Rhetorical Public Speaking

Second Edition

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PEARSON

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The purpose of this book is to give students a practical understanding of how public speaking can function as a rhetorical intervention—as an act of persuasion designed to alter how other people think about and respond to public affairs that affect their lives. The audience for this book is the engaged citizen—that individual who is an active participant in the democratic process of debate, deliberation, and persuasion as it relates to issues of public concern.

NEW TO THIS EDITION

This new edition has been updated and expanded to provide students with the tools they need to be effective public speakers. The following lists specific changes to the new second edition:

■ Updated examples of rhetorical artifacts from historical social movements and contemporary popular culture to show public speaking in action
■ An introduction to media theory that articulates the relationship of rhetoric to written, electronic, and oral communication
■ A succinct definition of rhetoric as the art of giving form to a situation through the action of an audience
■ A comprehensive presentation of the Five Canons of Rhetoric that allows you to master the basics of public speaking in the first few weeks of class
■ The addition of a chapter on eloquence to challenge advanced public speakers to raise their skills to a higher level

The guiding rationale for this book is that the success or failure of democratic social life depends on the cultivation of engaged citizens, each of whom has the capacity to act rhetorically in the public sphere. In other words, democracy suffers when we base our educational system on the naïve faith that individuals instinctively possess the skills of public advocacy. The reality is that citizens are made, not born. Part of that educational process involves instilling in people the belief that free speech is their right and individual expression is their duty. The other part of the process is to give them the knowledge, skill, and confidence to perform that duty and to judge the performances of others when the situation demands it. One unique function of a class in public speaking is to provide a structured and supportive environment in which to develop these skills in preparation for an active life. This textbook is designed to facilitate that process by providing the tools—understood as methods—that promote the creative expression of engaged citizens.

The speaker in rhetorical public speech is therefore something more than just a person who says words in the presence of others. A rhetorical public speaker is called a rhetor, meaning a conscious instigator of social action who uses persuasive discourse to achieve his or her ends. Being conscious implies that a rhetor is not
simply one whose speech happens to have consequences. All acts of communication have the potential to influence people and events, but rhetorical public speech is unique in having been created specifically for that purpose. That is what makes it an art rather than a product of luck. Being an instigator means that a rhetor intentionally behaves in such a manner as to cause others to think and feel in new and different ways. We instigate not only when we prompt, originate, and begin something, but also when we do so in the presence of others who may be reluctant to follow. An instigator makes people act in ways they might not otherwise have done if not prodded to do so. Finally, what is instigated is a social action, meaning that the effects of a rhetor’s persuasive discourse are determined by how they alter and impact the behaviors of other people with respect to some end, or some goal or interest that functions in response to an exigence. A rhetor thus represents a person willing to stir, motivate, challenge, and even confront audiences in order to make them think and act in such a way that addresses a shared problem.1

It is from this methodological and pedagogical perspective that examples have been chosen which represent strategies for generating social change within certain historical moments of crisis. Methodologically, a historian of public speaking finds the most interesting examples of rhetoric on the margins of culture. Understandably, this does not mean that these strategies were particularly effective or virtuous; it means only that the strategy was explicitly and creatively employed in such a way that makes it useful for the purpose of elaboration. Instructors and students who do not find their own views expressed in the examples of the book should bring them to the table during the span of the course to generate productive discussion through engagement.

The controversial nature of these speeches also provides an opportunity to discuss the ethics of rhetoric. By “ethics,” I do not refer to whether a speaker’s beliefs match up to some formal catechism or obey some polite convention. The ethics of rhetoric are determined by how well the speaker has fully considered the broader consequences of his or her actions beyond the immediate moment and has acted conscientiously with respect to that evaluation. Part of the responsibility of rhetorical theory is to make speakers aware of just how much impact a single speech might have in a complex and interconnected world in which “good intentions” are not enough to produce desired consequences. The ethical study of public speech helps people to avoid getting trapped into such a situation by providing the tools to survey a broader social environment before acting. Based on this “holistic” ethical ideal, a large part of what distinguishes this book from other texts on public speaking is its continual emphasis on the speaker as a part of a larger social whole.

I have tried, in this book, to reconnect public speaking with the rhetorical and wholly democratic tradition of eloquence—of the act of appearing before others to express one’s truth with beauty and excellence. Toward this end, I have emphasized that aspect of public speaking which is often quickly passed over by textbooks in haste to present the latest in flowcharts and moral catechisms—the act of appearing before others. Throughout this book, I will emphasize public speaking

as an action that occurs in the company of others who share experience on matters of common concern. Although rhetorical public speaking is arguably about the act of persuasion, it is more importantly an action of gathering together people to appear before one another in a shared space of their common world. Nonetheless, a few examples are analyzed in this book that appeared in print and were meant to be read. I have selected them because they perfectly exemplify a specific persuasive strategy and because they highlight an important figure in history. As much as I am able, I will emphasize how the written form changes the delivery and organization of the argument in order to make clear the difference between the written and spoken word.

Finally, the book emphasizes that public speaking is an art. As an art, it is learned through practice. Nothing replaces the pure experience of simply talking in front of others. This experience cannot be quantified or measured. The value of any conceptual material, therefore, must be judged with respect to how it enriches and broadens the experience of the student in the act of speaking. The Roman rhetorician Quintilian wrote, “An art consists of perceptions consenting and cooperating to some end useful to life” and involves “a power working its effects by a course, that is by method;” consequently, “no man will doubt that there is a certain course and method in oratory.” A successful course in public speaking will seek to educate students in a method of channeling the power of the spoken word toward ends that are useful in life.

Those who have used earlier editions of this book in the past will find this edition to be far more lucid, accessible, and practical. The challenge of writing this textbook has been to integrate complex theoretical concepts and rich historical material into a practical teaching manual. Trial and error have revealed which concepts should be forefront and what examples speak to the diverse experiences of students. One effect of this has been to streamline the conceptual material. This version of the textbook has eliminated an entire chapter on the psychology of motivation and has reduced considerably the discussion of the rhetorical background, folding relevant material into a single chapter on the rhetorical situation. Furthermore, it has altered a chapter originally titled “Style” so that it focuses instead on “eloquence,” and by doing so has reduced six poetic categories to three—the heroic, the comic, and the tragic. Another effect has been to alter the makeup of the historical examples, requiring (with two exceptions) all of the examples to be originally delivered orally. Third, the entire body of text has been completely rewritten in order to make it more readable and accessible to students while also reinforcing dominant themes of the book. Finally, the extended treatment of a single speech by Martin Luther King, Jr. (that originally occupied the summary sections in each chapter) has been replaced by more focused summaries that simply show how all of the conceptual material relates to each other. The result is a book that I believe has identified the core concepts that are absolutely essential for the mastery of public speaking presented in a way that challenges and engages students.

INTRODUCTION

The goal of rhetorical public speaking is the transformation of a collection of disparate individual hearers into a common and committed audience through the power of the spoken word. Every metaphor, every gesture, and every argument must be directed toward this act of turning the many into the one, at least for a moment. This basic fact was recognized by nineteenth-century orator and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, who wrote more than one essay on the subject of “eloquence.” Of the orator, he says the following:

That which he wishes, that which eloquence ought to reach, is not a particular skill in telling a story, or neatly summing up evidence, or arguing logically, or dexterously addressing the prejudice of the company,—no, but a taking sovereign possession of the audience. Him we call an artist who shall play on an assembly of men as a master on the keys of the piano,—who, seeing the people furious, shall soften and compose them, shall draw them, when he will, to laughter and to tears. Bring him to his audience, and, be they who they may,—coarse or refined, pleased or displeased, sulky or savage, with their opinions in the keeping of a confessor, or with their opinions in their bank-safes,—he will have them pleased and humored as he chooses; and they shall carry and execute that which he bids them.3

Although Emerson’s language expresses something of a tyrannical tenor (“Do my bidding!”), he nonetheless emphasizes the essential characteristic that sets public speaking apart from other mediated forms of communication, such as writing or video—the fact that experience of being in the same place at the same time to listen to a single person speak can be a very powerful experience indeed. This is because, as Walter Ong later pointed out, “spoken words are always modification of a total, existential situation, which always engages the body. . . . In oral verbalization, particularly public verbalization, absolute motionless is itself a powerful gesture.”4 When we watch someone on a screen or read his or her words on paper, silence may bore us and we can always turn our attention to other things; but when we are present together to listen to a speech that captures our attention, we commit ourselves completely to the experience.

However, it is natural to ask whether Emerson would have had held oratorical eloquence in such high regard if he lived in our modern technological age of the Internet, television, smartphones, digital video, photography, movie, radio, and all the other technologies from the past hundred years. Indeed, one might argue that modern technology will soon make the art of oratory obsolete altogether. Why,

4Walter Ong, Orality and Literacy, 67.
after all, give an informative speech about the history of the civil rights movement when one can forward a PDF file? Why bother making introductory speeches to every person in a new workplace when one can send a group e-mail? And why get everyone in the same room to hear a sales pitch when they can do it by videoconferencing? In an age where communication via electronic technology is the first choice for most people in their busy lives, one must have a clear reason for gathering people together in the same space at the same time to hear a speech. Consequently, any book that purports to teach public speaking as oratory must address the unique quality of oral performance that makes it something to take seriously despite the pervasiveness and attractiveness of new media.

The best place to find evidence of the continued vitality of the oratorical tradition is simply one’s everyday experience. On the one hand, it is undeniable that new media have effectively challenged or even replaced many communicative interactions that previously had relied on face-to-face contacts. One can imagine a time when the university classroom, the corporate boardroom, and the local merchandise store will all go the way of the door-to-door salesperson and the colonial-era town hall meeting, and when a “friend” will refer simply to a relationship one has with a digital picture and associated text messages. On the other hand, the science fiction projections of a time when human beings will be content simply sitting alone in a room surrounded by video screens and constant chatter are really meant as amplifications of isolated tendencies in society rather than serious predictions based on human nature. For the fact remains that despite our ability to communicate through media as never before, there is a very basic need in every human being for intimate human contact that comes from simply being with others in the same place at the same time and recognizing and welcoming one another’s presence. There is simply no way that any form of media will replace the necessity to be present together at births and at deaths, during weddings and wakes, in celebration and in tragedy, and to achieve communion and to resolve crisis. In short, even as the amount of time spent communicating through new media increases mathematically, the importance of those moments when we must come together and share the experience of eloquence increases geometrically. We may not speak to one another in person as much as we had in the past, but that only means that we must be prepared to do so with passion and with power when the moment calls.

Moreover, although the inventions of our time are certainly new additions to the world, the challenge of adapting our forms of communication to new technology is a very ancient one. In the age of Classical Greece in the fifth century B.C.E., the new technology was writing and the new media was papyrus. We might think this an archaic media by our standards, but at the time it was highly disruptive to the traditional oral community. In the Phaedrus, Plato complained that writing will “introduce forgetfulness into the soul of those who learn it: they will not practice using their memory because they will put their trust in writing, which is external and depends on signs that belong to others, instead of trying to remember from the inside, completely on their own. . . . And they will imagine that they have come to know much while for the most part they will know nothing.”

5Plato, Phaedrus, 275b.
himself, Plato wanted to limit the scope and influence of writing because he believed it would interfere with the pursuit of wisdom through what he called “dialectic,” which was a method to use face-to-face dialogue to seek out truths of both the world and of the soul through living speech. For him, writing threatened to replace that which was real and vibrant with that which was artificial and mechanical.

But just as every first generation has its Plato, whose job it is to warn us of the dangers of being seduced by new technology, every second generation has its Aristotle, whose job it is to adapt our method of communication to our available mediums. Although a student of Plato, Aristotle did not look upon writing with such anxiety. He simply recognized that each medium required its own unique form, and that “each kind of rhetoric has its own appropriate style.”6 In his mid-fourth-century B.C.E. treatise Rhetoric, Aristotle gives us perhaps the first extended treatment of the differences between the written and spoken word:

The written style is the more finished: the spoken better admits of dramatic delivery—alike the kind of oratory that reflects character and the kind that reflects emotion. Hence actors look out for plays written in the latter style, and poets for actors competent to act such plays . . . [However, speeches made to hear spoken] look amateurish enough when they pass into the hands of a reader. This is because they are so well suited for an actual tussle, and therefore contain many dramatic touches, which, being robbed of all dramatic rendering, fail to do their own proper work and consequently look silly. Thus strings of unconnected words, and constant repetitions of words and phrases, are very properly condemned in written speeches: but not in spoken speeches—speakers use them freely, for they have a dramatic effect.7

Aristotle points out perhaps the most essential quality of the spoken word—its unique suitability to capture the emotional character of a situation with only a few words or gestures, and to do so in such a way that powerfully brings an audience together through shared experience. Whereas writing must reproduce every single aspect of a situation through words, thus necessitating lengthy and detailed narration and argumentation, oral performance can accomplish the same task with a simple turn of phrase or wave of the hand. And even perhaps more important, Aristotle recognizes that the spoken and written word are not in competition; each is suited for its own unique purpose and has its own unique form.

The difference between these two mediums was emphasized again much later by philosopher John Dewey in the twentieth century, who made an effort to recover the importance of the face-to-face community that he felt was being threatened by rapid changes in both transportation and mass communication. At the time, many people were arguing that the only way to sustain democratic life was to abandon the oral tradition and instead concentrate on disseminating massive amounts of print material that would inform citizens about every single aspect of the world so that they could make educated decisions about matters of political and economic affairs. What Dewey recognized was that although the written word was certainly

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6Aristotle, Rhetoric, 1413b5.
7Aristotle, Rhetoric, 1413b1020.
important to deal with complex matters, it was not sufficient to sustaining democratic life. He wrote:

Signs and symbols, language, are the means of communication by which a fraternal shared experience is ushered in and sustained. But the winged words of conversation in immediate intercourse have a vital import lacking in the fixed and frozen words of written speech. Systematic and continuous inquiry into all the conditions which affect association and their dissemination in print is a precondition of the creation of a true public. But it and its results are but tools after all. Their final actuality is accomplished in face-to-face relationships by means of direct give and take. . . . The connections of the ear with vital and out-going thought and emotion are immensely closer and more varied than those of the eye. Vision is a spectator; hearing is a participator. Publication is partial and the public which results is partially informed and formed until the meanings it purveys pass from mouth to mouth.8

For Dewey, written speech has a linear pattern and logical coherence that makes it suitable for effectively arranging and disseminating complex ideas, whereas oral speech tends to emphasize the total quality of shared experience that makes it more suitable to sustain relationships and to create connections among diverse groups of people. Written speech highlights the power of language to create a network of causal relationships, to weave together a web of meanings, and to project possibilities into the future based on knowledge of the present and past.

In effect, written speech gives order to a complex world, as exemplified in the scope and power we grant to the discourses of science, religion, economics, and history. He thus relates writing to “vision” not only because one has to literally look at the words, but also because it creates the experience of being an observer from a distance. By contrast, by connecting via the ear, oral speech tends to create the experience of being surrounded by and immersed within an environment. Oral speech made in the presence of others brings ideas and possibilities to life within the objects, people, and events of one’s surroundings. When successful, oral speech draws people together to share what is created in that moment, an effect that is often associated with ritual ceremonies and celebrations. In short, genuine community can only exist within the spoken word. Dewey’s democratic ideal would therefore strike a balance between the two mediums. A harmonious relationship between written and oral speech would bring about the best of both “spectator” and “participant” experiences, thereby allowing people to stand outside a situation and contemplate it from a distance while also, periodically, immersing themselves in the shared life of a community.

The introduction of even newer electronic media of communication has not refuted this ideal as much as supplemented it. The phrase “electronic media” is taken from Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan, who used it to denote any technology of communication that used any form of electricity to disseminate messages immediately across a potentially global field and/or reproduce auditory sounds or visual images with great accuracy and the potential for playback. The

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term electronic media therefore includes both traditional “mass media” such as the television and radio as well as newer “digital media”—everything accessible through modern computers, such as e-mail, the Internet, and digital photography and video. Starting with the telegraph in the nineteenth century and extending up to and beyond modern smartphones, electronic media far surpasses the invention of the printing press and introduces the utopian possibility of immersing ourselves in the total life of the planet in a single moment. This creates opportunities for expanding the horizon of one’s experience to distances unheard of a century ago. Social networking sites and global communication systems now create the possibility of reaching thousands if not millions of people instantaneously.

Yet despite all of this, we still demand the detached solitude of the literate life and the tactile experience of partaking in the spoken word. Each medium serves its own function and must be appraised by that function. In order to guide judgments about what medium of communication is appropriate for what types of situations, this introduction will define three different speech contexts: the context for written speech, the context for online communication, and the context for public speaking.

THE CONTEXT FOR WRITTEN SPEECH

Written speech, as it is used here, refers to the primary media of a print rather than handwriting insofar as print privileges sequential ordering of parts, a specific point of view, an explicit logical progression, a complex arrangement of information, and a spirit of objective detachment. According to McLuhan, printed speech is marked by isolation, reflection, distance, specialization, and fragmentation. In writing, one does not participate together in a shared moment; one composes or reads in private, taking each word and each sentence at a time, and threading together a total sequential narrative that often has a sense of past, present, and future. McLuhan observes that “writing tends to be a kind of separate or specialist action in which there is little opportunity or call for reaction. The literate man or society develops the tremendous power of acting in any matter with considerable detachment from the feelings or emotional involvement that an illiterate man or society would experience.” By “acting without reacting,” McLuhan means the ability to reflect on ideas or situations—not with just an overt, physical response—but by quietly writing down one’s thoughts in logical or poetic form.

Writing, that is to say, makes possible the monk, the poet, the scientist, and the philosopher. Written speech refers to those objects that we wish to study in private, to dwell over and reflect upon, to use as a reliable guide for judgment. Objects of written speech include annual business reports, scientific journal articles, the Bible, handwritten letters, diaries, legal judgments, novels, the U.S. Constitution, technical manuals, poetry anthologies, new procedural guidelines, to-do lists, biographies, economic projections, and philosophies. Because of the nature of the medium, the context for written speech tends to be of a much broader scope than that of oral or electronic communication. A written document takes time to compose and to publish in the promise that the message it contains will retain relevance for some time to

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come. For instance, sometimes it is better to provide a written manual rather than to explain a procedure, to print out an article rather than send it by e-mail, or to document the reasons for a judgment rather than argue them in a public setting. To put it succinctly, written speech is the best response when we wish to give an audience material to “take home and study.” Whenever we want someone to reflect upon a message in private and be able to return to it later, written speech is the ideal medium.

Perhaps the paradigmatic case of written speech as a rhetorical response to a complex and enduring problem is the publication of “reports” produced by research committees and commissioned by government or industry to provide frameworks for action based on a careful research into the current situation. Ideally, these reports are then studied by relevant authorities, after which time they present their judgments on how to act. “Reports” are the way that specialist groups such as scientists, judges, economists, theologians, and historians actually function rhetorically in the broader political environment. Even though their intention may not have been specifically to “persuade,” the publication of their research acts to guide judgments about public affairs in a powerful and convincing way. From a rhetorical perspective, situations that call for a persuasive response through written speech tend to possess the following qualities:

- A pervasive problem that endures across durations of time and breadth of space
- Sufficient time to deliberate upon a proper response without the need for immediate action
- Significant resources to draw upon in analyzing the problem
- An audience with the willingness and capacity to deliberate over a period of time upon a single issue

Given this type of situation, rhetoric that takes the form of written speech generally attempts to accomplish the following goals:

- Provide a distinct perspective on a situation that offers a useful point of view
- Give order and coherence to a disordered and chaotic condition
- Replace short-sighted fears and desires with far-sighted judgment
- Replace overheated involvement with cooler forms of detachment
- Encourage delayed individual reflection over immediate group response

Discussion: The best way to understand the unique character of written speech as a print form is to compare the same text presented in two different media types. What is the difference, for instance, between checking out a book from the library and reading it as a PDF file online? What is the difference between writing and receiving a handwritten letter and just sending an e-mail? And when do you feel you need to “send a card” with writing inside of it versus simply sending an e-card?

THE CONTEXT FOR ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

Although electronic forms of communication include many technologies of the mass media, most of us will primarily make use of online forms of electronic communication, such as e-mail, teleconferences, website postings, and text messaging. Online communication is thus meant to refer to text, image, audio, and video messages sent and received by individuals on computer-aided technologies and capable
of being received simultaneously by an infinite number of users, and also being recalled by those users at any time. As indicated by McLuhan’s analysis, online communication tends to foster mobility and decentralization and at the same time create a sense of constant feeling of being “in touch” with other people. In addition, it tends to favor messages that have an iconic or mosaic form over those that feature more primarily linear narratives or arguments more fitting to written speech.

There are several specific features of online communication that make it unique. First, it allows for multiple messages to be sent and received simultaneously and at rapid speed. This creates an enormous competition for time, as it creates an almost permanent backlog of messages awaiting consideration. In this environment, messages are naturally developed to capture one’s immediate attention and be received and understood in a short amount of time. Second, the capability of multimedia messaging further heightens the competition for attention, such as a simple e-mail might be supplemented with embedded images, attached files, and background graphics or sound. Third, it creates a situation of receiving a message in private at the same time that it is capable of being broadcast to a group. This reduces the sense of “privacy” that written speech tends to produce while at the same time allowing a message to be freed from its situational context. Fourth, the capability of saving and resending messages allows them to spread widely and rapidly, thereby allowing both successes and mistakes to be immediately broadcast to all members of a group, from a group of friends to a global audience. Fifth, it creates the possibility of anonymity if the message is sent with a blind or disguised sender, thereby liberating the message not only from context but from authorship.

The majority of our online communication tends to be informal in quality—despite the intended content. Even in organizational settings, official e-mails are often laced with personal observations, jokes, compliments, or complaints that have a conversational tone. E-mail, in particular, fuses composition and production in one function, thereby fostering a type of discourse that is loose and impromptu rather than formal and reflective. In addition, online communication makes ease and entertainment permanent features of its use. Even governmental websites are designed to be appealing to the eye. On the one hand, this makes online communication ideal for situations that require readily accessible information or the rapid dissemination of striking ideas, events, or images. Whereas websites are there to present information or perform a function for anyone who needs it at any time, e-mails and text messages allow individuals to send specific messages to anyone in an instant. On the other hand, online communication tends to lack durability. As quickly as messages are produced, they are destroyed or replaced. Also, online communication tends to lack a sense of shared or situated context. Whereas even a book needs to be read somewhere, online communication has the sense of being received everywhere and nowhere.

But does electronic communication dominate every aspect of our lives simply because it is available? That question can only be answered by looking more closely at the unique qualities of each type of media. If we take the writing of Marshall McLuhan as a guide, the Internet exaggerates all the characteristics of previous electronic media, such as the telegraph, radio, movie, and television, which appear to eclipse the function of both written and oral speech. McLuhan writes that “it is the speed of electric involvement that creates the integral whole of both private and
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public awareness. We live today in the Age of Information and of Communication because electric media instantly and constantly create a total field of interacting events in which all men participate.”10 McLuhan associates the following qualities with the electronic age: decentralization, or the ability for organizations or groups to operate without any central organizing structure; implosion, or the impression that everything far away can be brought close to you in an instant; mosaic form, or a mode of presentation that places multiple things next to each other simultaneously, as in a hyperlinked website; and immersion, the sense that everybody is deeply involved in everyone else’s lives and activities all at once.

However, whatever the utopian hopes and terrifying fears generated by the appearance of the Internet, little indicates that online communication has made the book and the speech obsolete. The Internet has certainly created that sense of being a “global village” that McLuhan prophesized, breaking down the stark divisions among peoples by creating a sense of being connected as a whole. However, although the rise of electronic communication has permanently affected almost every aspect of our personal, cultural, and political lives, it has not obliterated (except with a few exceptions, like papyrus and the telegraph) older forms of communication. For instance, despite the ability to reach the whole nation online, political candidates still spend ever-increasing time and money speaking at rallies, community centers, and special events where supporters eagerly gather to listen. Televangelists have been around for decades, yet millions of Americans still travel to places of worship every week to gather together in shared praise. Commemorative events like the Fourth of July or the presidential inaugural address are now streamed online at any time, and yet people will even endure harsh natural elements to be able to say that they were there in person. And while telecommuting and teleconferencing have increased the scope and efficiency of business, the rituals of the board meeting, the national convention, the interview, and the sales pitch remain staples of corporate culture.

Once again, nothing denies that online communication may also transmit complex information that functions similarly to written speech in certain contexts. It only indicates that the medium is more suitable to respond to more immediate situations. Rhetorically, online communication plays a particularly significant role within social movements, both in terms of its organizational capacity during rallies and protests as well as in terms of maintaining an actively interested support based on mass e-mails, videos, text messages, and other media that keep relevant “current events” in the consciousness of the audience. Online communication has made organized movements possible that are of global scale and that can act almost immediately anywhere in the world. As with the written word, then, there are particular situations that are suitable for online communication and those that are not. Rhetorical situations that call for a persuasive response through online communication thus possess the following qualities:

■ Dealing with an event that is of short duration and requires immediate response
■ Widespread interest in that event, which produces heightened emotional tensions seeking expression

10McLuhan, Understanding Media, 248.
A rapidly changing situation that makes people desire the latest information
Little time to dwell upon the complexities of the situation or reflect upon its past or future
A communication environment where many messages are competing for attention

Rhetoric that takes the form of online communication generally attempts to accomplish the following goals:

- To communicate with individuals in a diverse population across a wide area
- To signal, or call attention to, a specific event, object, person, or quality
- To direct action in the immediate present, often in the form of a command
- To stimulate the senses and satisfy emotional cravings
- To generate a common interest in a particular subject matter

Discussion: When have you been without access to online forms of communication for an extended length of time? What did you feel you were missing? What functions did you feel unable to perform? Did that give you a sense of peace or were you actually more anxious? What does this experience tell you about your relationship to online communication?

THE CONTEXT FOR PUBLIC SPEAKING

If written speech tends to invite individual cognitive reflection in solitude while online communication heightens the feeling of collective immersion in an immediate event, public speaking generates an atmosphere of shared experience within a dramatic situation. For public speaking is not so much about the words spoken as the fact that they are spoken publicly—which is to say, spoken within a shared space that includes both the words and the total environment in which they are uttered. Public speaking is different from mass communication. Mass communication disseminates a message, but it is received in a different environment than that in which it was produced. It reaches a “public,” as an organized body of acting citizens, but it is not a public speech. A public speech is an oral communication delivered by an individual to a public audience gathered in a shared physical environment to listen collectively and respond to that message in the present.

Even a speech videotaped and rebroadcast is not the same as the speech heard by those physically present. A public speech is a shared event that often has a past and a future. The speech includes all the events that led up to it (including the travel required for people to reach the same place, the time it takes to gather together and to wait, and any preceding events that introduced it) and the actions that follow it (including conversation with others about the speech, any proceeding events, and the final departure of the guests). The public speech is not separate from its history. It requires its history to be meaningful. Those who watch a speech on television may remember certain words or phrases used, and perhaps an image of the audience flashed before the screen, but their memory of watching the speech is tied up with the physical context of where it is watched—a living room, a bar, a classroom, and the like. For the people actually present, the speech is an event that is a part of a larger drama, even if it includes merely the conversation with co-workers before and after the boardroom meeting.
For McLuhan, the dominant aspect of the spoken word is therefore the creation of “audience participation,” not just in the understanding of the words but in the comprehension of the total speech situation that “involves all of the senses dramatically.” In oral speech, “we tend to react to each situation that occurs, reacting in tone and gesture even to our own act of speaking.” When we speak, we are not just conveying information; we are forming relationships between ourselves and the audience, the audience members with each other, and everyone with the total environmental context. At each word spoken, one must manage a delicate process of adjusting to constant feedback, or the return messages that are constantly being sent by the other people involved in the communicative process. Oral communication is thus a means of inviting people to participate in a shared, tactile experience that involves what McLuhan calls the profound and unified “interplay of the senses.” In other words, being present at an oral performance is a whole-body experience that we feel “in touch with” in a way that cannot compare to the experience of watching the same speech on a video recording (and this includes even speeches that are incredibly boring; nothing makes you more intimately aware of your chair as a bad speech).

What makes it so difficult for those versed in the language of written or online communication to appreciate the uniqueness of public speaking is the habit of isolating the message from its context and judging it as if it were just a pamphlet or an e-mail. But the unique thing about public speaking is not the content or even the style of the words; it is the fact that the words are spoken in the company of others in a common, shared space. This almost intangible quality is more easily experienced than explained. It is the difference between being part of a graduation ceremony and receiving the diploma in the mail, between going to a place of worship to hear a sermon and reading a religious text at home, between making a toast at a wedding and sending a card of congratulations, between hearing an inspirational speech before a big game and receiving an e-mail of that speech, or between announcing the birth of a child before one’s family at Thanksgiving and distributing a video of that speech online.

The fact is that public speaking is a unique and complex experience that cannot be reduced to the simple content of the message. For instance, despite the fact that written communication allows for more complicated factual and logical argumentation and online communication makes possible more sophisticated multimedia presentation, McLuhan observes that oral communication tends to be far more complex in terms of its ability to comprehend and bring together a diverse number of environmental elements into a coherent whole. He notes that dominantly oral communities “are made up of people differentiated, not by their specialist skills or visible marks, but by their unique emotional mixes.” Therefore, although oral communication is certainly less capable of precise diagnosis than written speech and is more restricted in scope than online communication, it is far more powerful in situated settings to bring about a feeling of meaningful group participation in a dramatic moment. These kinds of settings often are more capable of producing distinctly memorable events with the possibility of generating lasting relationships and commitments. Although occasions for public speaking may occur less

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frequently than occasions for written or online communication, they are far more capable of producing monuments of shared experience that act as a firm ground on which further written or online communication is built.

Perhaps the best way to appreciate the unique functions of a public speech is by experiencing the opposite—speeches that attempt to perform functions better performed by written or online communication. Particularly in organizational settings, so-called informative speeches are often given that really just summarize what is already written on paper. One has, during these speeches, the feeling that the speaker should have just “sent a memo on that.” Alternatively, people often launch into speeches that try to re-create the experience of seeing a movie or a video that is better shared by simply being forwarded electronically. The reaction to such speeches is the proverbial, “I guess I needed to be there.” A public speech should never be used as a replacement for a medium of communication that can do the job better. But the inverse is also true. Given the ease of sending e-mails, we often assume that a quick message can perform the job that oral communication should do. But there are many times when we need to address people in person, either in a conversation or in a speech. Knowing what to say is important, but even more important is knowing how to say something. So what is the context for rhetorical public speaking? It includes the following characteristics:

- An issue that is forefront in the consciousness of a public or publics
- A speech situation that occurs within a larger dramatic context with a past and a future
- The necessity or desire to make a judgment in a timely fashion
- The lack of time to wait until further inquiry, which mandates drawing on the best available information
- The ability for members of an audience to gather in a shared space
- The need to establish common understanding and closer relationships among members of the audience

Rhetoric that takes the form of public speaking generally attempts to accomplish the following goals:

- Establish or reinforce relationships between members of the audience
- Encourage dialogue in the audience subsequent to the speech’s conclusion, which contributes to shared understanding and solidarity
- Make listeners more attentive to the significance of their physical and social surroundings
- Provide a dramatic narrative that projects and clarifies long-term goals
- Highlight the importance of the most important available means to attain those goals
- Create a unified emotional response capable of moving and inspiring an audience

Discussion: Think of a public speech you attended with friends or family. In that memory, what stands out about the experience as separate from the content of the speech itself? How did the event of being there affect your interpersonal interaction before, during, and after the speech? Last, what was the most memorable moment of that experience: the speech itself or the situation surrounding the speech?
SUMMARY

The easiest way to conceptualize the relationships between these three mediums of communication is by considering how they actually function in multilayered persuasive campaigns in marketing, politics, and religion. All three types of campaigns make use of each medium, although in different ways and in different ratios. Marketing campaigns rely heaviest on electronic media, relying on humorous, seductive, or shocking spectacles to attract attention to a product or issue. Print media, usually in the form of take-home pamphlets, provide more detailed information to interested parties. Yet despite the millions spent on electronic and print advertising, the spoken word remains important both in “closing the deal” (particularly with big-ticket items such as cars and houses) as well as in sparking interest in products through various forms of guerrilla marketing, such as paying college students to wear products and talk about them to other students without disclosing the fact that they are being paid.

Campaigns for political candidates rely even more heavily on the spoken word. On the one hand, we often talk about candidates being “packaged” and “sold” like products precisely because they use the exact same strategies as marketing by paying for television and radio advertisements and disseminating print material to explain their platforms. However, any viable candidate knows that he or she must commit to hundreds of speaking engagements, often addressing only several dozen people at a time in local communities without significant press coverage, in order to solidify support from those communities. In addition, campaigns for higher offices such as Congress or the presidency require a significant staff of volunteers who “canvas” neighborhoods by knocking on doors and speaking individually to hundreds and thousands of people. What makes this type of canvassing worthwhile is not because volunteers actually speak to everyone in a voting precinct but because each person they do persuade usually then speaks to his or her own family and friends about the candidate, thus creating a word-of-mouth network of supporters.

Last, religious campaigns rely heaviest on the spoken word precisely because they are long-term affairs that ask for a lifetime commitment from audience members. This is not to say they do not make use of print or electronic media. In fact, most religions feature an established sacred “text” that can be taken home and studied by adherents in their solitude, and excerpts from this text are almost always included in various pamphlets that can be widely disseminated. And there is a long tradition of various religious faiths using televangelists, billboard campaigns, and television advertisements to deliver their messages. Yet the basic medium of any religious community is the spoken word, delivered either in a sacred space to a whole congregation or in the home with members of an immediate family. This is because the spoken word is a powerful unifying medium that brings people together with a common message that forms emotional bonds not only between speaker and audience but between audience members themselves. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that orators like Emerson speak of eloquence in religious terms, such that “words” which are spoken with truth and passion become the way to realize the “Word” of some higher power.

One does not have to import any such religious understanding of public speaking to appreciate its unique capacity, amongst all forms of communication, to produce the type of shared experience capable of creating both commitment and community. Therefore, when I refer to rhetorical public speaking as “the art of the engaged citizen,” I do so not because writing or electronic communication are of less significance to democracy; I do so because it is the most universal form of communication that has the greatest potential to make a change at the local level insofar as it speaks directly to an intimate audience about affairs that directly impact their lives and communities. In an age that requires significant resources to produce and disseminate messages through print or electronic media in a way that will actually reach a wide and influential audience, it is naïve to think that mere access to the Internet somehow
equalizes the playing field against well-funded institutions, corporations, and government agencies that can easily overwhelm the national and international media with a well-planned agenda and multilayered yet concentrated message. The fact remains that although print and electronic communication are essential to sustain democratic movement of any kind, they nonetheless must be grounded in the power of the spoken word, which allows individual citizens to confront the power grounded in control of resources with the power of collective commitment grounded in shared experience that is constituted and made conscious by rhetorical public speech.

Of course, the value of public speech is not only found in the political sphere. Public speaking is also the art of the loving family member, the dedicated coach, the charismatic business leader, the persuasive salesperson, the inspirational teacher, the prophetic preacher, and the successful lawyer. Public speaking continues to justify its existence whenever people gather together in the same space to have a chance to hear what everyone else hears, to feel what everyone else feels, to consider what everyone else has considered, and to potentially act together in the knowledge that all present have all heard, felt, and considered the same thing. There is no written or electronic substitute for a story told by a grandmother to her grandchildren in the living room, the halftime speech in the locker room, the confrontational challenge by the chief executive in the boardroom, the witty banter that goes on in an automobile showroom, the Socratic give-and-take that occurs in the classroom, or the pathos-written appeal delivered by a lawyer in the courtroom. These are moments that demand the spoken word, and they are the moments for which this book has been written.

**EXERCISES**

1. Select a passage from a famous speech and a partner for this exercise. Type the text of your passage as an e-mail and send it to your partner. For the next class period, print out the passage in an elegant font and give it to your partner. Next, actually deliver this passage orally to your partner. Which presentation did your partner find to be most powerful? What differences can you note in how you received each of your partner’s messages?

2. Locate a social movement website and analyze its content. Does it use a mosaic form? What iconic images are present? Next, find a speech made by someone connected to the movement, and compare this content with the website. What differences do you note in how information is presented and experienced? Do certain aspects of either seem more effective in delivering the intended message?

3. Think of a moment in American history when a major catastrophic event happened in the past (such as the assassination of JFK) or more recently (such as the World Trade Center attacks). Now consider learning of this news through a face-to-face conversation, through print, and through television. What difference would this make in how we receive the information? Do we often seek out other media after our initial encounter?

4. Select a short public speaking passage and a partner for this exercise. Deliver your speech for your partner while he or she records it, and then switch roles. Listen to the recordings. In both cases, each partner delivers the same speech to the same audience, but in a different medium. What differences do you note? What stands out in each media?