

Rhetoric, Knowledge, Mediation

A Project on Theories of Knowledge and Media

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The Norwegian Research Council has through its Programme on Research on the Mediation of Culture and Tradition (KULT) decided to fund a collaborative, cross- and multi-disciplinary project at the University of Bergen with the above title, which is to run from the spring semester of 1995 through 1997. The following is a description of the overarching themes of this project and includes short descriptions of the individual projects it comprises.

A central ambition of the KULT programme has been to demonstrate the social relevance of certain kinds of research within the humanities and the social sciences and the knowledge produced there. A key word in the programme has been “*formidling*”, which is the Norwegian version of the German “*Vermittlung*”. Its meanings include both “dissemination” or “transmission” (of knowledge and cultural phenomena/activities) and, more dialectically, “that which takes place in-between”. In the context of the Bergen project, we feel the term *mediation* is the most appropriate translation. We want to focus on (a) relations between research in different scholarly disciplines, (b) relations between research on the one hand and society at large and “ordinary people” on the other, particularly with a view to the role of modern mass media, and (c) the role of *language* (in an extended sense) in these relations and in the production of knowledge.

We want to ask questions such as these: How is that which is to be “mediated” produced? What does the mediation of knowledge and culture entail, and how is it to be legitimated? What are the socio-cultural and technological parameters of such mediation processes in (late) modern societies? Ultimately, we want to look into the *conditions for mediation of culture and knowledge in our time*.

The main perspective of the project will be *rhetorical*. This suggests a certain angle of entry to investigations of the relations between the languages and ideas of research on the one hand and those of the everyday and everyday media on the other. It is important to maintain the plural forms here; both scholarly disciplines, the “everyday” and “everyday media” are multifarious phenomena. Still, the keyword *rhetoric* provides an overarching perspective and a degree of guidance in the selection of specific problematics.

Rhetoric thematizes, first, in both classical and recent forms, how the signifier and elements of “form” influence what we call “content” or “message”. Second, rhetoric focuses on the persuasive functions of the signifier and elements of “form”, i.e. on how they in different communicative situations are geared toward making recipients accept the text in question’s version of the (part of, kind of) “world” or “reality” it deals with. Rhetoric is in other words *pragmatically* oriented, something which is evidently important here. Third, rhetoric was originally not only about the craft or art of making speeches or texts, but about this craft or art as a form of *struggle*. This opens thought-provoking *conflict-oriented* perspectives on the issues involved in the project. In which ways are for instance traditional notions of “mediation of knowledge and culture” tied to a distributive conception of cultural politics, where it is presupposed that “culture” is an entity which may be “disseminated” in places where such a thing does not exist, and what does such ties imply? How is actually (the necessity of) various forms of mediation of knowledge and culture legitimated in increasingly heterogeneous liberal, western democracies? Finally, the long history of the rhetorical tradition provides a number of concrete examples of different ways to understand the relations between language, knowledge and culture, and the broadly *media-historical* conditions of these understandings.

Three Overarching Problematics

Starting from the ideas sketched above, the project will deal with the following overarching problematics:

- (a) *The interrelatedness of language and knowledge:* What are the characteristics of the typical “linguistic” forms and rhetorical devices of research and the sciences, and how is the knowledge produced determined by these “linguistic” features? Are other forms of knowledge imaginable, produced in other kinds of language?
- (b) *Mass media as mediators of knowledge and culture:* What are the characteristics of typical “linguistic” forms and rhetorical devices commonly employed by broadly oriented mass media, and how is that which they communicate/mediate determined by these features? What are the social conditions of the media’s mediating activities? What does a mediation or “translation” between the languages of research and the languages of the media imply?
- (c) *Rhetorical theory and its current status:* How does recent rhetorical theory relate to the classical tradition? To which extent and in which sense is classical rhetoric, originally developed with a view to oral communication (speech), relevant to modern print-, visual and electronic media?

The latter problematic will necessarily also be part of the former two, since rhetorical theories and perspective will in a sense be “tried out” in all individual sub-projects. As the following will indicate, most of the individual projects will comprise or at least touch on more than one of the above main problematics.

Participation in the Project

The project has in a general sense been developed over a number of years through an internationally increasing interest in rhetoric in a number of disciplines, both in the humanities and in some social sciences. At the University of Bergen, work in the departments for Classical Studies, Comparative Literature, Nordic Languages and Literatures, Media Studies, Philosophy and others has been supplemented by cross- and interdisciplinary initiatives in the School of the Arts, such as the Rhetorical Forum and seminars organized by the Centre for European Cultural Studies. These activities form a general background and basis for the project.

Those who hold regular teaching positions in Norwegian universities are in principle supposed to

devote fifty percent of their normal working hours to research. This ordinary, “obligatory” research is most often conducted on a purely individual basis, quite rarely as part of a collective enterprise involving organized, “scheduled” dialogues with colleagues within the discipline in question or across disciplines. By organizing researchers with related interests and projects in a structured, goal-oriented – but hardly conflict-free or streamlined – network, one may hope to develop a productive milieu which will not least provide inspiration for Ph.d. and M.A. students from several disciplines. These students come in addition to the ordinary participants in the project.

As many as 17 researchers from 7 departments/units at the University of Bergen have joined the Rhetoric, Knowledge and Mediation project. Two departments stand out as “pillars” – Comparative Literature (5 participants) and Media Studies (6 participants). All participants were free to design individual projects in accordance with their own particular interests within the framework provided by a preliminary draft of the joint project proposal. As it turned out, the individual projects could be placed in three categories, with several interesting overlappings between them: (1) *Rhetoric, science, knowledge*; (2) *The histories of media technologies, language and rhetoric*; (3) *Media rhetoric and the problematics of mediation*. In the following very brief presentation of the individual projects, it is also indicated which of the overarching problematics each project is most closely related to (a, b, and c above).

Individual Projects

(1) *Rhetoric, Science, Knowledge*

Professor Atle Kittang, Department of Comparative Literature: *Kenneth Burke, Rhetoric and Issues in Theories of Knowledge*

Kittang’s project starts from the differences and conflicts between the renewed interest in classical rhetoric on the one hand and the work on rhetoric tied to semiotics and deconstruction since the 1950s on the other. Kenneth Burke’s original work seems to have prefigured later developments already between the World Wars. Kittang aims to give a substantial presentation and critical discussion of the role of rhetoric in Burke’s writings, with a particular view to the following three questions: (1) What characterizes Burke’s understanding of rhetoric and rhetorical theory, in comparison with the two strands mentioned above, and in light of his contemporary intellectual-historical context? (2) Which are the impli-

cations of Burke's rhetorical theory for theories of knowledge and science? (3) To which extent can Burke's theory contribute to the theoretical foundations for research in the humanities?

Two other projects aim to investigate forms of knowledge produced by non-scholarly writing:

Professor Arild Linneberg, Department of Comparative Literature: *Rhetoric, Art Experience, Knowledge*

The idea that one "learns" something from encounters with art in different media, literature not least, is widespread and foundational particularly to various forms of didactic "mediation" of art and literature. Attempts to define the characteristics of aesthetic experience and its socio-cultural role constitute a central field in aesthetic theory/philosophy. Linneberg's project, which springs from his previously published work on the aesthetic theories of Adorno and others, will be devoted to analytical work on recent Scandinavian literature (primarily novels), centering on these issues.

Senior Lecturer Lars Sætre, Department of Comparative Literature: *Topographies: The Potential for Knowledge in Marginal Writing*

The general question behind this project is formulated as follows: How does the relation between the "materiality" of the text (in Walter Benjamin's sense) and its rhetorical figuration determine the kinds of knowledge (insight, experience) it produces? An answer to this question requires a critical examination of its two key concepts – materiality and figure/figuration. The project draws on theoretical impulses from the Frankfurt School and Walter Benjamin, from the work of Lyotard and others on aisthesis and anaesthesia, psychoanalytical and psychosemiotic theories of the subject, and, in particular, on Sigrid Weigel's materialistic, topographical and "figurative-visual" textual theory. Readings of a selection of texts that in some way or other are marginal to established canons and genres constitutes the analytical component of the project. Both modern fiction, classical myth and philosophy will be represented.

The usefulness of the rhetorical perspective is perhaps particularly striking in studies of what happens when scholarly or scientific discourses "collide" with cultural fields or discourses they are more or less alien to. One such "collision" is the subject of the following project:

Professor Per Buvik, Department of Comparative Literature: *Psychiatric pathographies of Artists*

This project is a study of the rhetoric of a medical science, psychiatry, and its consequences this discip-

line's production of knowledge about a central cultural field – art. Not only psychoanalysis, but also psychiatry has taken an interest in art and artists. The psychiatric pathography of artists can be seen as a subgenre of the medical psychopathography. Its heyday seems to have coincided with the first flourishing of modernism in literature and the visual arts (late 19th and early 20th century). French psychiatrists studied artists such as Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Ribaud, Cézanne, Manet and Gauguin. This project will attempt a systematic study of this psychiatric literature, trying out the following three hypotheses: (1) Psychiatry would like to be regarded as a medical science, but reveals itself in its encounters with art and artists as a moral and ideological (normative) discipline. (2) The psychiatric psychopathography is a textual genre and its characteristics is in need of more precise descriptions. (3) The texts in question may problematize notions of 19th century art as "bourgeois" – it is rather psychiatry which is "bourgeois", while the art of the period appears pathologized and hence marginalized.

Discursive "collisions" obviously also take place within research or Academia, and rhetorically inspired studies of controversies within single disciplines may shed light on both concepts of knowledge and various processes of mediation:

Professor Nils Gilje, Centre for the Study of the Sciences and the Humanities: *The Research Community's Communication of Scholarly Controversies*

Studies of scholarly "controversies" is a quite recently established field. They concentrate on conflicts within research communities which seem to have no "normal" solution in the short run and which tend to lead to a deep crisis within the milieus in question. Controversies within the humanities and the social sciences have hitherto not been studied as much as those within the natural sciences. The purpose of this project is, by way of two empirical case studies, to raise questions concerning how scholarly controversies are communicated to agencies that fund research, to a wider scholarly audience (including students at various levels) and to people outside of Academia. The idea is that a study of such controversies and the ways in which they are (not) communicated may shed some realistic light both on the "ethos of science" and on the processes whereby knowledge is mediated in wider social contexts. The case studies will be (1) the controversy in anthropology between Margaret Mead's and Derek Freeman's versions of Samoa and (2) the struggle within the sociology of religion between different perspectives on the processes of secularization, where empirical

facts are agreed upon while interpretations of them are radically different. In both cases it is assumed that a rhetorical analysis of central texts will prove fruitful to an understanding of the controversies.

The links between specifically scientific and scholarly rhetorics and those of more general discourses on philosophy, politics etc. may well be studied within a certain discipline and the production of knowledge and insight that takes place there. This is part of what the following project may be said to be about:

Senior Lecturer Ellen Mortensen, Department of Comparative Literature: *Rhetorical Reversals: Readings in Feminist and Queer Theory*

The feminist discourse on literary and cultural theory has always legitimated itself referring to its “critical” and “emancipatory” potential. The aims of liberation and enlightenment have been upheld without much discussion even as one has embraced more recent theoretical discourses (psychoanalysis, deconstruction, post-structuralism) which all to a greater or lesser extent reduce or outright empty the potential for “critique” and “emancipation” in the modern subject. The project will approach this paradox in light of the fact that feminist theory now is installed as one of the most important newly-conquered territories of the academic institution. The working hypothesis is that an important reason for this integration is that there are links between the Enlightenment rhetoric in feminist theory and the ethos of the University as an institution. The project will concentrate on a rhetorical study of texts by quite different feminist theoreticians (Spivak, Braidotti, Moi, Grosz), but will also involve readings of Enlightenment philosophers (Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Schelling, Fichte, Rousseau). For both kinds of texts, the focus will be on concepts and rhetorical figures of gender difference, knowledge, emancipation and freedom. Finally, so-called “queer theory” (Butler, Roof, Fuss, Sedgwick) will similarly be studied in order to see if it continues or breaks with feminist theory at the points in question.

The final project which is placed in this category is a study of a discipline, history, which traditionally is particularly central to the formation of ideologies and identities both through the educational system and through institutions such as the mass media.

Professor Ashbjørn Aarseth, Department of Nordic Languages and Literatures: *Narrative Strategies in Norwegian Historiography: A Comparative Study*

This project will compare texts from the 1870s and the 1970s dealing with issues in Norwegian political

history. The texts will be of two kinds – academic or scholarly texts on the one hand, and texts written with a more general readership in mind on the other. The choices of rhetorical devices in the construction of sequentiality and cohesion will be compared, as well as the narrative strategies employed in historiography intended for scholarly and general readerships respectively. The central problem concerns the relation between narration and explanation in different kinds of historiography, and the project will be drawing on a number of theorists in this field, including Hayden White and Louis O. Mink. The main focus in the analysis will be on the identification of differences between scholarly and popularized writings.

(2) *Language, Rhetoric and the History of Media Technology*

This category comprises three projects which share an orientation toward the linguistic and rhetorical consequences of the historical development of media technologies. Taken together, they cover a very long period of time and emphasize a historical dimension to the project as a whole.

Professor Lars Boje Mortensen, Department of Classical Studies: *Credibility and Medium: Changes in Media Technology and the Writing of History in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (1000-1600)*

Two main questions are to be investigated: (1) How does the separation of research on the past and its mediation actually arise, in practice? (2) Which means do historians typically employ in order to strengthen the credibility of their narratives? The project will regard these questions in light of the developments in media technology and try to determine to which extent changes in the production and distribution of historical texts may have led to changes in research on the past and its mediation. The introduction and spread of the printing process in the second half of the 15th century is the most well known revolution in the medium of writing. But already in the 12th century, the dependence on writing in both administration and learning reached a “point of no return”: references to written material became a prerequisite for credibility, and libraries and the production of books expanded tremendously. This created a new situation for historians and their work. The later introduction of printing then revolutionized the conditions for historical writing again, since it made identical copies of texts (including images, tables, maps) simultaneously available all over

Europe. The consequences of these developments will be studied in a selection of historical texts of various kinds, written in latin at different times in the period indicated.

Senior Lecturer Arild Utaker, Department of Philosophy: *A Media-Historical Perspective on Modern Concept of Language and Mediation*

Rhetoric has always emphasized the media and forms of expression through which knowledge is produced and mediated. But it has also been argued that the media – broadly understood as technologies of language and communication – work as sources of metaphors through which we understand language, communication and knowledge. Computer technology will, for instance, obviously influence our ideas about these phenomena. This project is intended to have a closer look at such connections between media technologies and theories of language and communication, working from the hypothesis that new media not only redefine social spaces but also “theoretical spaces”. The historical examples will be drawn from the times after the introduction of telegraphy (1843), which may be said to have prepared to ground for modern theories of language (the notion of “codes”, the distinction between a plane of “expression” and a plane of “content” etc.). Later inventions such as the phonograph, the telephone etc. may also be said to have provided new modes of existence for language, changed its phenomenology, and thus contributed to the dissolution of previous conceptions of it. The project aims to (1) clarify theoretical perspectives in this area, and (2) to do readings of certain theoretical texts with a view to these perspectives.

Professor Anders Johansen, Department of Media Studies: *Political Rhetoric and the Condition of Modern Media*

The personal presence of the speaker in voice, gestures and mimicry was a central concern of classical rhetoric since it was a rhetoric of speech, of oral, “live” presentation. While overlooked in much of the recent revival of rhetorical theory, radio and modern audiovisual media have brought renewed importance to art of presentation, of *actio*. The project involves a mapping of changes in the forms of political speech, as evidenced in eye witness reports, manuals for speakers, and, for more recent times, audio/visual records. (Some of this work is already published.) The main focus will, however, be on the shift in the postwar period from the passionate speaker to the “lower-volume”, “everyday” forms of presentation now dominating. This shift is seen as related to the emergence of new criteria of credibil-

ity, tied to the speaker’s ability to appear as no longer just “speaking the truth about the issue” and not only “speaking the truth about his/her relation to the issue” but also to appear as really “being” him/herself when speaking. The central question is to which extent this change is produced by new media, new practical conditions for communication – the transition from podium/auditorium to TV-screen/living room. The role of television must be regarded in light of the total modern “media formation”, and in light of long term changes in moral and aesthetic values in modern society. The new media of this century must be seen as culturally determinant – but only to the extent that they are also culturally symptomatic: they are particularly suited for the spreading and normalization of a set of values that are central to late modern culture. – The project will on the one hand involve studies of historical sources and theoretical writing, on the other, a detailed analysis of selected recordings of speeches, debates and interviews will be conducted in an attempt to link general and abstract insights to concrete evidence of these processes of change.

(3) *Media Rhetoric and Problems of Mediation*

Two of the projects in this category is about the rhetoric and mediation of knowledge in the news genre:

Senior Lecturer Martin Eide, Department of Media Studies: *...Making Use of the Results of Modern Social Scientific Research...*

The quote in the project title is taken from the first issue of the Norwegian newspaper *Verdens Gang*, June 23, 1945. This paper had roots in the Resistance movement during the war, and was thus related to papers such as *Information* in Denmark and *Le Monde* in France. But contrary to these “intellectual” newspapers, *Verdens Gang* (VG), became the first modern tabloid in Norway from the early 60s. This project aims to investigate the role(s) and rhetorical constructions of social science research and expertise throughout VG’s history. The coverage of four important national political struggles between the late forties and the mid eighties have been selected for particular analysis. The analysis will also be related to changes in press ideology and strengthened journalistic professionalism in this time period. It will attempt to answer questions such as the following: What happens when journalists increasingly take over as mediators of knowledge and get a rhetorical “upper hand” in relation to their academic

sources? What kinds of interplay may be pointed out between the texts of researchers and the texts of journalists? Can researchers be seen as producers of premises for public debate?

Senior Lecturer Oddgeir Tveiten, Department of Media Studies: *Rhetorical Perspectives on International Reporting*

Tveiten is involved in international research cooperation on the coverage of war and international conflicts in the media, and the journalistic use of critical, research-based knowledge in such contexts. The present project may thus include a comparative dimension, but will primarily focus on the rhetoric of international reporting in Norwegian news media and in more specialized print media. Three main problems will be specifically addressed: (1) The construction of a more or less shared stance of narration in Norwegian international reporting, particularly on the so-called third world, through shared educational background and moral/political engagement. A number of other factors (stipends, travel support etc.) also contribute to the formation of relatively strong informal networks and a high degree of similarity in perspectives. (2) The development of a topology of international reporting, where the world “below” (Africa and other poor parts of the so-called third world) and the world “beyond” (Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union) are equipped with sets of fixed, stereotypical characteristics. (3) The relation between research-based expertise on the one hand and the international reporters and their stories on the other. These problems will be studied specifically in relation to the coverage of the catastrophe in Rwanda – and the catastrophes which are/were never highlighted in the same way.

While the two above projects focus primarily on print media, the following three are about audiovisual media, primarily television. One of them addresses fundamental issues in a rhetorical theory of audiovisual media:

Professor Peter Larsen, Department of Media Studies: *Figurations: The Rhetoric of Moving Images*

Certain parts of classical rhetoric, such as *inventio* and *dispositio*, contains rules and analytical devices which remain meaningful also when applied to non-verbal materials. But such a transferral is clearly more problematic in the case of *elocutio*. Roman Jakobson and Roland Barthes once tried to integrate classical rhetoric’s ideas about *elocutio* in a general semiotic theory. But, even after several decades of work in their footsteps, it remains an open question whether clearly delineated concepts of tropes and

figures are really meaningful in relation to non-linguistic materials such as music, pictures and moving images. This project is devoted to this issue, and will consist of both theoretical and analytical work. It builds on previously published work, where Larsen argues that verbal language and moving images are semiotically different systems both in terms of “substance” and “form”, and that this is the reason why transferrals of rhetorical concepts/categories to the study of moving images have more or less failed. The hypothesis of this present project is, then, that while no general rhetorical *form* exists, one might argue that certain general processes of signification, a general rhetorical *work*, exists, which operates in many substances and organizes a variety of forms. This argument is to be further developed not least through analyses of film and television texts. These texts will primarily be of non-narrative kinds, since such texts seem to be less strictly organized than narrative ones and a rhetorically oriented description of this field might prove rewarding.

Two project will study different aspects of television as mediator of research-based knowledge of different kinds:

Senior Lecturer Barbara Gentikow, Department of Media Studies (partially in cooperation with Senior Lecturer Endre Willassen, Department of Zoology): *Transnational Mediation of Knowledge Through Cable: The Discovery Channel*

The Discovery Channel is probably the only satellite channel available in Europe which is totally devoted to what might be termed “enlightening” programmes. Programmes drawing on the natural sciences are central to the channel’s profile. This project will look into both the organization of the channel, the production of its programmes and their reception. But the main emphasis will be on an analysis of its programming profile and, particularly an analysis of the rhetoric of its programmes about nature. What narrative devices are employed in reports about animals of various kinds? Which idea(s) about Nature are constructed, and how? Is Nature portrayed as a sort of metaphor for society? How are these programmes related to current ideas in research within the natural sciences? The study of the reception of the channel’s programmes is largely to consist of a series of interviews with a group of Norwegian viewers, the results of which is to be compared to the conclusions in the textual analysis of selected programmes. General issues concerning the understanding of transnational television (linguistic problems, practices such as “zapping” or “grazing”) will also be touched upon in this connection.

Professor Jostein Gripsrud, Department of Media Studies: *Science, Knowledge and Wisdom in Popular Culture and Television*

Mediation of knowledge through television will almost by necessity take a more or less personalized form. Scholars or other intellectuals who for instance host series on various more or less scholarly issues will then necessarily be subjected to the kinds of evaluations of screen “personalities” which audiences routinely produce when watching TV. They will be categorized as more or less sympathetic, more or less credible etc. on the basis of widespread everyday “schemata”. Television and its insistent close-ups thus present new conditions for and a new emphasis on the mediator’s *ethos*, i.e. his or her ability to convey *phronesis* (“sound judgement”), *areté* (“good human character traits”) and *eunoia* (“good will/intentions in relation to the audience”). This project is to consist of three interrelated parts: (a) A historical mapping of stereotypes of scholars and in-

tellectuals in folk and popular culture; (b) an analysis of how scholars and intellectuals appear/perform in a selection of “enlightening” programmes; (c) a “focus group” reception study in relation to some of these programmes, aimed at producing a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between stereotypes, “perceptions of personalities” and mediation of knowledge. A hypothesis regarding the stereotypes, is that both folk and popular culture has tended to distinguish between people with “knowledge only from books” on the one hand, and people who represent “wisdom”, which is associated with experience, on the other. These categories have different ethical implications, and the reasons for this need to be looked into. Three of the programmes (series) selected for analysis are British productions: *Civilisation*, *Ways of Seeing* and *The Shock of the New*. Theoretically, the project will be indebted not least to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Norbert Elias, Richard Sennett and Joshua Meyrowitz.

