title phrase arrives (ex. 2), its use of a previously musically problematised word ("Amy") combines with the apparently fragmented textual syntax ("All of the boys and all of the girls are begging to— If you seek Amy…") to suggest that a surface reading is ill-advised:

Ex. 2. Main vocal line of Spears and Martin (*YouTube* 0:45–0:51), transcribed by ear, with dots above stave to indicate beats (bold dots for strong, non-bold for weak), and underlay spelled and punctuated to convey both surface meaning and concealed meaning.

That is not to say that a musical analysis suggests unequivocally a subtextual reading; throughout the song, the musical treatment of anacoluthon actually undermines a simple (single?) interpretation. As can be seen from example 3 below, the music provides a strong sense of interruption and discontinuity for the clearly syntactically fragmented text in the pre-chorus: the syntactic disjunction in the lyrics is marked with a rest (silence) and rhythmic irregularity in the music.

Ex. 3. Main vocal line of Spears and Martin (*YouTube* 0:33–0:37), transcribed by ear, with dots above stave to indicate beats (bold dots for strong, non-bold for weak), and box drawing attention to anacoluthon.

In contrast, the title phrase is sung to music (ex. 2) not nearly so obviously discontinuous as that which sets the anacoluthic text in the pre-chorus. On the one hand, we could say that since it gave such strong musical support to its first textual anacoluthon, the song does not now need to be so insistent with its second. The logic runs something like this:

1. The first, unambiguous anacoluthon in the lyrics was backed up by forcefully interruptive musical gestures (ex. 3).

2. Therefore, the song has legitimized the idea of syntactic disjunction as part of its communicative fabric.

3. Therefore, any further such disjunctions can be taken on faith, without the need for such insistent musical realization labouring the point.

However (and here the paradoxical nature of this song's communicative strategies comes to the fore), we could also make the opposite claim:

1. The first, unambiguous anacoluthon in the lyrics was backed up by forcefully interruptive musical gestures (ex. 3).

2. Therefore, the song has established that unambiguous textual anacoluthon requires musical realization.

3. Therefore, by withholding such realisation, the song is now indicating a lack of "belief" in the title phrase's merely potential anacoluthon.

This latter impression is strengthened when we realise that the syntactic unity of the lewd meaning ("All of the boys and all of the girls are begging to F. U. C. K. me.") is, in some ways, actively suggested by the music: the title phrase is sung as part of a melody that falls by step all the way down the musical scale. Certainly the steady, unchanging melodic direction and complete coverage of the scale might both be heard to create the integration and conclusiveness necessary for the subtextual reading, at least if we take the passage in isolation. Yet, once again, looking at the passage in context shows that all is not so simple.

Based on what we have heard up to this point in the song, we would expect a falling scale to comprise the notes named in example 4 (the notes of what music theorists would call a natural minor or Aeolian scale):

Ex. 4. Main vocal line of Spears and Martin (*YouTube* 0:45–0:51), transcribed by ear, modified to illustrate pitches expected on basis of previous musical material, with dots above stave to indicate beats (bold dots for strong, non-bold for weak), underlay spelled and punctuated to convey both surface meaning and concealed meaning, letter-name of note above first occurrence of each note, and scale degree number above letter-name.

Instead, the penultimate note is flattened (lowered by one semitone); see the boxed notes in example 5:

Ex. 5. Main vocal line of Spears and Martin (*YouTube* 0:45–0:51), transcribed by ear, with underlay spelled and punctuated to convey both surface meaning and concealed meaning, letter-name of note above first occurrence of each note, scale degree number above letter-name, and box drawing attention to flattened second degree.

Compared to the scale that the song had led us to expect (the natural minor or Aeolian), this minor-with-flat-second scale (a Phrygian scale, in music-theoretical parlance) evokes an intensified sense of "darkening." Might that darkening suggest a single speaker adopting a huskier, more seductive tone as she finishes spelling out the profanity? Possibly. Eron Smith has written on "flat-two as a hotness topic" in post-millennial rock ("topic" in the sense of rhetorical *topos*), and the flat second *might* evoke a husky tone appropriate for spelling out a profanity. But it might equally well point toward the anacoluthon required for the innocuous surface meaning: the flat second's sudden, unexpected intrusion could represent the protagonist interrupting herself to embark on the new subject, or the darkness created by the flat second could mimic the interruption of another speaker with a markedly different vocal timbre (we will return to this possibility below).

Moving from ambiguity to outright contradiction: there may be no strong musical break for the surface meaning's anacoluthon, but its aposiopesis is in fact heavily implied by a sudden change of musical rhythm ("hemiola," whereby a set of six beats expected to be grouped 3+3 is grouped 2+2+2 instead); see the box in example 6 (the circle will be explained below):

Ex. 6. Main vocal line of Spears and Martin (*YouTube* 0:45–0:51), transcribed by ear, with underlay spelled and punctuated to convey both surface meaning and concealed meaning, dots above stave to indicate beats (bold dots for strong, non-bold for weak), numbers above the first beat of each group indicating number of beats in that group, and box drawing attention to hemiola grouping.

This effect causes the melody to end on a very weak beat (the circled second–last weak dot in example 6), suggesting a trailing off that is entirely suited to aposiopesis, and thus to the surface meaning. The trailing off is not wholly unsuited to the subtext either, since the speaker might be seductively allowing her voice to fade to a whisper, but given the syntactic conclusiveness of the subtextual meaning, this is perhaps something of a reach. Moreover, the hemiola effect is the exact same rhythm with which the singing of the earlier, unambiguously (textually and musically) anacoluthic sentences concluded (ex. 7):

Ex. 7. Main vocal line of Spears and Martin (*YouTube* 0:33–0:37), transcribed by ear, with dots above stave to indicate beats (bold dots for strong, non-bold for weak), numbers above the first beat of each group indicating number of beats in that group, and box drawing attention to hemiola grouping.

That earlier, medially anacoluthic sentence had not concluded aposiopetically, so we cannot really say that hemiola has been established as an aposiopesis marker; additionally, the earlier sentence's music ended on a strong beat, while that of the title phrase, as already mentioned, does not. But signification can be associative as well as direct, and listeners might, on some level, be inclined to think, "If a musical unit ends with a hemiola, there was an anacoluthon in the middle of the text-phrase sung to that music." And while we are discussing precedents of signification: the name "Amy" was indeed (as discussed) misaccented at first appearance (ex. 1), but that appearance came in a sentence that made perfect, unfragmented sense at face value, and was one of many references to "Amy" (or "her") that seem perfectly sensical on their surface, indeed, devoid of any obvious double-entendre. In summary, we can say that the first verse makes a local, musical case against the chorus's surface (by its misaccentuation of one crucial word, the name "Amy"), but a global, textual case for that surface (by including that word in a totally innocuous series of sentences),

and at best sets up two contradictory potential expectations by the musical foregrounding of the unambiguous anacoluthon at "'cos I'm so— Oh!".

The second verse opens with the name "Amy," but now properly accented, its first syllable landing on a long (two-beat) note beginning on a strong beat (see ex. 8):

Ex. 8. Main vocal line of Spears and Martin (*YouTube* 1:07–1:10), transcribed by ear, with dots above stave to indicate beats (bold dots for strong, non-bold for weak), and box indicating placement of first syllable of name "Amy" on strong beat and second syllable on weak beat.

Thus, when the titular phrase returns in the second chorus, the ambiguity is even more pointed, because the listener has been made to doubt their doubts of the surface's viability. And the intensification of complexity (even confusion) does not stop at the end of the second chorus. When the title phrase returns in the bridge section, things become almost ludicrously polysemic (capable of multiple meanings). See example 9:

Ex. 9. Main vocal line of Spears and Martin (*YouTube* 2:20–2:27), transcribed by ear, with dots above stave to indicate beats (bold dots for strong, non-bold for weak).

Again the name "Amy" comes out as "a-MY," suggesting a faulty surface. But listeners are armed with the ambiguities of two choruses and as many verses, and those ambiguities explode quasi-prismatically with the appearance of the first-person plural. Who are "we"? Is the original speaker speaking throughout, propositioning her addressee, then promising an encounter involving anything the addressee desires?

> **Protagonist:** Oh, baby, baby, F. U. C. K. me tonight.
> Oh, baby, baby, we [you and I]'ll do whatever
> you like.
>
> (Spears and Martin, *YouTube* 2:21–2:28, interpreted as a sexual
> proposition from the song's protagonist)

Is the original speaker propositioning her addressee, who responds by promising an encounter involving anything the original speaker desires?

> **Protagonist:** Oh, baby, baby, F. U. C. K. me tonight.
> **Clubber:** Oh, baby, baby, we [you and I]'ll do whatever
> you like.
>
> (Spears and Martin, *YouTube* 2:21–2:28, interpreted as a sexual
> proposition from the song's protagonist and a response from the
> clubber she propositioned)

Is the original speaker speaking throughout, promising that if her addressee looks for Amy, then she (the speaker) and Amy will make it worth the addressee's while (sexually, perhaps)?

> **Protagonist:** Oh, baby, baby, if you seek Amy tonight,
> Oh, baby, baby, we [Amy and I]'ll do whatever
> you like.
>
> (Spears and Martin, *YouTube* 2:21–2:28, interpreted as a sexual
> proposition from the song's protagonist and as containing a
> reference to an absent third party)

Is the representative of a group addressing the original speaker throughout, saying that, if the original speaker is looking for Amy, their group will assist the original speaker in any way she asks?

Clubber: Oh, baby, baby, if you seek Amy tonight,
                Oh, baby, baby, we [clubbers]'ll do whatever
                you like.

(Spears and Martin, *YouTube* 2:21–2:28, interpreted as an offer
of help from the clubber that the song's protagonist had earlier
been addressing)

Is the original speaker addressing the representative of a group,
promising that, if they look for Amy, she (the speaker) will make it
worth their while, only for them to interrupt before she names the
reward, saying that they will assist the original speaker in any way
she asks?

Protagonist: Oh, baby, baby, if you seek Amy tonight…
Clubber: Oh, baby, baby, we [clubbers]'ll do whatever
                 you like.

(Spears and Martin, *YouTube* 2:21–2:28, interpreted as a request
for help from the song's protagonist and an offer of help in
response from the clubber she had been addressing)

Is the original addressee speaking throughout, propositioning the
original speaker, then promising an encounter involving anything
the original speaker desires?

Clubber: Oh, baby, baby, F. U. C. K. me tonight.
                Oh, baby, baby, we [you and I]'ll do whatever
                you like.

(Spears and Martin, *YouTube* 2:21–2:28, interpreted as an offer
of help from the clubber that the song's protagonist had been
addressing)

To quote Ellen Rosand, "[p]atient analysis of this sort can seem
compulsive, yet it builds a cumulative case for a conclusion of some
importance" (*Monteverdi* 170). Here, somewhat meta-analytically,
that conclusion would be that the song itself builds a cumulative

case for the important (inconclusive?) conclusion that both interpretations of its title phrase are viable.

THE ADVANTAGES OF AMBIGUITY

We have seen that "If U Seek Amy" is a communicatively complex song and examined why this complexity arises on a formal level. We now ask "why" on a more aesthetic level. Why design the song like this, and what is gained by such communicative complexity? In the words of Alan Moore, we now "go beyond just asking 'What?', to asking 'So what?'" (Moore 26:58–27:05).

Drawing on Relevance Theory, Nigel Fabb asserts that, "in communication, if we are invited to expend inferential effort then we should expect cognitive rewards" (146). He goes on to suggest that "in our experience of literary texts, contradiction is experienced as aesthetic, and thus is a cognitive reward" (Fabb 146). If we accept pop songs as "literature" or "verbal art," the web of contradictory meanings, syntactic structures, and even speaker-attributions in "If U Seek Amy" can be considered powerfully cognitively rewarding. This is especially true in light of the song's conflicting "implicatures" and "explicatures" (Fabb's Relevance-Theory terms again [Fabb 65, 83, 94]), simultaneously backing up at least two interpretations. Whether or not listeners would consciously shift their interpretative "lens" from replay to replay (or even within a single listening) is a more complicated question, as is the question of whether or not they need to choose one lens or the other; perhaps both meanings can be attended to simultaneously, equally, or in varying ratios. But the pleasure derivable from conflicting implicature should not be discounted.

More practical concerns should also be considered. By going so far to justify the surface interpretation, the song maintains plausible deniability in the face of censors. This did not save it from radio

edits, but did perhaps spare it from *only* receiving airtime in edited form. In fact, these edits themselves make an interesting case for the surface meaning of the song as it already existed: some stations played it as (and changed the hook line to) "If U *See* Amy" (emphasis mine). In other words, by omitting one phoneme, they brought the title phrase more closely into line with the song's nominal context of asking for help finding a lost friend, veritably forcing listeners to hear the figures of syntactic discontinuity that I argued were present in the original surface meaning: "All of the boys and all of the girls are begging to— If you see Amy…" can only be plausibly interpreted as two unfinished sentences, since "begging to F. U. C. A. me" is nonsensical.

And combining these ideas, double meaning may simply be claimed as entertaining in itself. Bluntly explicit sex-talk has its place, but ambiguity can open a work to wider audiences, offering many possible interpretations or "lenses" through which it can be understood. This would also enhance "replay value," allowing the song to be heard from various combinations of interpretive lenses at each playing.

Perhaps some listeners (like myself) actually recognise only one of the meanings at first, and so the song gains wider reach by appealing to those actively seeking shamelessly explicit content *and* those seeking content that is "rebellious" but still "safe for work." It does after all still feature nightclubs, a forthright main character, clubbers addressed as "baby," female friendship, and helping one's fellow partygoers. Indeed, the issue of female friendship is arguably more strongly foregrounded if the hook line is heard as referring to a woman named Amy, which, in combination with the reference to "all of the boys and all of the girls," perhaps offers an even more personalized (empowering?) portrayal of the protagonist as a bisexual woman. Amy may be her love interest; another ambiguity ripe for interpretation.

Perhaps some listeners spot only one meaning the first time, but notice that there "seems to be more to" the song, and so are drawn back to uncover the other side of the double-edged hook line. Perhaps they spot both meanings (initially or later), and appreciate the fact that the song can be as lewd or as innocent as listeners want it to be, depending on their mood when they replay it (or indeed—since choruses by definition recur, and this one contains two iterations of the hook line per chorus—each time they hear the hook line even in a single playthrough of the song). The lyrics are a semantic version of the famous optical illusion that depicts both a rabbit and a duck, where half the fun is in knowing that the other meaning or image can be accessed with a simple switch of mental gears.

Perhaps some spot both meanings but feel smugly superior because they think that most people will only spot the surface, or think that the surface is the sole intended meaning and feel superior to "dirty minded" listeners who think there is a subtext. These condescending positions might not be terribly tasteful from a moral perspective, but marketability is marketability, and pettiness is not a bad listener-sentiment for creatives to bank on.

And some listeners might even enjoy being able to focus on one plausible meaning while consciously ignoring the other entirely (whether in one listening or all of them). And, at the risk of sounding like a naïve proponent of rhetorical utopianism, this need not be a bad thing. Listeners should, even must, be allowed to explore and enjoy explicit content if they so desire, but facilitating non-explicit readings is not necessarily a repressive or regressive strategy either, and in general, giving an audience control over how they wish to experience a piece of media can be seen as supportive and inclusive. YouTubers offer their Patreon supporters access to uncensored versions of their videos for a reason; sex sells. But video game patches make sex scenes skippable for a reason too; customisation and variety of options also sell.

I have discussed "the song" as if it were an autonomous entity, but it was, in fact, written and performed by human beings. Without straying too far into minefields of authorial intent or death of the author, I should point out that I have not interviewed Spears or Martin about the song. And even if I had, they might have responded as the classical composer Benjamin Britten did to analyses of his music: "I must have a very clever subconscious" (Reed 5). I make no assertion that the song's creators were explicitly aware of all the complexities with which they loaded it. Certainly, I would not assume that either knew the terms aposiopesis or anacoluthon. In anthropological parlance, this has been an "etic" rather than an "emic" analysis, various rhetorical and musical concepts serving as lenses through which to understand a song's workings, not implied as techniques consciously employed in its composition.[6] But complex, nameable techniques are observable in many contexts and artforms, whether or not the artists know the names or history of such techniques. To discuss anacoluthon and aposiopesis in Britney Spears seems no less useful than discussing *appoggiatura* in Medieval polyphony.[7] Composers of the time might not have known or used the term, but they often approached a dissonance by leap and left it by step; and that is the harmonic/contrapuntal procedure that the modern term *appoggiatura* describes. Spears and Martin probably knew that they were using ambiguity and fragmentation, although they may never have read a rhetorical manual.

And on a related note (pardon the pun): even if neither Spears nor Martin could articulate every aspect of the complex argumentative structure that this article identifies (or the moral implications alluded to in recent paragraphs), both artists probably knew that the ambiguity was both present and effective. Ambiguity has helped Spears in a marketplace context, and her career has often played on paradox; we already noted her "sexy innocent" image, and might add that the title line of another of her songs (also co-written by Martin) explicitly declares her "Not a Girl, Not Yet a Woman" (Spears et al., "Girl"). "If U Seek Amy" can therefore be read as a continuation of Spears's musically communicative (and identity-

performative) ambiguity to favour her position in the marketplace. In fact, the song contains multitudes of paradoxical concept-pairings that match its dual reading modes: commercial/transgressive, empowering/objectifying, hedonistic/social-critical, possibly even for-young-fans/explicit. And it seems to play prominently on those paradoxes in more (and possibly more obvious) ways than I have examined here. For instance, the music video's scenario begins in a sex party before turning into a white-picket-fence family photo in front of the paparazzi. And (to return to rhetorical figuration), the chorus's lyrics contain the antithesis (semantically opposed predication) "Love me, hate me"; both two-word halves are set to the same music, perhaps encouraging us to infer that we may love or hate Britney and it will be literally all the same to her (and, on a more formal level, turning the antithesis into something like an oxymoron).[8]

In light of all this, it seems more than plausible to argue that the chorus communicates a genuine multiplicity of meanings (as opposed to a nonsensical surface with a "real" lewd subtext), through both its music and its lyrics, through local features and broader context. And as the previous paragraphs have argued, this need not be a wholly virtuous nor a wholly manipulative thing. Indeed (keeping to the spirit of this song and this analysis of that song), it can be both sides of these dichotomies at once, if not always in equal measure. Songs can contain multitudes, and those multitudes can themselves have multifaceted aims (and, more importantly, multifaceted results).

DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Much more could be said of this song. For instance, anacoluthon and aposiopesis are not the only figures that operate in "If U Seek Amy." I have long felt that the echo effects produced by backing voices deserve attention, employing as they do various figures of

repetition and parenthesis. Rhetoricians might usefully explore such issues here and in a larger number of other vocal works.

I presented anacoluthon and aposiopesis as clearly distinct, but the two figures are often conflated, and their distinctions argued over. Such ambiguity opens up interesting perspectives on the interaction of style and delivery, the manners in which performance can ambiguate, disambiguate, or alter a text's figuration, and how music specifically figures its lyrics. Length of pause can be difficult to indicate through written text alone (especially in traditions that lack standardized systems of punctuation), but a musical setting could place rests of varying length at moments of textual syntactic discontinuity (shorter rests suggesting that the next words are an anacoluthic interruption, longer rests suggesting aposiopetic trailing off into silence), thereby clearly articulating which figure operates when. Alternatively, the text's original punctuation might be clear on which type of pause occurs when, only for the pauses in the music not to accord with the ones indicated by the textual punctuation, or to be of such diverse lengths as to blur the distinction between interruption and trailing off. The music might forego such rests altogether, turning all potential or clear anacolutha and aposiopeses into non sequiturs. Such avenues of investigation could prove very fruitful for both rhetoricians and musicologists, whether those studying songs with music and lyrics by the same artist (like "If U Seek Amy") or by different artists, and the method could surely be extended to other pairs or sets of figures that are often conflated or difficult to indicate with text alone.

I focussed on language and music, but largely ignored the phenomenon often conceived as mediating between them: poetry. "If U Seek Amy" is a sung text, but that text is rhymed and metrical, facts that play a prominent role in how it is sung. By dodging poetic issues, I avoided overinflating this article with terms like *molossus*, *unmetrical*, *strong and weak position*, *unaccented rhyme*, *enjambment*, and even figures like *antilabe*. But observation of these

and similar features could potentially lend much greater nuance and complexity to the analysis.

Some attention was paid to ambiguities of speaker, but not to every instance of such ambiguity. Which "character," for instance, delivers which syllables of the phrase "Ha ha he he ha ha ho"? Since the phrase follows "Can somebody take me home?" might the song's protagonist be laughing at herself and calling herself promiscuous?

> **Protagonist:** Ha ha he he ha ha. Ho.
>
> (Spears and Martin, *YouTube* 0:43–0:44, interpreted as protagonist's laughter and assertion of her own promiscuity by way of a [reclaimed?] whorephobic slur)

Is she laughing while someone else calls her such (perhaps interrupting her laughter with the imprecation)?

> **Protagonist:** Ha ha he he ha ha.
> **Clubber:**   Ho.
>
> (Spears and Martin, *YouTube* 0:43–0:44, interpreted as protagonist's laughter followed by her fellow clubbers applying a whorephobic slur to her)

Are other people laughing at and perhaps calling her such?

> **Clubber:**   Ha ha he he ha ha. Ho.
>
> (Spears and Martin, *YouTube* 0:43–0:44, interpreted as protagonist's fellow clubbers laughing at, and then applying a whorephobic slur to, her)

Why is she being laughed at and possibly called promiscuous (possibly by herself)? Has she or her addressee noticed that she said something with a lewd double meaning? Is the laughter friendly or malicious? How much "in-story" awareness and agency do we attribute to the speaking personas in a song, and how does that attribution shift based on whom we assume is speaking when? Such

questions are beyond the scope of this paper, but might be interesting for those interested in song as narrative or even drama.

Common sense might suggest that many of the song's ambiguities could be clarified or at least further explored by examining the music video. But even if we had time for such examination, music videos do not always crystalise a song's content as we might expect, and can actually add extra layers of complexity. For instance, the lyrics of this song reference a club, but the video is set in a private home, and Spears seems not to address any other "character" in the video, instead singing to the camera. Researchers who specialise in the dramaturgy of music video might find this article a useful starting point from which to explore such productive tension between song scenarios as described and as enacted on screen.

On a much more local, formal level, the long form of the vowel *O* is prominent at significant moments:

> I'm s*o*— *Oh*— I can't get her off of my brain
>
> (Spears and Martin, *YouTube* 0:33–0:37, with prominent vowel "o" italicized for analytical emphasis)
>
> Can somebody take me h*o*me?
>
> (Spears and Martin, *YouTube* 0:41–0:42, with prominent vowel "o" italicized for analytical emphasis)
>
> Ha ha, he he, ha ha, h*o*
>
> (Spears and Martin, *YouTube* 0:43–0:44, with prominent vowel "o" italicized for analytical emphasis)

Is this mimetic of sexual moaning, a nod to common abbreviation of words like "orgasm" and "orifice," a structural device (conscious or not)? Such questions could be of interest to scholars of literary linguistics, those interested in subtextual communication (perhaps even evocation that slips below the level of conscious attention), or those who study mimesis.

And on higher hermeneutic levels, how do the communicative strategies of this song shape (and, if reconsidered, reshape) its portrayal of Spears, her sexuality, her image, and the titular "Amy"? Does an innocuous reading paint the protagonist as more vulnerable than does the subtextual, sexually forthright reading? Or does that risk reducing all female agency to sexual assertiveness? After all, she still seems quite outspoken as she asks her fellow clubbers for help in finding Amy (as the innocuous, surface reading of the song portrays her doing). To what extent can songs, or lyric poetry in general, even be said to *have* protagonists, characters, or narrative threads? Such questions are beyond the scope of this article, but might appeal to researchers of song as narrative or as drama, not to mention of communication and gender.

Throughout this article, I implied that there were two lenses through which to view this song, and two layers to its potential meaning: the innocuous and the suggestive. In reality, of course, these are just two extremes on a spectrum of interpretations, and nothing prevents a listener from changing lenses between listenings, or one or more times a single listening (or, for that matter, holding the two possibilities in tension simultaneously). This is probably a subject for scholars of audience studies or readership theory, but it obviously has applications far beyond this one song; indeed, it could be applied to almost anything that could be plausibly interpreted as having subtext of any kind.

I spelled and punctuated the title phrase to bring out whichever of their possible meanings I was focussing on at the time ("If you seek Amy" or "F. U. C. K. me"); but we should not ignore the fact that the official release spelled it "If U Seek Amy". The paratextual stylistic implications of such respellings is much too broad a topic for an article of this length, but it should perhaps be noted that this spelling also points in two directions at once: "u" is a perfectly acceptable spelling of "you" in text-speak (supporting the innocuous surface reading), and also one of the letters of the

profanity being sounded out letter by letter as the lewd subtext. Perhaps this subject might interest scholars of *mise en page*.

As stated above, general observations on ambiguity in song lyrics would be beyond the scope of this article. However, fruitful avenues for future research might include distinctive ways in which ambiguity functions either in this genre at this time or in the work of performers adjacent to Spears, which might speak to the rhetorical exigencies that underlie this song. Rhetoricians in particular might be interested in the idea of "lewdness with plausible deniability" as a *topos*, a subject already investigated to some extent by online *topos* enthusiasts: the "tropers" of *TV Tropes* (which uses the word *trope* in the sense of "narrative convention").

And, of course, my two readings (one innocuous, one lewd) are not intended as prescriptive or comprehensive. I interpreted "you" as being the second person singular pronoun throughout, based upon the fact that its first use in the song is almost certainly intended as such ("Oh baby [singular], baby [singular], have you [singular?] seen Amy tonight?"). But later uses of the word might just as easily be meant as the indefinite pronoun (more formally given as "one," thus, "If one seeks Amy") or the second-person plural ("If all of you seek Amy," "tell me if any/all of you see her"), and each of these could offer a fascinating new lens or set of lenses on the scenario, through which other scholars could reveal further complexity in the song.

Conclusion

Exploring the textual, musical, and musico-textual communicative devices of "If U Seek Amy" reveals the potential for an interpretive experience of the song that is far more complex than either the acceptance of its innocuous surface or the dismissal of that surface in favour of the lewd subtext could be alone. This is emphatically not to say that the song's real meaning is on the surface, and that over a decade's worth of listeners have gaslit themselves into reading

bawdry into an innocent text. Rather, the song demonstrates a remarkable ability to convey, simultaneously, two very different contents. In fact, it sometimes hints at one or other or both of those contents through the same formal devices. And while this might be taken as yet another blow to the idea that music can communicate or even signify, a more optimistic interpretation would be to see the polysemic potential of such devices as an expressive resource for creators, listeners, and analysts. From Apuleius's Cupid and Psyche to Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, allegorical narratives can function just as well at their surface ("as stories") as beneath it (as symbolic vehicles for other, often more abstract concepts). "If U Seek Amy" is a striking case for the claim that the same can be true of innuendo.

NOTES

[1] The goal of the article is not so much to examine this particular genre of song or to explore in detail the song's distribution or reception, but to demonstrate how rhetorical analysis helps to illuminate the song's complex ambiguities. In doing so, the article provides evidence of how productive rhetorical (and particularly figural) analysis can be, showing how the distinct "means of persuasion"—in Aristotle's terms (*Rhetoric*, 1355b)— associated with the different media that collectively constitute the song all work together in complex ways toward a particular effect. The paper's approach is thus formal rather than social semiotic.

For readers interested in engaging with more analyses like this one, or who would like to conduct similar analyses themselves, however, it may be useful to mention some other studies that take a similar multimodal rhetorical approach to musical analysis or that have been foundational in establishing such an approach:

- Many music scholars have examined the concept of musical rhetoric, perhaps most notably Dietrich Bartel, but studies tend to focus on "purely musical" dimensions: *epizeuxis* as a term for the repetition of the same note, *synonymia* for repetition of a melody at a significantly different pitch, *meiosis* for the subdivision of long notes into shorter ones, and so on.

- John Walter Hill's 2005 study of Baroque music is one of the few to also deal extensively with musically figured lyrics; that is, how the music of a song realizes (or, to use terminology from the five rhetorical canons, encodes delivery of) rhetorical figures present in the words, or even adds figures not present in the words alone.

- The concept of musically figured lyrics is also foundational for Richard Toft's 2018 study of early modern singing in England and significant in Daniel Fischlin's 1998 study of the English ayre.

- Ellen Rosand's studies of opera make rarer use of classical rhetoric's vocabulary and figural inventory, but include extensive explorations of how musical and textual form interact persuasively in music drama, especially in Italian opera.

- Mauro P. Calcagno's 2012 study of Monteverdi is primarily narratological and cultural-historical, but draws on rhetorical theory in support of several arguments, and also features detailed analysis on the communicative function of formal elements in vocal music.

- My own 2020 PhD thesis (Twomey) also examines music's realization of the rhetorical figures in, and addition of rhetorical figures to, its lyrics.

All these monographs deal with early modern vocal music, but were central inspirations for this article's approach to song as rhetorical and rhetorically figured (musically, linguistically, and musico-linguistically).

[2] I thank Máire Slater for bringing this to my attention (private correspondence).

[3] Quite a lot of cognitive effort in this case. The formula runs something like:

1. Slightly reconfigure the syllable-boundaries.

2. Reinterpret the first four syllables as letter names in the Latin alphabet.

3. Realize that the fifth syllable is a homophone for the first person singular pronoun.

4. Assume that the syllable boundary is also a word boundary.

[4] These are also effectively the first words of the song, since the introduction or pre-verse lyrics consist entirely of the vocables or nonsense syllables "la la la."

[5] Throughout this article, I use the word *beat* to refer to the note value that most frequently carries a syllable; thus, if a new syllable is sung every quaver, the quaver is the beat. A more accurate term for this would be *recitational* or *declamatory pulse*, but these terms have seemed unnecessarily obscure for the purposes of the article. Nevertheless, interested readers might like to be aware that, in strict music-theoretical terms, the musical metre 12/8 actually uses dotted crotchet beats; thus, the note value that I have called the beat (the recitational pulse) is in fact the sub-beat, three of which comprise a single full beat, with those beats grouping into two *strong–weak* pairs in each bar.

[6] In the words of the ethnographer David Fetterman, an emic perspective is "the insider's or native's perspective of reality" (20), while an "etic perspective is the external, social scientific perspective of reality" (22).

[7] I take this example from Margaret Bent, an eminent scholar of medieval polyphony. In analysing the "harmony" of famous fourteenth-century *Messe de Nostre Dame* by Guillaume de Machaut, Bent decided to "use modern terms (such as appoggiatura and passing note) where there seems to be no medieval term for concepts that observably extend the rudiments of medieval counterpoint teaching" in the manner captured by those modern terms (Bent 83).

[8] The recurring falling melodic contour is also reminiscent of schoolyard jeering in the manner of "Na na na na na"; perhaps Britney taunting her critics or daring them to say more about her?

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L'effet de l'autofiction sur l'éthos de stand-up

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Abstract: Le ton personnel et direct revendiqué dans le discours de stand-up présente un intérêt scientifique considérable. Cet article examine donc l'usage et la nécessité de l'autofiction comme technique dans le stand-up francophone contemporain. Il s'agit d'un travail qui se fonde d'un côté sur la théorie linguistique de l'énonciation et de l'autre côté, sur la tradition rhétorique des preuves et de l'argumentation. À l'aide de notre corpus comprenant des discours courts de stand-up francophone, nous étudions notamment le degré de l'exposition du stand-uppeur et comment il réussit à protéger son *éthos* tout en gagnant l'approbation du public. Plus particulièrement, nous abordons la question du caractère fictif ; la duplicité énonciative due à l'ironie ; et enfin, le lien entre l'autofiction et la métafiction.

Mots-clés : stand-up, analyse de discours, autofiction, ethos, spectacle

Abstract: The personal and direct tone claimed in stand-up speech is of significant scientific interest. This article therefore examines the use and necessity of autofiction in contemporary French-speaking stand-up. This work is based on the linguistic theory of enunciation on one hand, and on the rhetorical tradition of modes of persuasion and argumentation on the other. Using examples drawn from our corpus comprising short French-speaking stand-up speeches, we study in particular the degree of exposure of the stand-up artist and how they manage to protect their ethos while gaining validation from the public. Especially, we address the question of fictional character, the enunciative duplicity due to irony, and finally, the link between autofiction and metafiction.

Keywords: stand-up, discourse analysis, autofiction, ethos, performance

Introduction

Après la tradition critique des années 1970, associée à l'ironie transcendante, à l'abstraction et surtout au discours désubjectivisé se résumant avec *La mort de l'auteur* de R. Barthes, « l'autofiction » devient la nouvelle tendance dans l'analyse textuelle et discursive.

Terme initialement français, adopté par la suite par les revues anglophones (Worthington), l'autofiction décrit la réapparition du « je » dans la prose pour revendiquer un caractère non plus naturaliste, mais simplement subjectif et personnel. Contrairement à l'autobiographie, elle offre à l'auteur la liberté de parler de soi-même avec la possibilité d'osciller entre la réalité et la fiction (Burgelin et *al.* 7).

Popularisé dans les années 1970 et 1980 aux États-Unis, le stand-up se définit comme l'art oral, selon lequel un humoriste s'adresse directement au public en prononçant un discours dont il est aussi l'auteur (Springford). Il s'oppose donc, à la fois au théâtre classique, mais aussi au *one-man-show* où l'identification entre personne et personnage n'est pas obligatoire. En effet, le stand-uppeur en tant qu'orateur raconte ses anecdotes de façon directe et spontanée. Ainsi est-il évident que la question du « je » joue un rôle primordial dans le discours.

La présence du stand-up francophone est assez forte au Canada depuis les années 1980 avec des festivals qui ont conditionné son évolution. Cependant, le stand-up selon les normes américaines arrive en France au début du XXIe siècle en se distinguant des formes similaires antérieures françaises comme le café-théâtre, revendiquant ainsi une nouvelle identité liée à la culture américaine. Depuis, et surtout après la pandémie de 2020, on note en France un intérêt croissant, tant médiatique que scientifique, pour ce genre. Il serait donc avantageux d'observer le procédé d'exposition de l'artiste dans le paradigme hexagonal contemporain.

Cet article propose donc l'étude de l'autofiction comme technique rhétorique dans le stand-up à l'aide des outils fournis par la rhétorique et par la linguistique de l'énonciation. Cela afin de répondre à la question : Pourquoi le stand-uppeur[1] fait usage de l'autofiction et comment ce choix influence éventuellement le discours ? L'objectif est de démontrer que son emploi fait partie

d'une stratégie rhétorique visant particulièrement à la protection de l'éthos discursif du stand-uppeur.

Le discours du stand-up est l'objet d'analyse du domaine de la comédie — *Comedy studies* et de celui de l'humour — *Humour studies*. Dans la bibliographie anglophone, il y a des travaux qui reconnaissent aussi son aspect rhétorique en se concentrant sur l'interaction avec le public du côté psychologique (Rutter, Guerra) ; sur son emploi stratégique dans le discours politique (Wilson) ou dans le changement social (Meier et Schmitt). Les travaux francophones portant sur la rhétorique du stand-up en particulier sont minoritaires et plutôt orientés vers l'analyse du fond (Quemener, Lafontaine) et moins vers la technique. Quant au sujet de l'autofiction, la recherche est avancée autant en français (Burgelin et *al.*, Delaume), qu'en anglais (Worthington, Gordillo, Schmitt), mais dans cet article, il est traité singulièrement dans le discours stand-uppien français.

Par la suite, en nous focalisant sur l'éthos discursif de l'orateur, nous examinons la fonction de l'autofiction comme technique principale du stand-up ainsi que les cas limites entre la réalité et la fiction dans le discours. Ensuite, les moyens grâce auxquels le stand-uppeur gère son exposition scénique pour protéger son éthos sont présentés. En particulier, après les appels rhétoriques classiques, nous étudions de près l'usage de la figure macrostructurale de l'ironie ainsi que celui du métadiscours où l'autofiction est explicitement déclarée. Les exemples utilisés sont tirés de notre corpus de discours courts – *des routines* de stand-up francophone contemporain, présentés devant un vrai public dans le cadre des festivals d'humour.

LE STAND-UPPEUR, PROTAGONISTE DU DISCOURS

L'énonciateur du stand-up, appelé « stand-uppeur » joue un rôle principal aussi bien pour le discours que pour le genre en général. Outre l'auteur (Springford) et l'émetteur, il s'avère aussi être le protagoniste du discours, puisqu'il parle en « je » de lui-même en

défendant ses causes. Il utilise donc la première personne du singulier (P1) pour se référer à la fois à sa personne et à son personnage en identifiant les deux. Puis, en utilisant la deuxième personne du pluriel « vous » (P5), il s'adresse directement à ses destinataires qu'il considère comme ses interlocuteurs. Exemple tiré de notre corpus :

(1)   Bonsoir, bonsoir à tous ! je m'appelle donc Verino, j'suis absolument ravi de jouer devant vous ce soir. Vraiment. Je sais que tous les humoristes sont toujours ravis de jouer devant vous ce soir, mais moi, c'est vrai en fait. [rire]. (Verino, *Zara*)

Dans cet exemple, le stand-uppeur impose cette norme du « je » devant « vous » dès le début de son discours. L'interaction de l'énonciateur avec les récepteurs constitue en effet la convention principale du stand-up (Rutter). Rhétoriquement parlant, le stand-up n'est pas une simple présentation, mais un échange interpersonnel (Dean 106), un dialogue qui se base sur deux binômes : « blague – rire » (joke – laugh) et « je – vous ». Ainsi, la quelconque spontanéité du stand-uppeur résulte de ce caractère dialogal du discours (Guerra) enfermé dans l'énonciation d'ici et maintenant de la salle.

Pendant les moments d'interaction avec le public à travers principalement les techniques de *riffing*[2] et d'*ad-lib*,[3] mais aussi à travers les déictiques, le temps du présent et le discours direct pour ses récits (la technique de l'*acting-out*[4]), le stand-uppeur réussit à maintenir la vivacité et l'authenticité du langage conversationnel quotidien et son effet humoristique. Ainsi, grâce à l'usage constant des embrayeurs comme « je » et aux références personnelles, le public, rassuré qu'il assiste à une vraie interaction, peut plus facilement s'identifier, s'impliquer et donc rire.

Aux limites de la vérité

L'identification du locuteur et du sujet parlant n'est pas étonnante pour la rhétorique ni pour la littérature (Ducrot). Néanmoins, concernant le stand-up, elle provoque une série de questions. Dans un ouvrage commercial non-académique pour les amateurs du stand-up, nous remarquons des conseils comme « Tell your truth » (dire sa vérité) (Dean 33) et « Get personal » (parler de soi-même) (Dean 57) encourageant les orateurs de stand-up de parler de leur vie personnelle, à s'impliquer autant que possible, voire à s'exposer. Tellement habitués à ce phénomène, probablement après le « *narrative turn* » (Salmon 9) lié à l' « impératif autobiographique » (Kaufmann) de la postmodernité, nous ne nous rendons pas facilement compte que cette pratique est éminemment révélatrice.

Les stand-uppeurs avouent que cette exposition personnelle leur offre un sentiment de consolation (Springford) et affirment que l'événement le plus bizarre ou déplaisant qui leur arrive peut se transformer en la blague la plus drôle de leur spectacle. Cependant, nous nous méfions des déclarations autobiographiques et doutons que le stand-uppeur parlant en « je » soit aussi honnête. Pendant leur discours, les humoristes déclarent souvent qu'ils disent la vérité. Néanmoins, il est difficile de vérifier s'ils mentent ou non ; cela aurait pu être un artifice pour renforcer la pseudo-authenticité de leur discours et réussir la proximité avec le public :

(2)   D'ailleurs, en parlant d'alcool, moi je bois pas d'alcool, c'est une vraie histoire. (Nam Ngo, *Je ne bois pas d'alcool*)

(3)   J'suis absolument ravi de jouer devant vous ce soir. Vraiment. Je sais que tous les humoristes sont toujours ravis de jouer devant vous ce soir, mais moi c'est vrai en fait. (Verino, *Zara*)

(4) Du coup j'ai arrêté, j'ai arrêté et j'ai ça [elle montre son portable, un vieil appareil] C'est vraiment pas un sketch, c'est pas pour mon sketch que je fais ça. Je serais une personne horrible… parler des enfants et après, genre chez moi, j'ai un iPhone en or, tu sais. (Shirley Souagnon, *Comment j'ai arrêté l'Iphone*)

Nous repérons notamment des expressions comme « c'est une vraie histoire », « mais moi c'est vrai en fait » et « c'est vraiment pas un sketch, c'est pas pour mon sketch que je fais ça » avec lesquelles les stand-uppeurs cités insistent sur la vérité de leurs propos. De l'autre, nous relevons parfois des histoires racontées qui sont indubitablement fictives et absurdes, comme la suivante :

(5) Récemment à Nantes, je rentrais de soirée et il était deux-trois heures du matin […] et j'ai vu un SDF devant moi […] il avait une poule [rire faible] dressée [rire] […] ça faisait cinq minutes que j'étais en train de le fixer à un mètre de lui […] et la poule, elle, elle a interprété ça comme une proposition de combat [rire faible] comme une demande de joute, donc elle a commencé à me courser, je vous fais le récapitulatif : à trois heures du matin, je me fais courser par une poule dans la ville [rire faible]. Sauf que l'histoire ne s'arrête là, parce que 30 mètres plus loin, y avait un autre mec qui, possiblement, rentrait chez lui et il se retourne, il voit que je cours vers lui donc, il court aussi logiquement [rire]. Je vous fais le récapitulatif : il est trois heures du matin, y a deux mecs qui se font courser par une poule dans la ville [rire] […] et miracle, y a un truc qui m'a sauvé, j'ai vu un KFC devant moi [rire faible]. Bah oui, parce qu'une poule ne va jamais dans un KFC. Une poule dans un KFC c'est

> comme le PSG en demi-finale, ça n'a aucun sens, ça
> n'existe pas, tu vois [rire] (Thibault Manai, *Je Ne Suis Pas
> Gay*)

Dans cet exemple, on est très éloigné de la réalité de l'autobiographie. Les éléments surréalistes de la poule qui poursuit l'humoriste, bien que très efficace humoristiquement concernant le KFC (chaine de restauration rapide qui propose des plats à base de poulet) comme « une poule ne va jamais dans un KFC », nous confirment que l'humoriste opte pour un style d'humour absurde. Il est possible que le stand-uppeur ait vécu une expérience similaire à son récit, probablement une version plus simple que celle racontée, mais afin de rendre une histoire triviale plus drôle, il a eu recours à l'exagération.

Toutefois, malgré les éléments sans doute autobiographiques, il serait abusif de parler d'autobiographie. D'ailleurs, le réalisme de l'autobiographie est incompatible avec le cadre humoristique où même le drame est présenté de façon explicitement exagérée pour provoquer le rire. Par conséquent, nous sommes obligés de considérer que le récit est autofictif combinant des éléments autobiographiques effectivement vécus avec des éléments fictifs, issus de l'imagination créative de l'humoriste.

La question du caractère fictif

Le fait que le stand-uppeur raconte des récits fictifs tout en déclarant dire la vérité devrait mettre en question l'authenticité de la globalité de son discours et, par extension, son éthos discursif. Si ce n'est pas le cas, il faut supposer qu'il ne parle plus pour son compte, mais pour un « caractère fictif », une nouvelle voix, invitée sur scène seulement pour prononcer un énoncé particulier (Maingueneau). Mais si l'on admet que le stand-uppeur interprète un rôle quand il défend ses causes, le stand-up devrait donc appartenir complètement à la fiction littéraire. Nous nous demandons ainsi pourquoi l'artiste n'est pas protégé par les normes de celle-ci.

En 2018, par exemple, pendant la cérémonie des Molières, le stand-uppeur Fary prononce un discours commençant par la phrase : « Salut les Blancs »[5] visant à dénoncer le manque de diversité de l'institution. Pour ce choix, il a été, ensuite, accusé de racisme antiblanc. Il est possible que dans un autre cadre ou avec un autre public, qui s'identifie au point de vue du stand-uppeur, le discours aurait pu avoir du succès. Dans ce cas-là, il a provoqué une polémique. Sans être concernés par le contenu du discours, mais seulement par la réaction que celui-ci a provoquée, nous comprenons que cela dépasse la question du politiquement correct. Le fait que Fary soit accusé de racisme, signifie que l'exposition du stand-uppeur est vraie, puisque la conviction théâtrale de la suspension consentie de l'incrédulité est remise en question, malgré le contenu fictif ou auto-fictif du discours. Est-ce que les spectateurs d'une pièce théâtrale accuseraient un personnage fictif pour ses idées et ses actions sur scène ? Évidemment que non. Alors, le fait qu'ils agissent ainsi dans le cas du stand-up prouve l'authenticité de l'interaction avec le public, comme mentionnée précédemment, mais surtout le haut degré d'exposition publique du stand-uppeur.

La technique du « caractère fictif » est une question polyphonique (Wilmet) assez compliquée du point de vue linguistique et peut être dangereuse pour l'éthos du stand-uppeur qui s'autofictionne, vu que, comme l'explique Rabatel, la distinction entre la voix du stand-uppeur et celle du caractère fictif n'est pas toujours claire. Alors, nous supposons que cette technique s'applique plus facilement dans la partie narrative du stand-up (voir exemple 5) et moins dans la partie argumentative. Nous doutons fortement qu'un stand-uppeur, étant aussi auteur du discours, choisisse d'argumenter pour une thèse avec laquelle il n'est pas d'accord dans la vraie vie. Il paraît logique qu'au premier degré, aucun stand-uppeur homosexuel ne parlerait pour l'homophobie (v. *infra* – exemple 12), de la même manière qu'aucun stand-uppeur homophobe ne parlerait contre l'homophobie. Les quelques exemples d'humoristes dont la position diffère sur scène et hors scène sont minoritaires. Cela prouve que cette technique ne constitue pas une norme générique, mais un cas

exceptionnel, qui semble finalement concerner plus le genre théâtral du *one-man-show* et moins le stand-up.

Nous concluons que pour des questions génériques, le stand-uppeur est obligé de déclarer qu'il dit la vérité pour convaincre le public que sa personnalité hors scène est celle sur scène convergent. Dans ce cadre, il a recours à l'autofiction, puisqu'au contraire des autres artistes, acteurs ou littéraires, il n'est protégé par aucun pacte littéraire ou à la rigueur humoristique (Leca-Mercier et Paillet 35). Il est jugé comme tout autre orateur de la sphère publique, privé du droit de la *parrêsia*, la possibilité de parler librement derrière ses caractères fictifs. Par conséquent, il doit être vigilant aux enjeux communicatifs que cela implique, rendant indispensable la défense et le soin de son éthos scénique et extra-scénique.

Les stratégies protégeant l'orateur autofictionné

Il a été démontré que l'impératif de véracité résulte du fait que l'énonciation du stand-up doit apparaître comme étant la moins fabriquée possible afin de susciter l'implication du public. Cependant, créer des doutes chez le public à propos de cette véracité peut rendre le discours encore plus intéressant tout en modérant l'exposition personnelle du stand-uppeur. Dans le cadre général de l'autofiction, l'orateur stand-uppeur peut jouer avec les apparences, le vrai et le faux, la réalité et la fiction, le premier et le second degré. En oscillant ainsi entre la réalité et la fiction, il a la possibilité de parler des expériences douloureuses de sa vie sans devoir admettre explicitement si elles sont vraies ou fausses.

En ce qui concerne le niveau argumentatif, il peut adopter une posture plus engagée et prononcer des arguments avec lesquels il n'est pas d'accord personnellement, à condition d'avoir recours au second degré pour montrer un contrepoint ou simplement pour provoquer. Dans un brouillard énonciatif donc, réussi grâce à la prise de distance et au dédoublement énonciatif, le stand-uppeur laisse apparaître seulement les éléments qu'il veut afin de s'assurer

qu'il ne sera pas jugé pour ce qu'il est en tant que personnalité, mais seulement pour ce qu'il dit sur scène.

L'exposition de la fonction protectrice de l'autofiction en tant qu'archi-technique étant démontrée, cette deuxième partie de l'article examine de près comment elle est mise en pratique par le stand-uppeur. Les stratégies qui seront développées par la suite sont l'élaboration d'un éthos rhétorique modeste et anti-héroïque ; la figure conceptuelle de l'ironie facilitant la prise de distance et la possibilité de la critique implicite ; et le passage au métadiscours faisant appel au caractère épidictique du genre. Outre la provocation immédiate du rire, le point commun de ces techniques est que, sous la tutelle de l'autofiction, elles permettent au stand-uppeur de protéger son éthos discursif et de sauver sa face pendant l'exposition scénique, voire publique.

Première stratégie : la preuve éthique

L'exposition étant considérable, l'orateur du stand-up doit s'en protéger. La première façon pour y réussir, concerne la preuve rhétorique de l'*éthos*. Comme le public participe activement au dialogue, verbalement en répondant aux questions du stand-uppeur ou à travers le rire, s'occuper de son éthos semble une condition *sine qua non*. Cela est nécessaire pour influencer positivement l'interprétation de l'auditoire (Maingueneau) avec des arguments qui résident dans le caractère moral de l'orateur et conditionnent sa crédibilité. Ainsi, le stand-uppeur fait des déclarations classiques pour gagner la faveur et la compassion du public en combinant la preuve éthique à celle pathétique. À titre d'exemple :

(6) Ma femme a déjà un enfant. Elle a un petit garçon, il a 8 ans et moi, je n'aime pas dire que c'est comme mon fils… je n'aime pas dire ça, parce que ça sous-entend qu'il ne l'est pas…et c'est mon fils, mon petit garçon, c'est mon bonhomme, c'est à moi, c'est mon petit garçon et vraiment je fais de mon mieux avec ce petit garçon, il est

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> là et sait que je fais vraiment de mon mieux et ma
> position par rapport à cet enfant, elle est vraiment cool.
> (Jason Brokerss, *Le mariage*)

Dans cet exemple (6), Jason Brokerss partagerait une information de sa vie privée et plus particulièrement de sa famille recomposée. Il décrit sa relation avec le fils de son épouse en soulignant que, bien qu'il ne soit pas son enfant biologique, cela ne les empêche pas d'avoir une relation père-fils ordinaire. Outre l'annonce du sujet, l'emploi des possessifs en répétition : « [c'est] mon fils…mon petit garçon… mon bonhomme…mon petit garçon…[je fais de] mon mieux…mon mieux…ma position » ainsi que la déclaration répétée : « je fais de mon mieux avec ce petit garçon, il est là et sait que je fais vraiment de mon mieux et ma position par rapport à cet enfant » montrent son affection et son investissement en tant que parent. En combinant le pathos et l'éthos, le stand-uppeur provoque des sentiments de compassion chez les spectateurs, ce qui lui permet de gagner leur faveur et leur confiance.

Modérer son éthos arrogant

Parlant en P1 et investissant sur son éthos discursif, le stand-uppeur devrait paraître arrogant et égocentrique, ce qui n'est pas le cas. En effet, dans le stand-up, le locuteur se présente souvent comme la victime de la blague visant à l'éthos d'un antihéros (Springford), qui expose son intimité originale, voire étrange et imparfaite. Apparaissant comme impeccable, l'humoriste risque la confiance du public (Leca-Mercier et Paillet 27). Sans pouvoir généraliser, adopter une posture offensive peut également constituer un choix technique visant à un effet différent, peut-être de provocation. Toutefois, suivant la norme générale, le stand-uppeur français abandonne volontairement son propre sérieux en faveur de son éthos et s'autocritique avant tout.

Rhétoriquement, il est assez intéressant de voir comment l'éthos du stand-uppeur se renforce quand il est modéré. Nous supposons que l'auto-limitation, ainsi que l'admission de ses défauts, fonctionnent très positivement pour l'éthos du stand-uppeur, parce qu'ils témoignent d'une sorte de maturité et de prise de conscience de soi-même. Ainsi gagne-t-il des points d'honnêteté et réussit-il à donner une image de soi correcte, sa « face » selon Goffman. D'ailleurs, il faut du courage émotionnel pour admettre ses échecs et encore plus pour s'en moquer, l'intention de communication du stand-uppeur étant finalement de provoquer le rire. Voici quelques exemples d'éthos modéré:

(7)   Parce que moi j'ai 28 ans et ma relation la plus longue a duré deux mois ; eeh moi aussi je suis dans une misère sexuelle et je me frotte pas aux gens. (Tania Butel, *#MeToo*)

(8)   Je me suis taillé une moustache de pédophile pour ce soir, j'espère que ça vous plaît [rire] [il le montre] je voulais le faire stylé, mais on dirait deux barres de flipper, c'est ridicule [rire] [il rit]. (Adrien Arnoux, *Ma grand-mère raciste*)

Dans les deux cas, les stand-uppeurs passent à des déclarations qui ne mettent pas en valeur leur apparence : « Je me suis taillé une moustache de pédophile ; on dirait deux barres de flipper » ; ou leur personnalité : « ma relation la plus longue a duré deux mois ». L'admission d'avoir des défauts, parfois très clairement : « c'est ridicule », montre l'aspect humain des stand-uppeurs sur le mode de l'autodérision. Même s'il s'agit de l'autofiction, cette pratique facilite la détente et l'identification du public, qui compatit avec le stand-uppeur comme victime de la blague.

Pour vérifier cette hypothèse, voyons un exemple d'éthos qui ne correspond pas aux normes du stand-up. Xavier Campagne, en étant trop théâtral dans son action, finit par montrer un éthos

arrogant, qui manque de véracité et de faiblesse antihéroïque.

(9)   Avant de me présenter devant vous ce soir, j'ai cherché quelques…idées…quelques conseils auprès de mon entourage et un ami très cher m'a regardé droit dans les yeux et il m'a dit : « Xavier, [il rit faux rire] raconte ta vie, c'est une blague en elle-même [il fait un geste] si si je t'assure » ; Ainsi, il m'a envoyé une petite liste de sujets à aborder ce soir et on va en choisir ensemble…Détendez-vous, je cherche un physique bien particulier [il fait semblant de chercher] [rire très faible] Tient, toi au premier rang, comment tu t'appelles ?

-       Inès

-       Inès ? T'inquiète pas, ça va revenir à la mode. [rire]

Donc en seconde j'étais amoureux de…Inès [il fait un geste pour saluer Inès] Cependant, avant d'aborder cette très jolie jeune femme, il fallait que… (…) Donc, après plusieurs mois de préparation physique et mentale, je décide d'inviter cette charmante [petite pause] Merde, j'ai dû le noter, c'est quoi ton prénom déjà ?

- Inès

Inès…je décide d'inviter cette très jolie…Inès à ma soirée rallye. Alors oui, ceux qui connaissent pas les rallyes sont des petites soirées entre bourges pour mépriser les classes populaires [rire très faible] Oh là là, j'adore les pauvres, oh pardon [il parle à soi-même] donc, [il continue] (…) (Xavier Campagne, *Mon premier râteau*)

Dans un cadre d'interprétation théâtrale, le stand-uppeur ose interagir avec le public. Il s'agit d'un choix technique assez risqué si l'interaction est clairement façonnée, ce qui influence négativement

son éthos. De plus, des énoncés offensifs l'empêchent de gagner la faveur du public : « T'inquiète pas, ça va revenir à la mode » ; « les rallyes sont des petites soirées entre bourges pour mépriser les classes populaires ; Oh là là, j'adore les pauvres, oh pardon ». Des déclarations arrogantes de ce type éloignent le stand-uppeur du public et entravent l'immédiateté et l'originalité de leur interaction. Adopter un caractère offensant sur scène demande de l'expérience pour que son intention pure soit toujours explicite.

En cohérence avec l'élimination de son éthos prétentieux, nous observons qu'il y a des cas où le stand-uppeur semble s'approprier un stéréotype sur la base duquel il crée sa blague. Pour éviter d'être insultant avec des blagues facilement considérées offensantes contre une personne ou une communauté, il choisit de cibler des communautés dont il fait partie, en « absorbant » ainsi une partie de l'attitude offensive (Leca-Mercier et Paillet 26). Dans les exemples suivants, Nam Ngo et Rayan Djellal semblent accepter des stéréotypes qui les concernent:

(10)   Bonsoir, bonsoir. Voilà, je me présente, je m'appelle Nam. C'est la deuxième fois que je monte sur scène pour faire du stand-up… et ça se voit pas forcément comme ça, mais je suis hyper-stressé et moi j'ai un très très grand problème, quand je stresse…moi quand je stresse je bande [rire faible] [petite pause] mais comme je suis chinois, ça se voit pas [rire] merci, non, rigolez pas, c'était juste pour voir s'y avait des racistes dans la salle, je vois qu'il y en a pas mal… (Nam Ngo, *Je ne bois pas d'alcool*)

(11)   Y avait un prof de mon école, il m'a reconnu, c'était un prof de maths – Ah comment je savais que c'était un prof de maths ? il avait l'accent marocain [le stand-uppeur a aussi l'accent marocain] [rire]. (Rayan Djellal, *École de Commerce & Romantisme*)

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Dans l'exemple (10), l'effet d'un éthos modeste est réussi par trois voies : a) le stand-uppeur admet sa faiblesse : « je suis hyper-stressé » ; b) il s'autofictionne en racontant son problème intime : « quand je stresse je bande » ; et enfin c) il crée une blague basé sur un stéréotype contre une communauté dont il fait partie : « comme je suis chinois, ça se voit pas ». Selon le stéréotype raciste en question, les parties intimes des Chinois sont de petite taille.

Dans l'exemple (11) la même technique est employée mais de façon moins directe : « comment je savais que c'était un prof de maths ? il avait l'accent marocain ». Au fait, un des stéréotypes racistes concernant les Maghrébins est qu'ils sont tous informaticiens ou mathématiciens. Parlant aussi avec un accent marocain, le stand-uppeur s'identifie à la personne qu'il vient de critiquer, ce qui modère l'effet de son éthos. Dans les deux cas, les stand-uppeurs assument le rôle de la victime implicite ou explicite de la blague racontée puisque l'attaque les concerne personnellement.

Deuxième stratégie: la figure de l'ironie

Une autre solution est la prise de distance par rapport à l'énoncé offensif. Pour y réussir, les stand-uppeurs optent très souvent pour la figure de pensée de l'ironie. Grâce au dédoublement énonciatif provoqué, qui fonctionne comme un emballage (second degré) pour ses énoncés (premier degré), le stand-uppeur exprime implicitement sa critique et ses idées provocatrices. En général, il fait mine d'accepter un point de vue extérieur ou négatif à son égard tout en laissant entendre que cela n'est pas vrai. Nous relevons des exemples des stand-uppeurs expérimentés qui passent à la critique dans leur argumentation en optant pour l'ironie. Voyons quelques exemples :

(12) Si tu es gay, tu es forcément un peu nympho, ça aussi c'est hyper-logique… si tu aimes les hommes, tu es attiré par touuus [allongement syllabique] les hommes du monde…[ironie] (…) À moi les gars-là…mmm…je me

retiens de vous sauter dessus. [pause] Vous inquiétez pas… j'ai pris mes médicaments. [intonation montante] [rire]. (Alex Ramirès, *Les clichés sur les gays*)

(13)   Ça fait 12 ans que je suis en France, donc ça fait 12 ans que je suis un expatrié et je dis que je suis un expatrié et pas un immigré parce que je suis [pause] blanc. [petite pause] [rire] Voilà, c'est la seule différence apparemment. Non c'est pas parce que je suis blanc, c'est parce que je suis américain, parce qu'un noir américain, il est aussi un expatrié, parce qu'un noir qui parle français avec un accent américain, il est pas noir, il est Morgan Freeman [rire]. Donc si vous voulez savoir si vous êtes un expatrié ou un immigré, c'est très simple, vous dites dans une soirée d'où vous venez et si la personne te dit « pourquoi t'es là », t'es un expatrié, s'il dit rien, t'es un immigré. [rire] « Ah tu viens de New York…pourquoi t'es là ? » ; « Ah tu viens de Portugal… » [pause] voilà…très simple ! [applaudissement]. (Sebastian Marx, *La langue française*)

(14)   Ouais, c'est pas du tout le même délire. Là, j'ai cité deux extrêmes. C'était Maghreb et la péninsule arabique, mais même très proche t'as des mésententes. Le Yémen… vous avez entendu parler du Yémen. Yémen, pour ceux qui connaissent pas, c'est un pays qui est assez plat et l'Arabie Saoudite s'est dit : « c'est trop plat, on va, on va bombarder un peu… [pause d'hésitation] pour faire des trous ». [rire] (Haroun, *Le monde arabe*)

Dans l'exemples (12), le stand-uppeur Alex Ramirès introduit l'hypergénéralisation selon laquelle un homme homosexuel est attiré par tous les autres hommes. L'hypothèse qu'il utilise l'ironie est confirmée par son énoncé suivant, qui a déclenché le rire : « Vous inquiétez pas… j'ai pris mes médicaments ». Avec un syllogisme plus développé dans l'exemple (13), Sebastian Marx tente de

présenter la différence de traitement des étrangers en France et leur catégorisation parmi les immigrés ou les expatriés. En comparant deux différentes nationalités, le stand-uppeur montre son désaccord avec cette discrimination en sous-entendant qu'elle est simplement absurde, voire raciste. En dernier, l'argument selon lequel le Yémen est si plat qu'il faut « bombarder un peu » (exemple 14) pour justifier les guerres dans la région, est utilisé par Haroun pour affirmer via l'ironie la gratuité de la guerre.

Alors, la dissociation énonciative de l'ironie entre les propos du locuteur et son attitude, qui nous oblige à réinterpréter l'argument, fonctionne comme un bouclier pour le stand-uppeur, lui permettant de dire une chose pour signifier le contraire (Fromilhague 105). Pourtant, il faut souligner l'importance de la clarté dans cette technique. Quand il emploie l'ironie, le stand-uppeur est toujours explicite afin de se distancier du message et de montrer son opposition. Sinon, il risque de donner l'impression qu'il accepte le contenu de l'énoncé. Examinons ces exemples :

(15) C'est tellement difficile de définir ce que c'est qu'un arabe…que peut-être qu'un arabe, fin, des vrais arabes il y a nulle part…ou alors…ou alors…ils sont partout [rire et applaudissement]. (Haroun, *Le monde arabe*)

(16) Moi je suis maman, j'ai une petite fille de 6 ans, et quand j'étais enceinte, j'avais un rêve et je voulais appeler ma fille « Jeannelle » et le papa est portugais… [petite pause] [quelques rires] Y a des portugais dans la salle ? [quelques réactions] Y a des portugais !...ils sont partout ! [rire] [elle rit]. (Laurie Peret, *Choisir un prénom*)

(17) C'est pour ça d'ailleurs que jeee, j'ai pas d'enfants. Alors, attention, j'ai rien contre les enfants euh ! j'en connais [rire] j'en ai dans mon entourage… je respecte leurs coutumes, leur mode de vie, y a pas de… Mais comment vous dire, pour moi les enfants, bah, c'est un petit peu

comme les immigrants, voyez, c'est-à-dire, ça me touche, mais j'ai pas envie d'en avoir chez moi [rire et applaudissement]. (David Azencot, *Les enfants*)

Dans les exemples présentés, les énoncés ironiques prennent la forme des pastiches : « ils sont partout » (exemples 15 et 16) et « j'ai rien contre [X] ; j'en connais ; j'en ai dans mon entourage (…) » (exemple 17). Dans les deux cas, il s'agit des phrases utilisées régulièrement dans des discours caractérisés comme racistes, mais employées ici dans un autre contexte, ce qui provoque le rire. Après la phrase « j'ai rien contre [X] … Mais », une partie de la population ciblée est souvent attendue à suivre. En revanche, David Azencot l'utilise en se référant aux enfants, un choix atypique. Le contraste entre le co(n)texte d'emploi habituel et celui des exemples constitue un argument ironique et humoristique à la fois. Le stand-uppeur prend de la distance par rapport à sa propre affirmation en s'opposant clairement à l'usage habituel de ces expressions.

Par ailleurs, il faut noter que la prosodie fonctionne comme indice pour exprimer ce détachement souvent via une pause légère avant les énoncés ironiques. Sans ces pauses d'ironie, le stand-uppeur pourrait être accusé d'avoir assumé le point de vue d'un raciste. Par conséquent, grâce à la manière de prononciation de l'argument, c'est-à-dire l'action rhétorique (voix et posture mimo-gestuelle), le stand-uppeur réussit à éclairer sa prise de position et à effectuer sa critique.

Insulte sans destinataire

Une autre manière de doubler l'énonciation, constituant une sorte d'ironie, est repérée quand le stand-uppeur s'adresse à une personne absente de manière vulgaire. La notion de vulgarité, définie comme le « non-respect des bienséances » (Molinié 335), souvent doublée par l'hyperbole, est exagérée au service de l'humoristique sans destinataire particulier. Les gros mots ou les jurons ne sont pas obligatoirement des insultes pour attaquer quelqu'un

personnellement, puisque cela serait catastrophique pour l'éthos du stand-uppeur. Assez expressive, la véhémence crée certainement de la tension et, quand elle est clairement fausse, elle provoque plus facilement le rire. Voyons un exemple d'insulte qui constitue la forme minimale de véhémence provoquant un effet humoristique maximal :

(18)   [à propos des filles sur Instagram] Le summum de ce qu'elle fait, le maximum du narcissisme pour moi, elle met une photo d'elle [pause] elle écrit en dessous : « Bonne journée » [rire] [pause] Pour elle [pause] C'est un don ! [rire] [...] Bonne journée ? Sois honnête avec moi, c'est pas du tout ce que tu veux me dire, ce que tu veux me dire c'est « je suis bonne » [rire] « je suis bonne et vous me toucherez jamais, bande de crevards », c'est ça que tu veux dire [rire] baiseuse... [rire]. (Fary, # *Hashtag*)

Dans cet exemple, Fary semble entrer vraiment dans un débat où il s'adresse à son collocuteur imaginaire : « Bonne journée ? Sois honnête avec moi, c'est pas du tout ce que tu veux me dire » ; et à la fin, il l'insulte aussi avec un mot vulgaire : « baiseuse ». Le spectateur rit, en étant rassuré par la fausseté de la véhémence, car la personne insultée en question est non seulement absente de la situation de communication, mais aussi complètement fictive. Ce choix constitue une autre manière d'attaque indirecte pour s'opposer à une pratique, une idée ou une mentalité. Alors, au sein de l'autofiction, de nombreux récits de ce type peuvent être créés et racontés par les stand-uppeurs. En ajoutant simplement des parties de conflit et des attaques impersonnelles dans une histoire triviale, celle-ci peut se transformer en une blague très réussie.

Dernière stratégie : passer au métadiscours

Quand elle n'est pas assez claire de manière indirecte, la fictivité des propos du stand-uppeur peut être soulignée grâce au métadiscours (Williams-Wanguet 20). Symptomatique de la postmodernité, la technique en question est omniprésente dans le discours du stand-up faisant preuve d'un esprit autoréflexif (Lepaludier). Pendant les moments de métadiscours, le stand-uppeur sort de la réalité du discours (Lepaludier) et désormais, dans l'énonciation principale avec le public, il explicite sa technique en rappelant à ses spectateurs qu'ils assistent à un spectacle. De cette manière, il admet qu'il s'autofictionne, bien qu'il mette en question la véracité du genre entier. Son objectif est, d'une part, de provoquer le rire visant à la complicité du public et, d'autre part, de se protéger de la critique.

Il est effectivement paradoxal que la même technique serve au stand-uppeur aussi bien pour actualiser son discours que pour prouver sa spectacularité. En l'examinant, nous repérons la position exacte de l'autofiction entre la fiction et l'autobiographie et nous comprenons pourquoi l'autofiction et la métafiction sont employées de façon complémentaire. Examinons les exemples suivantes :

(19)   Vous aussi ça vous arrive de péter en toussant ? [rire] On a été saisis par la transition ? [rire] J'appelle ça « le toupet » [applaudissement, elle sourit]. (Tania Dutel, *#MeToo*)

(20)   J'aime bien cette vanne, parce que c'est la seule vanne culturelle de mon sketch un peu… [rire et applaudissement]. (Rayan Djellal, *École de Commerce & Romantisme*)

(21)   C'est un spectacle éducatif, voilà [rire] y a des moments aussi où…y a pas de vannes, on apprend des trucs [rire]. (Kheiron, *On vous ment sur les prénoms*)

(22)   Du coup j'ai arrêté, j'ai arrêté et j'ai ça [il montre son portable, un vieil appareil] C'est vraiment pas un sketch, c'est pas pour mon sketch que je fais ça. Je serais une personne horrible… parler des enfants et après genre chez moi, j'ai un iPhone en or, tu sais. [rire] (Shirley Souagnon, *Comment j'ai arrêté l'Iphone*)

Au sein du métadiscours, dans l'exemple (19), Tania Dutel commente sa transition discursive vulgaire du point de vue aussi rhétorique (manque de cohésion) que thématique (contenu scatologique) : «Vous aussi ça vous arrive de péter en toussant ? ». Elle le fait à travers une question directe : « On a été saisis par la transition ? ». Dans les exemples (20) et (21) le métadiscours est utilisé en liaison avec le travail d'un éthos éliminé (v. *supra*). Rayan Djellal et Kheiron se présentent comme peu professionnels puisque le premier n'a qu'une « seule vanne culturelle [dans son] sketch » et le second finit par prononcer un discours plus éducatif et moins humoristique : « C'est un spectacle éducatif, voilà [rire] y a des moments aussi où…y a pas de vannes, on apprend des trucs ». Enfin, dans l'exemple (22), la stand-uppeuse insiste sur la vérité de ses propos : « C'est vraiment pas un sketch, c'est pas pour mon sketch que je fais ça ». Cela ne pouvant pas être vérifié, nous devons supposer qu'elle s'autofictionne en ayant recours au métadiscours pour sauver sa face et provoquer le rire.

Il parait que les blagues les plus réussies sont effectivement celles du niveau pragmatique, qui font référence à l'énonciation de la salle à laquelle les spectateurs participent comme agents. Il s'agit souvent des blagues fondées sur ce qui est mentionné pendant l'échange du stand-uppeur avec le public. D'ailleurs, le stand-up doit apparaître aussi réel que possible (même s'il ne l'est pas toujours) pour justifier sa nature de spectacle vivant interactif. Par conséquent, en exposant sa technique via le métadiscours, le stand-uppeur gagne finalement de la légitimité générique.

Conclusion

En guise de conclusion, il a été confirmé que l'implication personnelle du stand-uppeur conditionne le succès du discours, puisque son absence empêche l'identification du public. Cela signifie une exposition personnelle importante pour le stand-uppeur, qui dispose son vécu et ses pensées intimes au jugement du public (Springford), sans être protégé par aucun pacte littéraire ou humoristique (Leca-Mercier et Paillet 35). Le rôle primordial de l'autofiction dans le discours du stand-up est donc indubitable pour la protection de son éthos. Le recours du stand-uppeur à cette technique, qui lui offre une certaine liberté d'expression tout en espérant l'approbation du public, paraît la solution idéale, sinon une nécessité.

Au cours de cet article, après avoir expliqué les enjeux de l'autofiction et sa fonction, nous avons démontré comment le stand-uppeur en fait concrètement usage au niveau pratique. En particulier, ayant à sa disposition les moyens rhétoriques, l'éthos modeste et la duplicité énonciative due à l'ironie, l'artiste de stand-up vise à gagner la compassion et la faveur du public afin d'exprimer ses idées éventuellement provocatrices. Pour sauver face, il peut enfin opter pour le métadiscours tout en risquant de mettre en question l'authenticité du genre.

Sans aucun doute, l'orateur de cet art discursif spectaculaire, peut jouer avec les apparences et des illusions, à condition que son intention divertissante soit toujours claire. Alors, représentatif de l'éloquence épidictique, qui penche vers la satire et l'autocritique, le stand-up est un bon exemple pour comprendre les limites de l'art rhétorique et ses capacités formelles.

Corpus

Voir l'ensemble de ce corpus en ligne :

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/adkdbl54rn8etvrl5qeup/
KAISARLI_corpus_article_L–effet-de-l–autofiction-sur-l–thos-de-
stand–up_2024.xlsx?
rlkey=a3pnc8xnmaxwj78x2wt9utsh4&st=jkvplm0b&dl=0

Notes

[1] Dans cet article, le terme « le stand‑uppeur » est utilisé de valeur générique en nous référant à l'ensemble des artistes indépendamment de leur sexe.

[2] Riffing : interagir avec le public sur un ton humoristique souvent en posant une question.

[3] Ad libitum : ajouter des blagues improvisées dans un discours de stand‑up en interaction avec le public.

[4] Acting out : la partie de la démonstration humoristique du stand‑uppeur qui utilise le discours direct pour « jouer » un dialogue au lieu de le rapporter.

[5] FARY, 2019. « Salut les blancs ! » : Fary dénonce le manque de diversité aux Molières avec beaucoup d'humour ! [en ligne]. 2019. Disponible à l'adresse : https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x78gn1m [Consulté le 11 juillet 2024].

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Procedural Rhetoric in Operational Optical Media: How Humans Are Persuaded to See the World

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Abstract: Visual rhetoric functions as an effective tool to critique the ways in which visual media—things we look at—persuade the viewer to the goal of the image. However, with the emergence of smart glasses and other augmented reality headsets, this article calls for the need for a new rhetorical approach to modes of looking. Using Ian Bogost's concept of procedural rhetoric, this article critically examines how optical media—things we look through—persuade viewing subjects by producing institutional and technological modes of visuality.

Friedrich Kittler argued that with the advancement of military media, technologies would produce "subjects who no longer need any persuasion" to send the final message in the receiver's life (*Gramophone* 118). Using the coincidence rangefinder as an analogue case study, this article illustrates how the act of looking through forms of optical media persuades subjects to adopt culturally dominant epistemologies, and in the case of warfare, to send the final message.

Keywords: optical media, visual rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, smartglasses

Résumé : La rhétorique visuelle fonctionne comme un outil efficace pour critiquer les façons dont les médias visuels – les choses que nous regardons – persuadent le spectateur de l'objectif de l'image. Cependant, avec l'émergence des lunettes intelligentes et autres casques de réalité augmentée, cet article insiste sur la nécessité d'une nouvelle approche rhétorique des modes de vision. En utilisant le concept de rhétorique procédurale d'Ian Bogost, cet article examine de manière critique comment les médias optiques – les choses à travers lesquelles nous regardons – persuadent les sujets spectateurs en produisant des modes de visualité institutionnels et technologiques.

Friedrich Kittler a soutenu qu'avec l'avancement des médias militaires, les technologies produiraient « des sujets qui n'ont plus besoin de persuasion » pour envoyer le message final dans la vie du récepteur (*Gramophone* 118). En utilisant le télémètre à coïncidence comme point de comparaison, cet article illustre comment

l'acte de regarder à travers des formes de médias optiques persuade les sujets d'adopter des épistémologies culturellement dominantes, et dans le cas de la guerre, d'envoyer le message final.

Mots–clés : médias optiques, rhétorique visuelle, rhétorique procédurale, lunettes intelligentes

Once we have seen something, we have already started to destroy it.

– Paul Virilio, "Perception, Politics and the Intellectual"

Introduction

To protect its shores from invaders and enemies, King Minos of Ancient Crete had Talos—a giant bronze automaton made by the God Hephaestus—walk the perimeter of the island, his gaze out to sea, ready to defeat an enemy at first sight (Mayor 10). The effectiveness of Talos lay not only in his ability to sink enemy ships by throwing large stones at them, but in his ability to accurately sight and identify enemies at a distance. Ballistics mean nothing without a proper sighting, and unless soldiers and technologies are persuaded to see an enemy, no shots will be taken. Friedrich Kittler argued that with the advancement of military media, technologies would produce "subjects who no longer need any persuasion" to send the final message in the receiver's life (*Gramophone* 118).

Jeremy Packer and Joshua Reeves illustrate that in the case of drone warfare, the automation of military technologies removes the hesitancy and foolishness of the human subject by replacing the human with AI (Packer and Reeves 18). Unlike ancient Talos and contemporary drone warfare, this article attends to circuits where it is still necessary to persuade human subjects, and to how technologies of looking do the work of persuasion (Packer et al. 15). Looking through optical media such as telescopes, smart glasses, or gun scopes persuades viewers of their own faulty subjectivity and of the goal of the discourse network the optical technology is

embedded within: in the case of warfare, to accurately identify the enemy (Núñez de Villavicencio). Using Ian Bogost's concept of procedural rhetoric, defined as the process of persuading a subject to change opinion or move to action through enacting set rules of behaviour (125), this article critically examines the role of optical media in producing institutional and technological modes of visuality. It considers how the affordances of optical media always already determine the meaning-making practices in our visual communication processes.

In "The Rhetoric of Videogames," Bogost describes how within a set of rules, a space is created for play, and how humans within this circuit have the space to make meaning only according to the rules already in place (Bogost). In his piece, Bogost is describing videogames, not military practices. However, in his description of army videogames such as *America's Army: Operations*, a first-person shooter game released by the US Army in 2002, Bogost describes how these experiences functioned as a site of procedural rhetoric because they gave players the space to explore and make their own meaning within the constraints of war and its accompanying rules (Bogost 128). Bogost highlights the ways in which the emergence of new media in the form of photography and cinema in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries demanded the development of the subfield of visual rhetoric to account for these technological turns, as visual communication "cannot simply adopt the figures and forms of oral and written expression" (Bogost 124). Visual rhetoric functions as an effective tool to analyze the ways in which visual media—things we look at—persuade the viewer in line with the goal of the image. However, with the emergence and popularization of smart glasses, heads-up displays (HUDs), and other augmented reality and virtual reality headsets and glasses, this article calls for a new rhetorical approach to modes of looking, where it is recognized that studies of optical communication, to use Bogost's phrase, "cannot simply adopt the figures and forms" of visual rhetoric because while they attend to the persuasive effect of the

content we look at, they do not contend with the way the media we look through persuade viewers to see and make specific meaning.

In echoing Bogost's call for new rhetorical approaches for studying visuals and videogames, this article also considers how the act of looking within the constraints set by optical technologies embedded in discourse networks sets up spaces for play where meaning-making occurs within the affordances of the technology. For example, the emergence of smart glasses demands a new rhetorical approach that contends with the act of looking through media and not only at media. Bogost "suggest[s] the name procedural rhetoric for the practice of using processes persuasively," a sub-domain of procedural authorship where meaning is made not by the production of words and images, but by the construction of rules of behaviour where subjects are persuaded through enacting these behaviours (125).

This article takes up Bogost's terminology to examine optical media and the ways in which subjects are persuaded to see the world by the rules of behaviour or affordances produced by the optical media within specific discourse networks. However, it should be noted that the term *optical media* has traditionally been used to refer to looking-at and looking-through technologies alike, such as television or a magnifying glass respectively. To effectively cleave these into those looking-at technologies to which visual rhetoric already applies (and whose visual rhetoric has already been examined through semiotics, art history, and so forth), such as television and printed or digital images, and those looking-through technologies that require a new positioning, such as glasses and telescopes, a distinction must be made between traditional optical media and what I will call operational optical media (OOM).

Examples of OOM include analogue media such as reading glasses, microscopes and telescopes, and digital media such as smart glasses, HUDs, and headsets. These are the technologies we must look

through to witness images, screens, and reality. The following sections devote space to the examination of OOM as a persuasive technology and offer a case study in the optical rangefinder, an analogue precursor to radar and an essential visual tool in the early twentieth century. Although this paper stems from an interest in contemporary digital OOM, historical analogue OOM function as an effective case study because they illustrate how the act of looking through a lens, whether or not it is supported by augmented reality, always already persuades the subject to make circuit-specific meaning.

Operational Optical Media

There are five key elements that distinguish operational optical media from traditional optical media and persuade the viewing subject to make meaning valuable to the system: OOM are selective, they function in real-time, they are individuated, they co-produce images, and they have the capacity for space-axis manipulation, all of which produces an operational viewing that is persuasive in nature. To best understand OOM characteristics, we will offer the example of reading glasses.

Selection can be approached as both a filtering practice and an encoding practice. Situating these practices within a discourse network, defined as "the network of technologies and institutions that allow a given culture to select, store, and process relevant data" (Kittler, *Discourse* 369), gives us a context for approaching the practice of filtration. Filtering visual data—as it is not yet contextualized or shaped and therefore not quite information yet—is a practice that already defines which data are relevant to a system of context. OOM will filter data in distinct ways, depending on the goal of their use. Or put another way, OOM will filter signal from noise. But this can be a difficult process to recognize. Approaching selection as an act of encoding will better define the process of filtration as a communication practice.

Consider Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver's well-known model of communication. Communication can be defined as the movement of data or information. There are five distinct aspects to the Shannon-Weaver model of communication: source, encoding, transmission, decoding, and storage (Shannon and Weaver 7). The source of a visual communication—the message, content, or signal—cannot occur without light. In the absence of light there is no message, save that no message exists. For the purpose of this illustration, fire will stand as our source, the small flame at the top of a candle. The second aspect is the encoding of this light, the filtration of physical rays of light through a lens that allows some rays to pass through and deflects others. Selection of signal from noise, or the filtration of scattered light rays, occurs through a number of agents that transform the signal. Among those agents are the cornea, iris, and lens in the eye that refract and focus rays of light to produce an image on the back of the retina (Piccolino and Moriondo 133). Readers who have driven at night only to realize that they have forgotten to put on their glasses will immediately recognize this act of filtration, where all blurred light sharpens from its star-like shapes into clear distinct headlamps and car lights. Those who have never been burdened by face-worn technology can rest comfortably in the knowledge that the lenses in their eyes can naturally filter signal from noise to produce standard visual content.

The third aspect of visual communication is transmission. This occurs through the optic nerves, which carry the encoded signal to the parts of the brain that will decode the content, producing an image and, as the last step, storing it (Piccolino and Moriondo 133). The image that is produced on the back of the retina is further encoded by the rod and cone cells, nerve cells, bipolar cells, horizontal cells, amacrine cells, and ganglion cells that line the thin membrane at the back of the retina (Piccolino and Moriondo 133). That is, a plethora of cells work together to filter relevant data from the rays of light that have already been selected, producing a signal that is then transmitted by the optic nerve to areas of the brain that then decode it and store it—the final two aspects of the model.

Critical work that has focused on those visual technologies that humans look at, such as film and painting, has carefully considered the capacity of the medium to store encoded signals and transmit messages to the viewer. In the case of OOM such as reading glasses that enact the selection process before the eye selects and encodes again, their affordances determine what can be consumed by the viewer, limiting the capacity for what can be seen, where it can be seen, and how it can be seen, e.g., small print held a short distance from the face (Packer et al. 179). As selection media, OOM determine relevant data, preceding all other components in a discourse network and establishing the foundation for what kinds of visual knowledge can be produced. To be clear, OOM determine what visual data can enter a discourse network, but they are incapable of storing or processing the data into knowledge; those processes belong to other technologies. The relationship between operational optical media and optical media as they are traditionally referred to is a difference in kind, not in degree. For a person who requires glasses, optical media such as an advertisement and all its encompassing visual rhetoric can only enter into a discourse network upon the selection of visual information through the reading glasses (OOM), which present it to the eyes of the observer.

As a selection technology, OOM are also based on real-time images. Without the capacity to store content, they cannot perform a time-axis manipulation (Kittler, *Gramophone* 34). Unable to bring past images to the present or to freeze and hold images for some time, OOM can only work on encoding the visual reality that is before them at that moment. And that visual reality is individualized. Should the viewer looking through the OOM shift their position and focus on a different image, the OOM would not be able to bring the previous image forward or anticipate the following image. Reading glasses do not contain meaning or visual information within them, but rather act only when there is a viewer who proceeds to look through them at any one time in order to look at reality in real-time, but they cannot fast forward or rewind content that is stored.

As selective, real-time technology, OOM are part of a co-productive system of images. This is one of the most foundational aspects of OOM: they are only co-producers of images and cannot produce an image on their own. Traditional optical media such as the camera can store or present images regardless of whether an individual is there to look at them or not. An art gallery, for example, will hold multitudes of paintings or photographs witnessed by moving groups throughout the day, but at night when people have left the building, the images continue to exist, unchanged until the next day when a new group of visitors arrives. In the case of OOM, in a process similar to contemporary practices of meaning-making whereby semiotechnologies (see Langlois) produce meaning with humans, the visual content cannot be perceived without both the human and the technology. The image that would be witnessed by the human without the OOM is not the same image as the one witnessed through the OOM—they are different perceptions and different forms of reality. As any reader who currently feels the weight of reading glasses on their nose will intimately comprehend, the painting witnessed with the OOM allows for the production of a meaning that is different from the meaning that could be produced without them.

Another aspect of OOM, space-axis manipulation, refers to the capacity of these visual technologies to subvert and simulate human perception, a correlative to Friedrich Kittler's time-axis manipulation, which stipulates that media have the ability to compress and expand data and to effect nonlinear time (Kittler, *Gramophone* 34). Compression and expansion are two processes that allow data to be processed and transmitted at varying paces. *Compression* refers to large amounts of information which are processed and transmitted in a shorter time interval, such as fast-forwarding or increasing the speed of play, and *expansion* refers to the opposite, where smaller amounts of information are processed and transmitted in larger time intervals, such as slow-motion video. Both compression and expansion alter the temporal perspective.

Compression and expansion of data also alter the spatial perspective. This is best explained through the telescope and the microscope which have magnifying lenses for the vast and the miniscule, respectively. Telescopes and other long-distance visual aids such as binoculars compress visual information, bringing distant cars, signs, and landscapes, or stars and galaxies millions of kilometres away in space, close to the viewing subject, altering their spatial perspective. Microscopes and other magnifying lenses do the opposite, processing and transmitting small print or minuscule cells as data to larger space intervals. By expanding the amount of space that small text takes up in the field of vision of the viewer, reading glasses alter the spatial perspective through expansion. Although compression and expansion are described as processing and transmission processes, it is essential to recognize that, unlike time-axis manipulation, space-axis manipulation occurs at the selection stage in the discourse network. Before these optical media can transmit distant information or help process minuscule data, the lenses determine and select what visual data can be accessed and what information can be transmitted or processed.

If time-axis manipulation describes transforming the perception of time—re-presenting past events to bring them to the future, or in the case of AI and algorithmic systems, predicting the future in order to act on the present—then space-axis manipulation brings the distant reality to the forefront, the infinite space to the finite, or the micro to the macro. In a sense, OOM move the viewer in space so that they are closer to the reality they experience. These transformations or manipulations of how humans perceive spaces are an essential component of our reality-building and meaning-making practices. Above all, as co-producing, selective, real-time, space-axis manipulating optical media, these technologies shape what the human subject can see, and how they approach visual content—in other words, they shape the conduct of the viewer and persuade them to view reality in specific institutional and technical ways. Seen through the lens of procedural rhetoric, these OOM set

the rules of behaviour for vision, and ultimately establish the parameters within which viewing subjects can play and make meaning.

Although they have the capacity to modulate the conduct of users, what separates OOM from other traditional optical media is that they are entirely individuated. Where traditional optical media can be accessed simultaneously by groups of individuals, OOM can be used only by one individual at a time. Photographs, films, and other such visual surface content can be observed by two or more people from different distances or different perspectives, and though people may derive different meanings from the content (an act of decoding or processing) they are not personal experiences. OOM, on the other hand, require the physical gesture of approaching the source through the technology, whether by placing the apparatus on one's face, bringing one's eye to the lens, or positioning one's entire materiality in reference to the medium. They can only produce the image that is made with the individual viewer. Should a new viewer make the same gesture, they would not witness the same image. A pair of glasses can only be used by one subject at a time, and therefore the image produced can only be shared with the OOM.

A final element of OOM—their operational affordances—is important not only for what it does to produce an image, but also for how it shapes human conduct and subjectivity. Operational images, as defined by Harun Farocki, are those images that do not represent an object "but rather are part of an operation" (17). These are images that are unburdened by meaning (Pantenburg 118), "do things in the world" (Paglen 1), and are instruments not intended for the human eye (Sissel Hoel 13)—these are images for the machines that make them. Operational images are not intended for a human audience, while the images co-produced by operational optical media always are. However, the similarities between operational images and operational optical media are the key driving force for our understanding of what OOM "do" in the world. Similar to operational images, OOM do not represent

information—they can hold or give no meaning. The human must always be the one to produce meaning upon inspection of the image. Operational images are produced by computers for computers: they are machine-made images. And like operational images, images co-produced by OOM must always be considered for what they are—technologically and institutionally produced. And finally, like operational images, OOM do things in the world. These technologies intervene in our production of reality. They affect our orientation in the world, and as such modulate our reactions and behaviours in the world (Elsaesser and Alberro 9). OOM persuade the viewing subject to see not only reality but also themselves within a specific scope of meaning.

Due to these factors, the practice of looking through OOM sets up a space for meaning-making that enacts an experience similar to the "play" found in the games experience Bogost describes (Bogost 122). This paper's argument is not meant to reproduce Marshall McLuhan's "the medium is the message" (9); it does not argue that meaning is construed only through and by the OOM. The meaning is established by the act of using the OOM within a specific discourse network and can only be produced in tandem with the human. After all, the rules of procedural rhetoric are not equivalent to affordances, but rather constitute an ongoing process similar to the process of subjectivation wherein the viewing subject participates in the production of the image and is persuaded by the process of production rather than by the end product alone. To create meaning, the viewing subject must do the work of play within the structured optical environment produced through the affordances of the OOM: to adopt Bogost's phrasing, the rules of visual behaviour allow for the "authoring of arguments through [the] processes" of visuality (Bogost 125). Employing the work of the Toronto School of Communication, in tandem with Kittler's conceptualization of the discourse network and media escalation, we can best examine how Bogost's procedural rhetoric produces institutional and technological modes of looking through a case study of the optical rangefinder.

The Optical Rangefinder

Based on existing surveying technologies, the coincidence optical rangefinder was first developed by Scottish Professors Archibald Barr and William Stroud in 1888 in response to an advertisement put out by the Secretary of State for War on behalf of the Lords of Commissioners of the Admiralty (Moss and Russell 13). The optical rangefinder is a surveying technology used to determine the range of moving objects at a distance in order to successfully fire on the enemy. It played a critical role in ballistics, leading to the invention of radar in World War II and other visual technologies. The coincidence rangefinder consisted of a long cylinder with two external apertures, one at each end, and internals prisms that allowed a viewing subject to witness two half images simultaneously (see fig. 1).

Figure 1. Coincidence rangefinder of the Polish Destroyer ORP Witcher (1935).

The range of the target was determined based on trigonometry by carefully turning the internal prism angle until the two half images were seen in coincidence or as a whole image (see fig. 2). The range would then be indicated on an external gauge and communicated to the firing tower.
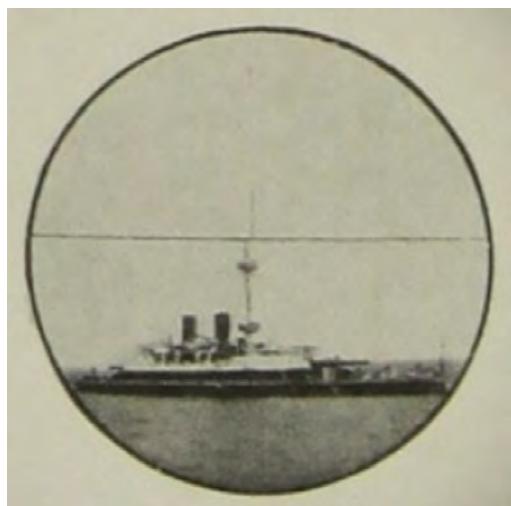
Figure 2. Aligning two halves in the coincidence rangefinder (Cheshire 251).

The optical rangefinder is an ideal example of an OOM that persuades the viewer—in this case, the soldier—of their own faulty subjectivity (Packer et al. 175), and within the discourse network of warfare, it also influences the viewer to frame reality through what Jeremy Packer and Joshua Reeves call an *enemy epistemology*. Packer and Reeves define enemy epistemology as the work of producing and constructing an enemy: "the media used to collect, store, and process data for the location of enemies and threats determine the kind of enemies that are possible" (Packer and Reeves 8). In the discourse network of warfare, the relevant data are those that allow for effective and accurate knowledge of the enemy, an echo of the meaning-making in *America's Army*, the military videogame Bogost highlights, where players participate in a cultural activity, developing values over time (Bogost 119). Here too, media

determine our situation as they work alongside our perceptual capacities to filter threats in the environment and persuade soldiers to produce signal from noise.

The work of all OOM is to select and filter what constitutes culturally valuable information, which determines what knowledge can be made. Recognition of an enemy is a processing practice; it is the application of selected information and stored information. An enemy is also a cultural product. However, information practices that depend on the use of media are shaped according to the affordances of the technology. In terms of enemy epistemology, "every new medium shifts the realm of the intelligible, creating new enemies specific to its particular capacities for capturing and processing data" (Packer and Reeves 8). Viewing subjects are disciplined to identify these targets based on the dynamic visual information selected through the OOM. The process of visual recognition is considered "epistemological labour—the work of sensing, remembering, and knowing" (Packer and Reeves 121).

But this work of knowing through the optical rangefinder belongs to the operational optical media episteme, the epistemological environment determined through the visual information selected, transmitted, and processed through the OOM. It is the epistemological labour conducted through the OOM that transforms the viewing subject and makes the user of the optical rangefinder the same as Talos—a weaponized subject. In seeking to align both images into coincidence (see fig. 2) in order to track the moving range and identify the target, the soldier is prepared to see only an enemy. The enemy is found when the top image and the bottom image perfectly line up as if they were one whole image. The material and cultural affordances of the optical rangefinder produce a space for meaning-making where soldiers can identify only an enemy or noise. A bird through this OOM has no meaning and is not relevant to the discourse network. Only the work of producing or knowing an enemy can be done through this device and, importantly, it can only be done with the human eye involved.

This weaponized subject plays an essential role in the circuit of ballistics.

It is the regimenting of the eye to anticipate and organize space through the optical rangefinder in ways the naked human eye could not that ultimately disciplines the subject into a weaponized position. The question of nearness in military operations is always one of problematizing—the turning of a process, object, or experience into a problem that requires actions, exercises, and changes in thought (Foucault 49). Packer and Reeves illustrate the problem by arguing "[w]e keep our friends close and our enemies closer because we have limited perceptual bandwidth. We can only sense so far. Nearness is a premedia solution to perceptual limitations" (Packer and Reeves 41). However, the optical rangefinder solves the problem of perceptual nearness at the cost of disciplinary action that subjectifies the viewer and determines the possibilities of reality. Optical rangefinders are not predictive media. They cannot be sure where the target is going, they can only track it. This is not a symbolic state—when the subject views reality through the configured lens, the lens shapes the existing world. Because these are transmission media and not storage media, there is no recording, so the symbolic in this interaction does not matter. What is important here is access to relevant data.

The assemblage of optical rangefinder, soldiers, communication pathways, target, setting, and firing tower—that is the circuit— produces the viewing experience. The optical rangefinder acts as the conduit for the vectors of subjectivation, simultaneously magnifying and tracking the motion of the target and of the viewing soldier. The viewing audience has already been problematized and modified through both training and the established enemy epistemology, so the optical rangefinder's process of magnification also becomes a process of subjectivation. This comes down to the affordances and design of the technology, which emphasize a procedural rhetoric (Bogost). Furthermore, the culture in which this technology is used has already trained the

viewer in order to position them as part of the weapon. As with most OOMs, the viewer is simultaneously the producer and the consumer of the visual experience, always at the centre of the discourse network, and always doing the work of meaning-making through the process.

The weaponized subject is also dependent on the "martial gaze," a term Antoine Bousquet uses to refer to the history of mechanization and eventual automation of perception accelerated by military imperatives (Bousquet 10). This is to say that the weaponized subject is embedded in the developing genealogy of visual culture through military practices that produce the entangling of humans and technology in an effort to automate perception for the goal of enemy identification. This developing escalation of the martial gaze is one where, Bousquet argues, "the human sensorium has been slowly and surely directed, mediated, and supplanted in service to the ultimate imperative of targeting" (Bousquet 12).

Contemporary technologies such as drones have moved beyond the human optical search function and are described by Packer and Reeves as "bypass[ing] the cornea, thalamus, and visual cortex by plugging right into military hardware, operat[ing] with a perceptual grammar that sloppy human organs simply can't process" (Packer and Reeves 141). The sloppy human organs in question— the eye and all the parts that make up the visual cortex—are and have been rendered faulty by the new modes of problematization employed by discourse networks that demand the antagonistic escalation of war and its associated media (Packer et al. 175). This escalation, which led to radar and AI, is distinct from the media escalation that did not seek to remove the faulty optical subject, but instead desired to feed it higher quantity and more precise visual data (Packer et al. 175). The eyes, more than the mouth, consume and are made hungry by the never-ending cornucopia of visual culture. The genealogy of OOM in warfare is a genealogy of visual feeding technologies fattening viewers so they become weaponized subjects.

Optical media, as Friedrich Kittler and Paul Virilio explain, were the solution to the problem of aiming ballistics in the twentieth century, magnifying the battle environment, and augmenting the ability to select and shoot the target (Kittler, "Media Wars" 122; Virilio 70). But even at their inception, OOM functioned as a filter. The greater the ability to magnify, the smaller, more discrete are the bits of visual information that are allowed to pass through to reach the eye. This article frames the weaponized gaze through the optical search function that seeks to capture the enemy and select the signal amid the noise through visual technologies, thereby creating the weaponized gaze. The weaponized gaze is trained to select the enemy from the environment but differs from the martial gaze in that it acknowledges that in capturing the enemy, it has also already captured the viewing subject and set them into the centre of the discourse network.

The weaponized gaze is dependent on media escalation (the antagonistic relationship between technologies whereby technologies develop in an effort to overcome previous technology) to produce the faulty subject, because technological antagonism always reveals the faultiness of human vision (Kittler, *Gramophone* 255). The optical rangefinder, as with all OOM, in producing the desired visual content (determining enemy range), simultaneously persuades the user of their faultiness, their own inability to see what the system demands of them without the aid of the optical technology. In persuading the user of their own faultiness, OOM ultimately also persuade the user that technology is necessity for successful visuality. Bogost highlights the ways in which videogames make "claims about the world, which players can understand, evaluate, and deliberate," often through the cultural and visual content they contain (Bogost 119). OOM, while they do not have the ability to store content, have the capacity to make claims about the world that viewing subjects can evaluate. The optical rangefinder makes claims about how to effectively perceive an enemy. The viewing subject understands this and is able to evaluate

the selected visual information in order to carry out the meaning-making process of identifying and firing upon the enemy.

The operationality of the optical rangefinder—its ability to do things in the world—is an act of persuading the viewing subject that they must see reality through an enemy epistemology to survive. In large part, this persuasiveness of the optical rangefinder is a result of the antagonistic relationship between technologies, and between technologies and the senses (Kittler, *Gramophone* 255). Media respond to media; humans are merely extensions (Kittler, *Optical Media* 29). Though a large aspect of Kittler's work looks at the ways war proliferates such antagonistic relationships, media in general seek to constantly overcome existing technologies or to improve on the human senses in the service of optimization, an increase in speed, or an ability to select more, store more, and process more. As Kittler illustrates, this media escalation is most obvious in war, where enemies consistently seek to shoot farther, hit stronger, and see the opposing side before they're seen. It is a technological race for survival. The optical rangefinder and its competitors are deeply situated in this discourse.

This media antagonism was a factor in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904, during which Japan ultimately sank twenty-nine of Russia's thirty-eight warships. Japan's victory was attributed not only to the greater number of optical rangefinders on Japanese ships (some twelve or thirteen per ship versus the Russian ships' two or three) but also to the training the Japanese soldiers had received (Moss and Russell 53). It was argued that because the Japanese soldiers were trained in using the Barr and Stroud optical rangefinders before the war, they were well-versed in sighting techniques and therefore made far fewer errors in calculating ranges than their Russian counterparts—ultimately, the errors of human vision cost the Russian fleet twenty-nine ships and the lives thereon (Westwood 227; Moss and Russel 54).

Success came not only to the party with the greater number of OOM, but also to the party that had more successfully trained the viewing humans in the act of institutional and technological seeing for accurate enemy identification. The soldiers trained in rangefinding, who successfully learned to see through an institutional and technological lens, were also persuaded of their own fallibility, to recognize that without the bio-technically produced mode of looking, they would have been unable to take down the enemy and would themselves have been felled. Human sight was already unable to keep up with guns able to shoot at 20,000 yards. Recognizing that the superior OOM was the one that best corrected the sailors' vision, their fears, and their material failings was integral to the subject position made for them. In looking through an optical rangefinder, the soldier is persuaded to find an enemy and simultaneously persuaded that without the OOM they are insufficient to meet the needs of the discourse network—the soldier without the OOM is a faulty subject.

After their loss, the Russian Navy recognized the importance not only of having access to the OOM, but also of training their men in the institutional mode of looking, and would go on to increase their orders for Barr and Stroud optical rangefinders, and to improve their training of soldier sighting (Moss and Russell 52). This short summary of the Russo-Japanese Naval battle highlights the ways in which the optical rangefinder succeeded not only in overcoming the viewing technologies the Russian Navy used, but also in overcoming human vision. Through these antagonisms, it persuaded the users of its necessity for effective looking and enemy production.

As Bogost states, procedural rhetoric is the name "for the practice of using processes persuasively" (125). The process of looking through the optical rangefinder—within an enemy epistemology—persuades, conditions, and gives shape to the content that allows for the making of meaning, and produces the weaponized subject. Like a child on a playground, the weaponized subject makes meaning in a

possibility space by exploring their field of visuality within a rigid structure (Bogost 121). It can be difficult to explore free movement (to "play") in a rigid space of military rule and command, where every communication is honed to function with machine-like precision, which is what machine-centric warfare looks like. But in circuits where the human is still at the center of the loop, where analogue OOM demand a human as part of the assemblage, there is still space for some play, for some meaning-making, and for subject formation. This meaning-making practice, though it takes place under the operational optical medium's persuasive influence, is possible in the field of play afforded to the viewing subject through the selective, real-time, co-produced, individuated, and space-axis manipulating structure that OOM offer. Viewing subjects need not look at the guns in their team's hands in the video game *America's Army* to know that they are a first-person shooter, ready to identify and take down an enemy. They need only to look at the real-world environment through the lens of an optical rangefinder.

Conclusion

McLuhan argues that "it is only too typical that the 'content' of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium" (9). There is a rich field of scholarship that attends to the content of operational optical media, but not to the medium. Our attendance to visual communication and visual rhetoric has left us blind to the character of those viewing technologies that give us access to the visual world. This article draws on the work of Ian Bogost to illustrate the ways in which the process of looking through optical media persuades viewers in line with the goals of discourse networks and convinces them of their own fallibility. OOM are present in many ways, from popular analogue reading glasses to fashionable sunglasses, from scientific telescopes to military rangefinders. Contemporary operational optical media also incorporate reality augmentation technology, big data, and Internet of Things solutions into the human visual meaning-making practice.

A final contemporary example that weaponizes the subject through OOM is found within the F-35 fighter jet. The F-35 Lightning II is a stealth multi-role fighter jet used by military powers across the globe (Mola). The F-35 pilot helmet's Helmet Mounted Display (HMD), which integrates the jet and pilot, employs an electro-optical targeting system that is able to display infrared cameras, search for and track radar, determine target identity and distance, and advise weapon selection, among other capabilities. The F-35 assemblage has been described as offering "unprecedented advantage over adversaries" largely due to the many cameras and sensors mounted on the jet and displayed on the HMD that give pilots access to the visual environment below, above, behind, and in front of them (Lockheed Martin). Individually made for each pilot's head size and gaze, the F-35 HMD acts as the conduit between human and machine in an effort to optimize the information processes dictated by the dynamic and dangerous settings (Lockheed Martin). The F-35 pilot helmet establishes the relationship between the pilot, target, and environment, transforming the jet into a large net capable of capturing visual data and filtering it through the HMD to the pilot. What is compelling about this augmented reality HMD is the insistence on keeping the human in the loop and reproducing a visual playground for the persuasive process of meaning-making in an enemy epistemology.

Looking forward, this article also calls on readers to think about the use of smart glasses in labour and entertainment settings and to consider how viewers are persuaded to see the world around them. With the rise of heads-up displays, smart glasses, and other smart operational optical media, it is essential to consider not only the content they display, but the very affordances of the technology that always already determine what we can see, where we can see, and how we can see.

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Reflections

The Heart Where I Have Roots[1]

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Indeed, conceit, arrogance and egotism are the essentials of patriotism. Let me illustrate. Patriotism assumes that our globe is divided into little spots, each one surrounded by an iron gate. Those who have had the fortune of being born on some particular spot consider themselves nobler, better, grander, more intelligent than those living beings inhabiting any other spot. It is, therefore, the duty of everyone living on that chosen spot to fight, kill and die in the attempt to impose his superiority upon all the others.

> – Emma Goldman, "Patriotism: A Menace to Liberty"

On 7 November 2016, as Donald J. Trump's election as the next president of the United States was announced, America broke my heart. On 6 January 2021, my son, who had recently completed a Congressional internship, texted with terrified friends and former colleagues who were hiding in the Capitol Building during the right-wing assault orchestrated by then, clearly, former President Trump. America broke my heart that day too. In 2022, when the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade—heart broken. How long would it take me to list the Black men, women, children, Queer and Trans peoples murdered by American police officers in the last ten years (let alone since the nation's founding)? Heart broken. Some sixteen states have passed or have pending legislation aimed at prohibiting the teaching of Black history, ethnic studies, critical race theory, 2SLGBTQ+ literature and history: anything that might cultivate pride among historically marginalized and oppressed students or cause raced-white, cis-gendered students to wonder, if only for a moment, whether America really is the best country in the whole wide world. America has broken my heart over and over again.

The house that I grew up in stood atop a hill at the intersection of Road One and Highway 322 in Clarion County, Pennsylvania. Its walls, made of stone hewn from the foothills of the Alleghenies in the mid-nineteenth century, were two feet thick. Once upon a time, we were told, the house had served as an inn for travellers making their way across the mountainous, heavily forested regions of western Pennsylvania. On either side of the front hall were two large rooms, each warmed by giant fireplaces, and these, we thought, had served as the communal areas for guests. My father had claimed one of these rooms for his own. He was a pianist, a composer, and a teacher, and the room he chose was large enough to hold his pianos, his music, and his books. There, he created a solitary space into which we children were seldom permitted to enter.

During the years my father was the faculty advisor for the Gospelleers—a choir on campus organized by Black students—the group would gather at our home for their annual picnic. Encouraged by my brother and me and with a nod from my dad, invariably at some point during the celebration, two students would take their places at his pianos and the others would crowd around them to sing,

To be young, gifted and black,
Oh what a lovely precious dream,
To be young, gifted and black,
Open your heart to what I mean. (Simone and Irvine)

My brother and I would race to the basement to listen while we watched the beams holding up the floors tremble as the singers kept time with their feet.

On other days, when my father was practicing, the music room was off-limits: its borders closed to children like me. But, I would creep in ever so quietly, curl up on the rug under my father's piano, and let music rain down on me. Mozart, Schubert, Bach—the tempestuousness of all the music—shaking my very bones.

Once, when I was very small, I was invited into the room with my brother and sister. My Dad had brought home a reel-to-reel tape recorder, and we had been tasked with making a birthday recording for my grandmother. I sat, legs folded criss-cross applesauce beneath me, while my sister played her flute, and my brother read a story about Snoopy and the Red Baron into the microphone. I could not yet read, but I loved stories—loved hearing them as well as telling them. And so, my choice was to tell the story of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table by looking at the pictures in a big yellow book that covered my lap when I opened it. I imagine my grandmother sitting at her kitchen table listening to that recording and wonder what she must have thought. For in the story I told, Arthur was Ho Chi Minh. The marauding knights were American soldiers, and Guinevere … I don't remember anymore.

The stories that permeated my consciousness as a child were more confusing than illuminating. They confused because they failed to explain to me in any compelling sense either my own experience or my witness of the world and my relations. I was nearly three years old when Malcolm X was shot down, five years old when Martin Luther King was assassinated, ten years old when members of the American Indian Movement and citizens of the Oglala Nation in South Dakota occupied Wounded Knee, surrounded by over a thousand FBI agents, U.S. Marshalls, and representatives of various law enforcement agencies. With my family, I listened to the nightly news reporting on the American war in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia for years. I could recite the numbers of casualties in that war, explain what napalm is and what it does to the skin of a child fleeing from the fighting. I could tell a dinner guest all about the My Lai Massacre, about why it was a war crime, and about how blaming William Calley without calling his superiors and fellow officers also to account was a travesty of justice. But I could not figure out nor could I explain how a nation founded on principles of equality, freedom, and justice could justify or defend its myriad failures to manifest those principles.

The place where I grew up was overwhelmingly white. Many folks lived in poverty. Most folks were working class. As the child of liberal parents and the sister of an Ojibwe brother (taken from his birth family and tribe and placed first in foster care and then for adoption by my white parents) I do not remember a time in my life when I was not acutely aware of the quotidian forms racial injustice takes: the toll it exacts in the lives of Black and Brown peoples and the wages and benefits it confers on raced-white peoples. How, I wondered, could people who professed their patriotism so loudly and frequently live with the contradictions between what they claimed their nation stood for and what they and their nation actually did on the daily—to a Brown-skinned boy? I could not reconcile the idea of America with my experience of growing up American and I still can't.

In his book *Power and Love: a Theory and Practice of Social Change*, Adam Kahane writes that

> a challenge is *dynamically complex* when cause and effect are interdependent and far apart in space and time; such challenges cannot successfully be addressed piece by piece, but only by seeing the system as a whole. A challenge is *socially complex* when the actors involved have different perspectives and interests; such challenges cannot successfully be addressed by experts or authorities, but only with the engagement of the actors themselves. And a challenge is *generatively complex* when its future is fundamentally unfamiliar and undetermined; such challenges cannot successfully be addressed by applying "best practice" solutions from the past, but only by growing new, "next practice" solutions.

What sense can a child make of challenges in which one's family, one's community, and one's country are embroiled and that are tough in all three ways at once?

I have lived with my nationality as one lives with an abusive lover, staying long past the point at which it was clear there was no love to be had in the relationship.

It seems to me that I have spent my career trying to understand how it is that the stories we have been told and have repeated about America's relationship to equality, justice, opportunity, and political empowerment have failed both to account for and to enable the redress of lived conditions of injustice, inequality, lack of opportunity, and disempowerment suffered, by so many of us, so profoundly, for so long. I have turned to critical and rhetorical theory as well as to storytelling and the study of story to make sense of this failure: a failure for which I, too, am responsible, as are all of us who have historically benefitted from the multiple, manifest failures of the United States to enact the principles it professes.

I have come to believe that the stories that shape the identifications, affiliations, and agency of individuals within a nation—any nation—and the communities that compose it are confirmed and legitimated more by ideological investment than by the lived experience and material welfare of its peoples. Those stories take on the qualities of the normal, the commonsensical, the truth beyond question, regardless of the degree to which the truths that compose the material conditions of our lives exceed, transgress, or belie the national narrative. Never is this reality clearer to me than when I am confronted by stories of the stranger: the other either in our midst already or who appears to be seeking entrance to a space, time, and relation that by virtue not only of nationality but also and more so by virtue of race (white), gender (cis-male), sexual orientation (straight), class (rich), and ability belong to an infinitely insouciant We.

I believed and probably still believe in certain principles that I now think are not unique to American political philosophy but are tightly woven strands of the fabric of American political and civic rhetoric. But it seems to me that the trajectory of American political

rhetoric in the latter half of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first has been epideictic rather than deliberative: aimed at claiming and celebrating an imaginary achievement of those principles[2] rather than at enabling the imagining of a world we have never seen before, but hope to create together. This seems a most perverse form of cynicism to me when I perceive that such national narratives are offered for the sake of political expediency, or a pernicious pessimism when I perceive that they are offered as a substitute for thinking hard, carefully, and deeply about how we might collectively address such wicked problems as income inequality, systemic and institutional racism, Queer and Trans-phobia, and white nationalism.

Like many unhappy lovers, my heart was not broken once but over and over again in multiple catastrophic ruptures. While drafting this essay, I tried to count the number of times during my lifetime when my home country has violated national and international law by interfering in the democratic processes of other nations to serve its own interests, even when to do so cost the lives of thousands of innocents; attempted to assassinate foreign leaders; participated in genocide or stood idly by pretending even in the face of incontrovertible evidence to the contrary that it wasn't really happening; or justified failures to provide humanitarian aid by claiming that state interests are the only reasonable determinant for intervention.[3] Too many.

My family and I left the United States in June of 2013 so that I could take up a new post and we could all begin a new life in Canada. While I still believe I have a responsibility to use my knowledge and my skill as a teacher, scholar, and writer to labour for justice in the U.S. as in the world, my ability to do that work well, I felt, was compromised in some critical way by being in-country. I wanted something of both the deliberativeness and the hope that James Baldwin ruminates on in the introduction to *Nobody Knows my Name*, when he describes his experience as an ex-pat:

> The questions which one asks oneself begin, at last, to
> illuminate the world, and become one's key to the experience
> of others. One can only face in others what one can face in
> oneself. On this confrontation depends the measure of our
> wisdom and compassion. This energy is all that one finds in the
> rubble of vanished civilizations, and the only hope for ours.
> (12-13)

In the years preceding my exodus, I felt stuck in America: my
intellectual vitality, creativity, and spirit beaten down. I have not
left my studies of American political rhetoric behind, nor have I
abandoned my concern and my sense of responsibility to address
and to resist the particular forms racial and economic injustice take
in the United States (for recent examples, see Condon 2016, 2014,
2012, 2011). I continue to realize the truth of Baldwin's insight that
"even the most incorrigible maverick has to be born somewhere.
He may leave the group that produced him—he may be forced to—
but nothing will efface his origins, the marks of which he carries
with him everywhere" (22). And so, I continue to contend with my
brokenness as well as the ways and degrees to which I continue to
love that which has broken me.

I hope that I am also learning to love well this new place where I
am making my home. I love the town I live in now and its people. I
love the landscape of the Saugeen Peninsula; I love the Saugeen
River that I walk beside each day; I love Lake Huron where I find
peace in the most beautiful sunsets I've ever seen. But I do not
delude myself that Canada—and its raced-white settlers—are not also
invested in unjustly policing the boundaries of belonging. As I
watch events unfold in the U.S., attempt to come to terms with the
American in me, and learn to offer myself and my work to my new
community, colleagues, and students, my conviction grows that the
very idea of nationhood and of nationality is irremediably flawed. I
think the study of rhetoric to which I have dedicated myself is also
necessarily the study of how human relations are forged in and
through language. We make and claim our relations as we compose

our lives. In my imagination—but not in any homeland I have yet found—there lies within human reach a world in which all our affiliations, our love and care for one another whether friend or stranger, cannot be contained by the borders of any nation. This imaginary is the heart where I have roots.

NOTES

[1] The title of this essay is taken from a poem by Pablo Neruda.

[2] For example, in a weekly radio address delivered in January of 1986, President Reagan invoked Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech to argue against "racial quotas" and for a "colour-blind society." Reagan did not claim that all the aims of the Civil Rights movement had been fully realized. Instead, he argued that they had been sufficiently realized. Specifically, Reagan argued that the prosperity of White and Black Americans was so thoroughly linked that to consider the economic effects of racial injustice on Black Americans would lead inevitably to economic injustice for White Americans—a claim that has since been taken up and widely circulated in American post-civil rights discourse about race and racism. Thirty years later, Donald Trump organized his campaign around the slogan "Make America Great Again," solidifying his base through a well-crafted if inexpertly delivered narrative predicated on the claim that America's achievement of its principles had been systematically undone by liberals, foreigners, Muslims, and people of colour within and beyond the nation's borders.

[3] See President Clinton's address on 27 November 1995 following the Dayton Accords for an example of this argument.

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Democracy, Rhetoric, and the Distance between the U.S. and Canada

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I am an American citizen who has lived and worked in Canada for the last twenty years. I was drawn to rhetorical studies for the ways in which the field places questions about democratic life at the forefront of intellectual work, and for the ways in which it eschews questions of objectivity in favor of questions about the pragmatic value of symbols. When I left the U.S. for Canada, I felt a deep remorse that I was giving up on my responsibility to use my scholarship and teaching to engage the central problems in American democratic life (as if leaving meant I wouldn't be fighting the good fight).

That remorse has receded in the intervening years, even as I have continued to publish about American pragmatism and the rhetorical practices necessary for building a social democracy. It has also receded alongside my now deeper conviction that I cannot show the objective validity of my scholarship or teaching but that I ought to show their pragmatic cash-value. It may be a decidedly "American" intellectual position, but it seems clear to me that what work an argument does is more important than its validity. I had thought that my scholarly arguments ought to do the work of intervening in the project of rehabilitating the American democratic experiment. But that has been complicated by living and working in Canada. And as I've lived in Canada, the intervening years have brought democratic backsliding to America.

One of the sources of my early feelings of remorse when leaving the U.S. was the belief that rhetorical scholarship is best imagined and enacted as engaged critique—a practice that ideally strives for a more just world by attempting to understand the symbolic encounters, exchanges, and intersections which constitute both individual identity and public culture. I do not think I am alone in this vision of rhetorical studies. Many of my fellow graduate students at the University of Pittsburgh seemed to believe this, as do many of my current colleagues from the United States that publish excellent and exciting work on such themes. I wanted my early contributions to contemporary rhetorical studies to describe, analyze, and explain democratic life by investigating the ways in which communication practices constitute and guide public deliberation in the hopes that sociopolitical change and transformation were possible.

I have approached the relationship between rhetoric and democratic deliberation by using American pragmatism as a historical and theoretical resource because pragmatism has always been committed to the utility of ideas and not their objective validity. The main insight of my work is that pragmatism and rhetorical theory can be brought together to revitalize democratic communication. Such an insight, I thought, offered fresh and useful answers to traditional questions about the relationship between rhetoric and democracy. The development of rhetorical pragmatism aims to cultivate a more participatory and responsible citizenry through a renewed understanding of the role that rhetoric can and should play in democratic life. I learned, in other words, to worry about the connection between rhetorical scholarship and democratic life within the scene of American intellectual culture and by using America's most enduring, sophisticated and substantial contribution to the history of ideas.

But how could I aid in the revitalization of the American democratic experiment while living in Canada? This was the question that drove my initial feelings of remorse. Then, when I

arrived in Canada, I realized that I would be carrying out this scholarship within an academic scene that had no robust place for rhetoric. In other words, Canadian academics simply do not think about the deep connections between rhetoric and democratic life— those connections are not significant intellectual preoccupations in the same way that they are in the United States. So my distance from America also meant distance from an intellectual preoccupation with the questions I thought were most pressing.

Rhetorical studies is not a substantial part of Canadian communication departments, undergraduate curricula, or graduate student training. Rarely is public speaking taught, for example, and rarely is the connection between civic responsibility and communication practice explored. In many ways, my scholarship speaks to a conversation that seemed uniquely American and decidedly un-Canadian. This is perhaps brought into relief by the fact that in over a decade in Canada I have never participated in the Canadian Communication Association, yet I still attend the NCA in America each year (many Canadian communication scholars are unaware of what NCA even is). Even at my home institution, the University with perhaps the best recognized Rhetoric PhD program in Canada, I do not teach rhetoric classes and have no relationship to the official academic programs in rhetoric—those programs and classes are housed in the English Department (a Department that seems to me confused about the status of Communication as an academic discipline and unwilling to collaborate with those of us in Communication programs committed to work in rhetoric).

Canadian universities tend to understand rhetoric as an art of composition and therefore not as deeply connected to questions of civic life as many of their American counterparts. How, then, does an American intellectual committed to work on the intersection of rhetoric and democratic life carry out a program of scholarship and teaching within such circumstances? My distance from America, in other words, created circumstances in which both my desire for my scholarship and teaching to be a resource for sociopolitical change

and the assumption that questions about rhetoric were inextricably linked to questions about democratic life fit poorly. This is brought home most clearly during grant application season, when the Communication Studies Committee at the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada routinely, and unfairly, discounts rhetorical work.

To return to questions of objectivity and pragmatic utility, I have come to believe that distance is critically important to scholarship and teaching. Or, put another way, that distance can be a useful resource for pedagogical practices and scholarly interventions in conversations. This may be an argument made of necessity for me, or a kind of self-defense mechanism to protect me from the remorse I felt from being so far away from both the political action about which I was writing and the intellectual conversation in which I was trying to participate. But I'm not concerned with whether distance is objectively beneficial to scholarship and teaching. My interest is in whether distance might be put to interesting uses to produce important effects. This is where I have come to understand my position within Canada as a useful resource. I am nicely insulated from the intramural politics and jockeying of professional development within both the scene of American communication departments and Canadian rhetoric or communication programs. Distance has meant that I am not beholden to the intricate and subtle forms of professionalization in either place. In this way, the effect of distance is a kind of freedom and security that comes from being largely irrelevant to the main disciplinary structures in either country.

Furthermore, my identity as an American combined with my lived reality in Canada allow me to do things in class that I might not be able to do otherwise. I can press my Canadian students to better understand themselves as political, rhetorical, and cultural agents through juxtaposition with my own authentic forms of national identity. Such juxtapositions have become regular resources for my pedagogy. My students routinely remark on my "Americanness"

and how it inflects their experience of a course or their own learning. I also think I write with different kinds of clarity and urgency about the intersection of rhetoric and American democracy because of my positionality. I co-authored two books on civility and rhetorical citizenship that would not have been possible without my years in Canada (years which have taught me to see and value forms of civil communication practice).

Rhetoric has taught me the following about identity (national or otherwise): one's self-perception does some work in one's own scholarship, but more important, it operates as a potentially useful resource. In addition, claims to identity are useful instruments for producing effects on audiences. Such claims do work, symbolic and material work, and we ought to be tracing the consequences of that work to analyze and evaluate the identity claims. In other words, rhetorical scholars can both track the consequences of identity claims and help others see the ways in which individual self-perception is consequential for scholarship and teaching. In some ways, the perspectives afforded by certain degrees of distance do not provide a methodology for objectivity (as distance might in some disciplines) but instead provide resources for invention, innovation, and intervention.

This, I think, is the enduring lesson of my move to Canada. Distance becomes the grounds by which to certify or authenticate methods of interpretation or scholarly activity without needing recourse to scientific standards of objectivity or the cultural norms of the moment that belong to whatever disciplinary/political conversation is driving work in professional associations. When I first arrived in Canada I went to get my hair cut. The person cutting my hair asked me, "What are you?" I told him I was American, but this was not enough. He pressed further, demanding to know my "original" ethnic identity. I told him a clever story of immigration, which satisfied him. Was that story objectively true? Probably not. Was the story he told me about his Italian heritage objectively true? I can't say. But our identity claims did some work

in that conversation, and those claims ought to be measured by the work that got done. We ought to stop asking what someone really is, and start asking questions about the consequences of identity claims. This I take to be one of the central lessons of American pragmatism and rhetorical studies.

I was recently denied Canadian citizenship because of ambiguous travel records to and from the United States. As I sank under the symbolic weight of that decision and argued with an immigration judge for a reprieve, I said, "But I am, already, Canadian in every way one can be Canadian." I filed my paperwork again and got my Canadian passport the second time around. I did so knowing that the distance afforded to me by living in such fortunate and privileged circumstances has allowed me to see the forms and forces of rhetoric in American democracy differently than I would have otherwise. That distance is not a form of objectivity like some scientists (physical or social) may endorse. It is, instead, a perspective from which to see the failures of the American democratic experiment and that can be used to make different arguments, thoughts, or ideas to both Americans and Canadians. One of the most pressing goals for the field of rhetorical studies in the coming fifty years (regardless of one's national identity) is to perform an autopsy on American democracy, to show where and how things went wrong in the hopes of leaving insights that might help the success of some future democratic age.

I started out in this field believing that my job, through my scholarship and teaching, was to help improve the structures and practices of American democratic life, but my distance and time away from the day-to-day realities of America have taught me that it might not be possible to revive or revitalize a corpse. Maybe all rhetorical scholars are always, already performing some form of autopsy, an after-the-fact assessment of some moment where symbols or communication practices did some work in the world. Those autopsies might not give us final answers or objective truth claims; we perform them in hopes of staving off our own demise,

teaching our students how best to survive, and showing others how rhetoric just might save us from some untimely death. It may be too late for America, but other nation-states might have the ears to hear these lessons. I, for one, intend on taking the best of what I have learned from my autopsy of the American corpse in the hopes that my Canadian students might have the ears to hear how to preserve, expand, and enhance their democratic ways of life. That is the advantage of inhabiting the intellectual space between Canada and the U.S.