



Foundations of Evaluative Criteria in Rhetorical Criticism

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Foundations of Evaluative Criteria in Rhetorical Criticism

PhD Dissertation

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A brief note on language

A note on gender-specific pronouns: Many of the scholars cited in this dissertation wrote at a time when it was standard practice to employ masculine pronouns or words such as “man” in a more or less gender-neutral fashion. This sometimes leads to anachronisms such as when quotations seemingly imply that all critics are men, that ethics is a subject matter about happiness for men, etc. I have decided to leave this language as-is without commenting on it or inserting remarks such as ‘[sic]’, because this would ultimately be confusing the points I want to make. In my own text I have strived for a more up-to-date style, hopefully successfully.

Abstract

This dissertation is a meta-critical inquiry into the foundations of evaluative criteria in rhetorical criticism. Where do these criteria come from, and how can their appropriateness be justified? In order to answer these questions, the dissertation investigates and discusses historical, theoretical/methodological, and analytical issues. The historical part focuses on the decline of evaluative rhetorical criticism in the twentieth century. Through a reading of a number of seminal rhetorical texts going back to Herbert A. Wichelns, the case is made that a conception of rhetorical criticism without evaluation as its main purpose arose around 1970. This decline is explained with reference to the counterculture of the 1960s and simultaneous increase in demand for scholarly rigor. Further it is argued that these developments should not necessarily lead to a decrease in scholarly attention to evaluative rhetorical criticism, not least because it has its own *raison d'être* which supplements that of analytical/explanatory criticism. In the theoretical/methodological part of the dissertation, it is hypothesized that the notion of function may be able to explain the origin and appropriateness of evaluative criteria in rhetorical criticism, and it is argued that rational reconstruction may be a means of analyzing and illustrating how the notion of function is operative among evaluative rhetorical critics. Finally, in the analytical part of the dissertation, rational reconstruction is used to explicate how four evaluative critics (Wichelns, Auer, Kock, Patterson) rely on the notion of function to reason about the quality of rhetoric and argumentation and derive and justify evaluative criteria. In this way, the dissertation aims to contribute historical, theoretical/methodological and analytical insights to an arguably neglected part of rhetorical criticism, namely the evaluative dimension.

Resumé

Denne afhandling er en meta-kritisk undersøgelse af grundlaget for vurderingskriterier i retorisk kritik. Hvor kommer kriterierne fra, og hvordan kan deres hensigtsmæssighed underbygges? For at besvare disse spørgsmål undersøger og diskuterer afhandlingen historiske, teoretiske/metodiske og analytiske problemstillinger. Den historiske del af afhandlingen handler om det tyvende århundredes tilbagegang i vurderende retorisk kritik. Gennem læsning af en række retoriske nøgletekster fra Herbert A. Wichelns og frem argumenteres der for, at idéen om retorisk kritik uden vurdering som hovedformål vandt indpas omkring 1970. Tilbagegangen forklares med henvisning til 1960ernes modkultur og et samtidigt øget krav om akademisk stringens. Det fremføres videre, at disse faktorer ikke nødvendigvis bør føre til et formindsket fokus på vurderende retorisk kritik, bl.a. fordi denne form for kritik har sin egen eksistensberettigelse, der komplementerer den analytiske/forklarende retoriske kritik. I den teoretiske/metodiske del af afhandlingen foreslås, at begrebet 'funktion' kan forklare oprindelsen og hensigtsmæssigheden af vurderingskriterier i retorisk kritik, og det fremføres at rationel rekonstruktion er et egnet redskab til at vise, hvordan funktionsbegrebet anvendes af vurderende retoriske kritikere til netop dette formål. I den analytiske del af afhandlingen ekspliciteres gennem rational rekonstruktion, hvordan fire forskellige vurderende kritikere (Wichelns, Kock, Auer, Patterson) baserer deres vurderingstænkning på fire forskellige funktionsbegreber, som de anvender til at opstille og underbygge hensigtsmæssigheden af vurderingskriterier for retoriske artefakter. På denne måde sigter afhandlingen mod at bidrage til at besvare centrale spørgsmål om den underbelyste vurderende dimension af retorisk kritik gennem historiske, teoretiske/metodiske og analytiske indsigter.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

No critical judgments can be more complicated than trying to distinguish good rhetoric from bad
Wayne C. Booth (2004, p. 39)

What is rhetorical quality? Rhetorical critics still are struggling with this question.
James Jasinski (2001, p. 133)

Rhetoric varies in quality; it can somehow be better or worse. But what makes it so? What are the criteria by which rhetoric is (or should be) evaluated, where do these criteria come from, and how can their appropriateness be justified? This dissertation investigates these questions in order to contribute to our understanding of how one might “distinguish good rhetoric from bad” (cf. Booth above) or understand the idea of “rhetorical quality” (cf. Jasinski above). In attempting to answer the questions, I hope to vindicate the relevance of an important but arguably neglected dimension of rhetorical criticism, namely evaluation.

What is evaluation? As a general phenomenon, evaluation may be defined as “the act of judging the value, merit, worth, or significance of things.” (Schwandt, 2015, p. 1). Or, as the venerable rhetorical critic Barnett Baskerville once put it more bluntly in the

specific context of rhetorical criticism: Evaluation is the attempt to “distinguish quality from shoddy” (Baskerville, 1953, p. 2).¹

Although the dissertation is about criteria, it is not an attempt to add my own list of evaluative criteria to those already on the market. Instead, the project undertaken here is a meta-critical analysis of how some rhetorical critics have established their evaluative criteria and argued for their appropriateness. What I hope to show, for reasons to be explained, is that evaluation of rhetoric *can* be based on systematically derived and justified criteria. If this project is successful, the ideas presented here may be useful for those engaging in (or wanting to engage in) evaluative rhetorical criticism. At the very least, these ideas will serve as a challenge for anyone who might doubt that evaluative criteria could have a deeper basis than ideology, arbitrary traditions, taste, or bias. The present inquiry, then, concerns the *foundations of evaluative criteria in rhetorical criticism*.

Three reasons motivating the inquiry

What warrants a study of the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism now? Several reasons may be adduced. For introductory purposes, I shall mention three. The first reason is *intradisciplinary*. As I will argue in Chapter 2, evaluation was for many years regarded as the ultimate purpose of rhetorical criticism. More specifically, the case may be made that evaluation was considered central to rhetorical criticism at least from 1925 when Herbert A. Wichelns inaugurated the modern discipline of rhetorical criticism in his landmark essay “The Literary Criticism of Oratory” (1925/1995). The importance of evaluation was affirmed all the way through to the publication of the proceedings of the renowned Wingspread Conference in 1971 (Bitzer, Black, & Wallace, 1971).² For almost

¹ By defining evaluation this sense, I concur with scholars such as Stephen E. Lucas (1981, p. 13) who maintain the futility of trying to classify all rhetorical criticism as evaluation: “There is a crucial difference between explicit evaluation in rhetorical criticism and evaluation as an inescapable part of all perception and interpretation. To say that rhetorical critics must forthrightly judge rhetorical works against some set of criteria is one thing. To say that rhetorical critics can never escape some sort of evaluative process no matter how they try is quite another. The latter position rests upon such a broad construction of ‘evaluation’ as to rob the term of any special meaning.”

² I use the phrase “modern history of rhetorical criticism” or “modern rhetorical criticism” to refer to the post-1925 era. Some readers will undoubtedly and understandably question my decision to include an essay from 1925 under the rubric of “modern rhetorical criticism.” The demarcation from 1925 onwards as “modern” is, it must be granted, somewhat arbitrary. But it reflects the notion that critics and theorists at least from this point on seem to converge on the idea that evaluation—in some form or another—should be central to rhetorical criticism.

half a century, statements of any alternative *raison d'être* for rhetorical criticism were virtually impossible to locate in the literature. And to this day, many textbooks on rhetorical criticism continue to advise students to include an evaluation of the artifact or artifacts of their choice.³ It thus seems that evaluation was, and to an extent still is, perceived as a primary responsibility of rhetorical critics. As Walter R. Fisher has put it, echoing the sentiments of many of his colleagues, "...the most fundamental task of the critic is to make evaluative judgments" (1974, p. 77), and during the fifty years post-Wichelns, whatever else critics said and did, some kind of assessment of the quality of the rhetoric was held to be necessary for their work to count as criticism.

If we grant that evaluation has been central to rhetorical criticism and grant also that it is a theoretically and practically complex phenomenon, it seems we should be able to find a significant number of extended treatments or even book-length accounts dedicated to the topic on our library bookshelves. Strangely enough, though, our libraries (at least the ones I know of, physical and digital) contain no such copiousness. In fact, to my knowledge, only a quite limited number of works focus squarely on the fundamental problems of establishing and justifying evaluative criteria in rhetorical criticism. These include Leister Thonssen and Albert Craig Baird's (1948) mammoth volume *Speech Criticism: The Development of Standards for Rhetorical Appraisal* and the more modest 123-page doctoral dissertation on *Evaluation in Rhetorical Criticism: Its Nature and Function, with an Application* by Howard N. Schreier, a graduate of Temple University (Schreier, 1980).⁴ Whatever the scope and merits of these works, disparate efforts to throw light on the manifold and profound problems of evaluation hardly seem sufficient to seal off this entire area of inquiry from further investigation and consider these problems to be sufficiently illuminated. One intra-disciplinary reason for the relevance of an inquiry about evaluation derives from the fact that it is a historically important, yet a theoretically (and perhaps practically⁵) under-explored aspect of rhetorical criticism.

The second reason is *interdisciplinary*. There is growing interest from other academic disciplines in the phenomena of evaluation and normativity. As I will argue in Chapter 3, disciplines such as political science, sociology, philosophy and argumentation

³ One of the most recent and prominent examples can be found in Kuypers (2009).

⁴ There might be other works addressing evaluative issues more tangentially, but my contention is that evaluation is important enough to warrant much more detailed and sustained attention.

⁵ The extent to which evaluation has been historically central among practicing rhetorical critics is a topic I will discuss in Chapter 2.

theory increasingly take an interest in normative modes of scholarship along with an interest in defining the proper scope and methods of such scholarship. Since the discipline of rhetoric has historically accorded great importance to normative scholarship, rhetoric as a discipline is uniquely situated to contribute to the development of normative scholarship in academia for example by investigating and explaining methods and strategies of evaluative reasoning and argument.

A third reason for the relevance of a study of evaluative rhetorical criticism is *extra-disciplinary* and concerns the growing distrust of evaluation *as a general phenomenon* in society. As pointed out by evaluation theorist Thomas Schwandt, among at least some members of the public, evaluative reasoning in the form of argument about policies or discussions about the merits of solutions to problems in community affairs is cynically dismissed as nothing but thinly veiled attempts at satisfying personal preferences that could have no basis in reason or rationality. In one paper, Schwandt thus writes (2008):

We are facing a rather worrying brew of developments affecting practical intellectual life in modern society and the very well-being of society itself. These developments threaten to degrade the central role that the cognitive endeavor, known as reasoned evaluative criticism, plays in the achievement, maintenance, and enhancement of the good society.

Schwandt points to a range of factors undermining the belief in reasoned evaluative criticism, but his basic concern is that we are increasingly substituting our belief in evaluation for impulsive gut-feelings illustrated by ‘likes’ on social media, thus promoting a shallow, superficial conception of preferences (needs, wants, etc.) to the detriment of a deeper appreciation of more thoroughly reasoned judgments. In my opinion, rhetorical critics and theorists have a duty to demonstrate how and why genuine evaluative reasoning about public issues by politicians or other public figures can be meaningful and significant, and to demonstrate that such reasoning does not have to be interpreted as attempts at spin, partisanship and egoism.⁶

In my opinion, these are three weighty reasons for undertaking a study of the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism: Within the discipline itself, sustained

⁶ In the following quotation, Schwandt speaks of evaluators generally, but I believe it applies to rhetorical critics who have evaluative ambitions: “[Evaluators] ought to embody in their work the viewpoint that reasoned evaluative criticism plays a central role in the achievement, maintenance, and enhancement of the good society.”

attention to the evaluative dimension is absent. Across the disciplines, evaluative modes of scholarship seem to be gaining traction, and rhetoric ought to be able to contribute to this area of inquiry. And a study of the evaluative dimension could also contribute, however modestly, to building a culture in which public evaluative arguments were better understood. With the above outline of the general topic and relevance of this dissertation, here is an overview of coming chapters.

Chapter overview

The dissertation consists of three parts. The first part is historical, the second part is theoretical/methodological, and the third part is analytical. The historical part opens with Chapter 2 which traces the ostensible decline of the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism. For most of the twentieth century, rhetorical critics commonly reiterated the idea that evaluation is a crucial, even constitutive, dimension of rhetorical criticism. However, in recent years prominent scholars such as James Jasinski (2001), Leslie Olson (2010, 2012), and David Zarefsky (2008) have suggested that evaluation moved from the center of rhetorical criticism to its periphery at some point during the twentieth century. Unfortunately, the details of this radical reorientation of the field of rhetorical criticism remain obscure. Chapter 2 therefore sets out to trace the contours of the decline of evaluation in rhetorical criticism, particularly with respect to the question of when it took place. Through a detailed examination of a large range of texts beginning with Wichelns' "The Literary Criticism of Oratory" from 1925 (1925/1995), I argue in the chapter that a conception of rhetorical criticism without evaluation at its center seems to evolve around 1970 at the time of the famous Wingspread Conference. Further, the chapter provides an important deepening of our understanding of the decline of evaluative criticism by showing that evaluation was perhaps never as important among *practicing* critics as it was among *programmatically* or *theoretically* inclined critics.

Chapter 3 continues the historical mode of inquiry from Chapter 2. Whereas Chapter 2 asked *when* the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism declined, Chapter 3 attempts to understand *why* it declined. What caused a defining feature of rhetorical criticism to move from the center of the discipline to its periphery? One candidate explanation builds on the narrative of professionalization as suggested by Nothstine, Blair, and Copeland (1994). However, after considering this narrative of professionalization and its possible contribution to the decline of evaluation, the chapter also critically questions the

explanatory power of this narrative. For while Nothstine et al. present professionalization as a ubiquitous phenomenon across all disciplines within the academy, evaluative research programs blossomed in disciplines closely related to rhetoric at the very same time that evaluation in rhetorical criticism seemed to decline. This paradox suggests that if neighboring disciplines were able to develop and refine a theoretically respectable evaluative component, so could rhetorical criticism. As an alternative to the narrative of professionalization, I speculate that factors such as an increase in the demand for scholarly rigor and an intellectual climate inspired by the counterculture of the 1960s may better explain the decline of evaluative rhetorical criticism. Finally, I end the chapter by discussing what, if anything, evaluative criticism has to offer that non-evaluative criticism does not. The answer I propose is that evaluative criticism has a capacity for effecting reasoned improvement in a target practice—a capacity that rhetorical critics should not ignore.

Chapter 4 focuses on criteria and functions. In order for evaluation to get off the ground, evaluative criteria must first be in place. Rhetorical critics, however, have not produced a clear theory about where those criteria come from (the problem of origin) or how their appropriateness for a given artifact may be justified (the problem of appropriateness). In Chapter 4, I conjecture that the concept of function may bring us closer to possible answers to these questions by serving as a useful starting point for a rational reconstruction of evaluative reasoning in rhetorical criticism. More specifically, I show that a specific intuition intimately related to evaluation is ubiquitous among theorists across a number of disciplines and academic eras. This is the intuition that *the quality of an object is intimately related to its capacity to fulfill its function*. While this idea promises to bring us closer to an understanding of evaluation of rhetorical artifacts, it also raises the following question: What exactly is a function, what exactly does it mean for an object to have a function, and how do objects actually come to have a function? These questions pertain to the problem of function ascription.

In Chapter 5 I propose a strategy for answering these questions. The strategy involves case studies of evaluative reasoning that will provide insights into the problems of origin and appropriateness of evaluative criteria. I argue that a suitable analytical approach for these case studies is *rational reconstruction*. Rational reconstruction is an analytical approach aimed at creating knowledge by explicating implicit principles and intuitions operative in a practice. If one problematic aspect of evaluative criticism is that it

can seem subjective and *ad hoc* (and therefore not in accordance with the academic demand for rigor), rational reconstruction—if successful—will hopefully contribute to showing that evaluation can be based on identifiable principles instead of undisclosed taste, ideology, and prejudice.

Chapter 6 marks the beginning of the analytical part of the dissertation. In the chapter, I reconstruct the evaluative reasoning in Herbert A. Wichelns seminal essay “The Literary Criticism of Oratory” (1925/1995) with special attention to the problem of function ascription. In the paper, Wichelns posits that using literary criteria in the evaluation of rhetorical (“oratorical”) artifacts is *inappropriate*. This claim raises the following question: Why are these criteria inappropriate? I propose the following answer: Since literary artifacts and rhetorical artifacts have different *functions*, the appropriate criteria for their evaluation will also differ. But this solution invites a new question: How does Wichelns establish that literary and rhetorical artifacts have different functions? The answer proposed and substantiated in the chapter is, briefly put, that Wichelns employs a so-called *designer approach to function ascription*.

In Chapter 7, I reconstruct the evaluative reasoning in the work of Christian Kock. In a number of publications, Christian Kock has defended a decidedly normative approach to rhetorical criticism of, especially, democratic debate (see e.g. Kock, 2013; 2011; Kock & Villadsen, 2015). Moreover, Christian Kock places the idea of function at the center of his normative approach. Through an analysis of Kock’s publications on the nature of rhetoric and public political debate, I argue that Kock’s evaluative perspective is primarily, though not exclusively, informed by a so-called *user approach to function ascription*. In the chapter I also discuss a critical commentary on Kock’s evaluative approach by David Zarefsky.

In Chapter 8, I reconstruct the evaluative reasoning in J. Jeffery Auer’s classic article “The Counterfeit Debates” (1962). In the article, Auer posits five evaluative criteria for judging the first televised debate between John F. Kennedy and Robert Nixon in 1960. Auer reviews in detail the tradition of debate in the context of democratic society, and I argue that the emphasis on tradition is most charitably reconstructed as expressing an *etiological approach to function ascription*.

In Chapter 9, I reconstruct the evaluative reasoning in an essay by philosopher Steven Patterson. More specifically, I discuss Patterson’s attempt to show that argumentation has a function. As in the previous chapters, I focus on rationally reconstructing the

reasoning employed by Patterson to defend this claim, and I argue that Patterson's evaluative reasoning can be reconstructed as basically expressing *an optimality approach to function ascription*—an approach that goes back to Plato.

Chapter 10 concludes the dissertation. In the chapter I briefly summarize the findings in order to set the stage for a discussion of some outstanding questions and to point to relevant directions that further research on evaluation in rhetorical criticism might take.

PART ONE: HISTORY

CHAPTER 2

Tracing the decline of the evaluative dimension

Prominent rhetorical critics such as James Jasinski, Lester C. Olson, and David Zarefsky have drawn attention to a significant but arguably underexplored development in rhetorical criticism. In passing remarks, they each posit that the *evaluative dimension* of rhetorical criticism seems to have declined during the twentieth century. The aim of this chapter is to examine this ostensible decline: Is there evidence to support it? Is the evidence clear or mixed? Can the moment or trajectory of the decline be pinpointed or traced with any accuracy? An investigation of these questions will contribute to the aim of vindicating the importance of the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism by bringing us closer to an understanding of what, if anything, could be problematic about the dimension. If by investigating the decline of the evaluative dimension we are able to move closer to an understanding of why it happened, this understanding could provide valuable information in the context of considering any obstacles—theoretical or otherwise—that would need to be overcome for critics with evaluative ambitions.⁷

To anticipate the conclusion of the chapter, what follows will reveal that a wide range of central rhetorical sources from Herbert A. Wichelns to current thinkers indicate that the basic story of decline as suggested by Jasinski, Olson, and Zarefsky is

⁷ Cf. Booth (1988) who noted a decline in theoretical discussions of the (ethical) value of literature: “As we take a close look at some of the reasons for such a decline, we may well risk destroying our subject entirely. It is always possible that the reasons for any cultural shift of this kind are good ones: ethical criticism may have no theoretical justification. On the other hand, if we take the reasons for its decline seriously we may manage to resurrect a hardier creature than has emerged from other recent efforts to bring forth a Lazarus.”

corroborated by reasonably clear evidence. But the reading also suggests an important bifurcation among modern rhetorical critics—a twist to the narrative of decline: Whereas *theoretically oriented critics* generally regarded evaluation as a central aspect of rhetorical criticism until around at least the late 1960s, it seems that more *practically oriented critics* have always—even since the days of Wichelns—been much *less* concerned with evaluation. The chapter thus accomplishes two goals. It provides evidence for and details about a hitherto under-investigated disciplinary story of decline; and it adds a new and unrecognized dimension to this story.

Did the evaluative dimension decline in the twentieth century?

Even though rhetorical criticism cannot and should not be reduced to a formula or recipe, it is commonplace to identify a number of components or dimensions typically present in a given piece of rhetorical criticism. James Jasinski (following Abrams and Bryant) helpfully summarizes these “crucial characteristics of criticism” in the following way: Rhetorical criticism (1) defines, (2) classifies, (3) analyzes, (4) interprets and (5) evaluates its objects (Jasinski, 2001, p. 125).⁸ Despite the fact that these components or dimensions of criticism depend crucially on each other and frequently merge both in theory and in practice, the focus here is on the *evaluative dimension* of rhetorical criticism and its alleged decline. To provide a starting point for inquiry into the decline, consider the following comment by Jasinski (2001, my emphasis) on the development of rhetorical criticism in the twentieth century:

Perhaps the first significant development in rhetorical criticism during the second half of the twentieth century was an interrelated process in which *its judicial or evaluative dimension declined* while its epistemological or analytic function dramatically increased.

Jasinski’s understanding of the development of rhetorical criticism is seconded by David Zarefsky, who notes that “while in earlier years it was widely believed that evaluation was the *sine qua non* of criticism; today explicit judging of the work is generally regarded as one of the critic’s options, not a necessary condition” (2008). The same point is made—more despairingly—by Olson (2010):⁹

⁸ A similar exposition can also be found in Villadsen (2009).

⁹ For a reiteration of this point, see also Olson (2012).

“[l]ess frequently today do rhetorical critics present ourselves as judges who offer reasons for an explicit appraisal in light of pre-existing theories or models, normative depictions of genres, ideologies, or movements, or even touchstones. Some have apparently abandoned judgment in favor of interpretation as being sufficient for criticism.”

Judging from these quotations, then, a significant development in the discipline of rhetorical criticism does indeed seem to have taken place during the twentieth century: The evaluative dimension has *declined* and evaluation in rhetorical criticism has come to be regarded as *optional* rather than *obligatory*. But when and how did this significant development happen? Neither Jasinski, Zarefsky nor Olson provide details. And so, in order to get a clearer picture of when evaluation was relegated from the center of rhetorical criticism, it is necessary to conduct a historical inquiry. To this end, the present chapter will review evidence from the earliest modern conceptions of rhetorical criticism and move forward chronologically in order to trace the alleged decline of evaluation through the twentieth century.¹⁰ Pursuing this issue is interesting in its own right, but in doing so we may also move closer to an understanding of the potential obstacles of arguing for the viability and importance of evaluative criticism.

A comment about my approach: It is, of course, practically impossible to review in full detail the development of the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism since the modern beginnings of the discipline in the current context. Certain choices have to be made. In order to feasibly achieve the most accurate and detailed review, I have focused here on reviewing journal articles and texts from authors that feature prominently in various anthologies and collections of modern canonical texts. (I make extensive references to these texts throughout the chapter). This choice of materials entails that I have not focused primarily on *actual examples* of rhetorical criticism, although much could undoubtedly be learned from such an investigation. The assumption behind this methodological decision is that important developments in the actual practice of rhetorical criticism will, sooner or later, leave sediments in the more theoretically oriented journal articles. If, say, an important shift in the conception of evaluation has taken place among

¹⁰ I use the term “modern” in contrast with “classical” or “ancient” in order to refer to the post-Wichelns era of rhetorical criticism.

practitioners of rhetorical criticism, this shift would—presumably—either *motivate* or *be motivated* by work in the theoretically oriented journal articles.¹¹

The role of evaluation in rhetorical criticism from 1925—1950

An obvious place to begin the inquiry is by considering Herbert A. Wichelns' seminal essay on "The Literary Criticism of Oratory" (1925/1995) After all, as noted by Walter R. Fisher, "[o]ne could as well avoid the name of Aristotle in tracing the history of rhetoric as neglect a reference to Herbert A. Wichelns in an essay reviewing a significant aspect of twentieth century rhetorical criticism" (Fisher, 1980).

In the context of the current agenda, the most significant feature of Wichelns' essay is perhaps its lack of direct argument or justification for the importance or relevance of evaluation in rhetorical criticism. But this is not to say that Wichelns does not consider evaluation important or relevant. On the contrary, Wichelns' silence on the issue speaks volumes of his conception of rhetorical criticism as properly evaluative. For Wichelns' whole essay, from beginning to end, is an exercise in establishing a method for conducting evaluative criticism that is properly *rhetorical*, as opposed to *literary*. Put differently, Wichelns' essay is a corrective to what he regarded as a prevalent category mistake, namely to evaluate rhetoric (or "oratory") by applying literary criteria. In Wichelns' essay, the relevance and importance of evaluation in rhetorical criticism is thus never argued but *assumed*.

The following quotations will substantiate this point. In the opening lines of his essay, Wichelns states the gist of his meta-critical project in the following way: "[T]hat section of the history of criticism which deals with judging of orators is still unwritten. Yet the problem is an interesting one, and one which involves some important conceptions" (Wichelns, 1995, p. 3). The crucial term here is "judging". For Wichelns, "[w]hat interests us is the method of the critic: his standards, his categories of judgment, what he regards as important" (ibid., p. 4) In other words, the critic should be regarded as a *judge* who employs certain *standards* for the purpose of reaching an evaluative verdict. The very topic of Wichelns' essay, then, is critical evaluation. And case by case, he trawls through a number of approaches to evaluation of rhetoric and finds them all wanting—to

¹¹ This methodological decision is inspired by Nothstine, Blair and Copeland's method for investigating the influence of professionalization on rhetorical criticism (1994, p. 30). Naturally, the accuracy of my depiction of the decline depends on the validity of the sampled source material.

various degrees and for various reasons. For Wichelns, we may conclude, there seems to be little doubt that rhetorical criticism should evaluate. Wichelns is not concerned with the question of *whether* criticism should evaluate, but rather *how*.

The importance of the evaluative component in rhetorical criticism is also taken for granted by a host of illustrious critics and theorists writing in the wake of Wichelns' seminal essay. Brigance (1933) warns critics, very much in the spirit of Wichelns, against the mistake of evaluating rhetoric as if it were literature. Hunt (1935) talks of the importance of pronouncing "judgments of value" and of these being "adequate judgments." Bryant (1937) also repeats the thoroughly Wichelnsian doctrine that rhetorical criticism is concerned "only secondarily with permanent esthetic canons" and should focus instead on "contemporary effectiveness." Lee (1942) denotes four perspectives from which a critic may "judge whether [a] speech was 'good' or 'bad'," and Dickey (1943) makes the case that critics should evaluate rhetoric by assessing not how *many* people were influenced, but rather how *much* they were influenced. Continuing in the same vein, Baird (1943, p. 304) characterizes rhetorical criticism as centered on "evaluation of outstanding speakers", and Reid (1944) holds that the critic should offer "a critical judgment about the ideas of the speech", make "a judgment about the effectiveness of the speech" (*ibid.*, p. 420), and preferably be able to "demonstrate [...] excellences as well as shortcomings, particularly in relation to speech composition" (*ibid.*, p. 421).

For these critics, then, evaluation is clearly a central dimension of rhetorical criticism. However, the above quotations are all from primarily *theoretical* accounts of the nature of rhetorical criticism. And actual instances of rhetorical criticism are of course not the same as theoretical, programmatic ideals; for criticism is at bottom a practical art. And so, while the theorists quoted above are *writing about* criticism, they were not themselves (in these excerpts at least) *doing* rhetorical criticism. And Loren Reid makes an important point about those "practicing critics". For, perhaps in contrast with Wichelns, the aim of Reid's paper from 1944 was not to provide detached mission statement on behalf of a still nascent and developing discipline, anxious to devise academically respectable methods and procedures. Rather, Reid's aim was to review the last two decades of published rhetorical criticism in order to inductively pave the way for improvements of the critical practice by identifying some observable "perils" encountered by practicing rhetorical critics unshielded by the comforts of armchair theorizing: "Perhaps now is a good time to look over what has been done, and to make certain observations, chiefly to

draw from *the practice* of the last twenty years principles which may be useful during the next twenty.” (Reid, 1944, p. 416, my emphasis).

So, what are those useful principles that rhetorical critics should follow? According to Reid, perhaps the single most important principle is that the critic must “take to heart his primary and inescapable responsibility as a critic: to interpret, to appraise, to evaluate; to say here the speaker missed, here he hit the mark; sometimes to speak with restraint when others applaud, sometimes to bestow praise when others have passed by” (ibid., p. 422). This is clearly an *evaluative* aim. Interestingly, Reid felt that it was necessary—after having reviewed twenty years of published rhetorical criticism—to remind practicing critics of the “peril” of writing non-evaluative criticism. Given that Reid felt the need to issue this cautionary statement in 1944, we may infer that much *practical* rhetorical criticism at least since Wichelns had been largely non-evaluative in the eyes of Reid.

Nonetheless, all the theorists and critics quoted above either assert or imply that evaluation is a central dimension of rhetorical criticism. And in no way do these writers seem to regard this doctrine as particularly controversial or in need of much justification or defense. Its importance is assumed rather than defended. In contrast to this attitude, Baird and Thonssen (1947) offer a much more elaborate case for the centrality of the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism. For example, Baird and Thonssen note how the ancients in their criticism of orators “not only formulated principles of composition and of presentation, but recorded at length their judgment of contemporary speechmakers” (ibid., p. 134). Baird and Thonssen provide reasons for their view of the appropriateness or perhaps necessity of evaluation in rhetorical criticism, and their article contains a number of passages suggesting a felt need to argue that evaluation is an important dimension of rhetorical criticism. But, as they note—perhaps with a nod to Wichelns—the study of *techniques* for evaluation in rhetorical criticism is a relatively recent endeavor: “[A]s a research technique, however, the art [of evaluation] is a contribution chiefly of twentieth century scholars. Only in the latest decades have investigators systematically developed and formulated working principles and techniques of rhetorical evaluation.” (ibid., p. 134).¹²

¹² Interestingly, Baird and Thonssen reference no such principles and techniques.

Having thus canvassed the scholarly situation as they saw it, Baird and Thonssen go on to state their main claim: “The thesis of this article is that *the purpose of rhetorical criticism is to express a judgment on a public speech*” (ibid., p. 135, my emphasis). As far as I have been able to gather, this is the earliest explicit and clear statement of the idea that the very purpose (as opposed to merely one important aspect) of rhetorical criticism is, ultimately, evaluation. And, to emphasize their point, Baird and Thonssen state that the “problem [to be dealt with in all rhetorical criticism] is that of pronouncing judgment” and, further, that “if the critical function is uppermost, the pronouncement of judgment must be a central consideration.” Throughout their article, Baird and Thonssen comment on a number of ways in which the evaluative judgment could and should be reached. But for now, let us not get caught up in the details of why and how evaluation should take place. Instead, let us simply note that Thonssen and Baird provide the hitherto most direct and elaborate case for regarding evaluation as the ultimate purpose of rhetorical criticism—perhaps the first sign that evaluative criticism was in need of justification.

The role of evaluation in rhetorical criticism from 1950—1960

Leland Griffin is yet another proponent of evaluation in rhetorical criticism. In his seminal article on the “Rhetoric of Historical Movements” (1952), he stresses that criticizing rhetorical movements involves applying criteria “in evaluating the public address of the movement”. Barnet Baskerville (1953) follows Baird and Thonssen in welding criticism and evaluation together: “[t]he critical method in speech, like the critical method in any other discipline, consists of making reasoned judgments based on certain standards of excellence” (ibid., p. 1), and to bring home the point, “[i]t is the function of criticism to render intelligent and relevant judgments [...]” (ibid., p. 5). But, Baskerville contends, *practicing critics* do not put enough emphasis on the evaluative component. There is, according to Baskerville, a “frequent lack of a sense of proportion” in rhetorical criticism (ibid., p. 4, emphasis added):

The biographical chapter goes on for fifty pages; the political-economic-social background is delineated in laborious detail; while the speaker's ideas, as they appear in the speeches, are dispensed with in five pages, and *the critical evaluation, properly hedged about with qualifications, is timorously tacked on to the summary.*

And, according to Baskerville, this tendency for practicing critics to slight or even ignore evaluation in rhetorical criticism is the single most important problem in the field of

rhetorical criticism: “But the most basic indictment of our critical studies is that they are not very critical. *In our intense desire to be objective and ‘scientific’ we eschew evaluation and fall back upon labeling and classification.*” (ibid., p. 4, emphasis added).

So, while Baskerville reaffirms that rhetorical criticism should be seen as an evaluative endeavor, he—like Reid before him—laments that practicing critics do not evaluate. And this theme is picked up by Albert Croft who—like Reid and Baskerville—examines the actual practices of working critics. And Croft’s findings, too, reveal interesting discrepancies between the theoretical ideals and the actual practices of working critics. In problematizing what he calls “the ‘standard’ approach to rhetorical criticism” (Croft, 1956, p. 283), Croft finds that *there is very little evaluation going on in practice*: “Perhaps the chief problem in public address research,” says Croft, as if echoing Reid and Baskerville, “is that we have thought of it all as ‘criticism’ when some is really theory, some is history, and some is criticism which has not evaluated the speeches studied”. And he then goes on to describe a common “inadequacy” in graduate theses on rhetorical criticism, namely that “very little effort, if any, is made to evaluate [...]” and he finds that “[t]here is a subtle but unmistakable implication in *all these studies* that the ‘critical’ process is not even intended to produce judgments on the merit of the speech.” (ibid., p. 285, my emphasis). Like Reid and Baskerville before him, then, Croft finds that there is a considerable difference between the theoretical ideals of rhetorical criticism (necessarily evaluative) and the actual practice of rhetorical criticism (largely non-evaluative).

The lack of an evaluative component in the works of practicing rhetorical critics, however, does little to detract from the point that no disciplinary controversy existed *at the theoretical level* at this point in time with regard to the question of whether rhetorical criticism ought to contain an evaluative dimension. On the contrary, we may conclude from the evidence cited so far that a consensus seems to be forming in the discipline around this time: Rhetorical criticism is considered to be evaluative almost by definition, and a critic who does not evaluate is neglecting a crucial responsibility.

With such a consensus, however, comes a requirement of theoretical solidity; in any respectable academic field, the most central tenets ought to be subjected to critical scrutiny before being accepted. Perhaps triggered by the sense that the importance of evaluation had at this point become virtually unquestioned, Thompson (1954) points to a troubling issue. In a survey of twenty-four articles published in leading journals between 1948 and 1952, Thompson finds that “eighteen out of twenty-four writers include value

judgments”. It is not clear exactly what Thompson understands by “value judgments,” but we should note here that his findings seem to go against the problem pointed out by Reid, Baskerville, and Croft, namely that practicing critics did not, in fact, fulfil their duty to evaluate. If “value judgments” is interpreted broadly, however, Thompson’s finding is not surprising.¹³ But despite the prevalence of value judgments in his sample, Thompson states that he has not been able to find a single paper “dealing with difficulties of evaluating effectiveness” or attempts at “improving these attempts at evaluation” (p. 24-25). So, while the importance of evaluation in rhetorical criticism seems to be taken for granted at this point, some concerns about the theoretical and methodological robustness of the evaluative dimension of criticism are slowly emerging.

Striking the same note as Thompson before him, Nilsen (1956) points out that “[a]n old and insistent problem in rhetorical criticism appears to be attracting new attention. I refer to the problem of whether and to what extent the effects of a speech should be within the purview of the speech critic.”¹⁴ Nilsen follows up his claim with a discussion of the prevalent conception of evaluation as the attempt to gauge the effect of a speech as measured by the impact of a speech on its immediate audience along with a proposal to extend this conception of evaluation to include consideration of more wide-ranging social consequences. With Thompson and Nilsen, then, evaluation thus moves slowly from being a rather unreflectively endorsed dimension of rhetorical criticism to being subject to theoretical and critical attention.

This movement is reinforced by Redding (1957), who—as far as I have been able to tell—is the first rhetorical critic to propose that a conception of rhetorical criticism entirely without an evaluative dimension may be viable. Quoting literary theorist Wayne Shumaker with approval, Redding argues that *thorough* criticism necessarily involves limiting the tasks of the critic in one or more ways—for instance by excluding the evaluative dimension (ibid., p. 101, my emphasis):

¹³ Cf. again Lucas (1981, p. 13) who distinguishes between different kinds of value judgments: “To say that rhetorical critics must forthrightly judge rhetorical works against some set of criteria is one thing. To say that rhetorical critics can never escape some sort of evaluative process no matter how they try is quite another. The latter position rests upon such a broad construction of ‘evaluation’ as to rob the term of any special meaning”

¹⁴ It is noteworthy here that Nilsen does not provide any references to substantiate the claim that this problem is an “old” one. In fact, the oldest reference to rhetorical theory in Nilsen’s article is to Herbert Wichelns (1925/1995) whose essay cannot in any meaningful sense be said to question whether the effects of the speech should be within the purview of the critic.

[A]s historians and others have long ago discovered, severe limitation of the subject is inescapable if thorough scholarship be the goal: 'the necessity of limiting each critical book or essay to some part of the total critical process has been increasingly recognized in recent years.' *One—and only one—way of limiting the scope of criticism is to concentrate upon analysis rather than evaluation.*

With Redding's article from 1957 we have, then, the first example of a conception of rhetorical criticism favoring analysis over evaluation. Further, we may note that Redding's motive for proposing non-evaluative criticism is that this may lead to more thorough scholarship. But as we have already seen, this does not mean that rhetorical criticism *in actual practice* had been evaluative up to this point. As was implied by Reid's analysis of critics from 1925 to 1944, by Baskerville (1953), and by Croft's analysis of the "standard approach" to rhetorical criticism, practicing rhetorical critics had not always lived up to the disciplinary orthodoxy of including an evaluative component in their work. This discrepancy between ideal and reality is also noted by Brock, Scott and Chesebro in their comment on the state of rhetorical criticism around the middle of the twentieth century (1989, p. 25, my emphasis):

Finally, in 1955 Marie Hochmuth Nichols published the third volume of *History and Criticism in American Public Address*, supplementing William Norwood Brigrance's two volumes released in 1943. These works include the critical efforts of forty scholars in the field of speech communication and demonstrates the application of the basic patterns to traditional criticism. However, the application was uneven and at times deviated significantly from the ideal. *Wichelns—and later Thonssen and Baird—stressed making judgments about the effects of rhetoric; but many of these critical essays tended to stress description, stopping shy of explicit evaluation.* The thrust of traditional criticism apparently brought many critics to look on their art as that of identifying conventional rhetorical strategies and presenting an account of the speaker and the times.

Around this time, then, the idea that rhetorical criticism should reconsider its connection with evaluation (and the idea that criticism might even get by without evaluation) is thus clearly beginning to be felt, perhaps influenced by the practicing critics.¹⁵

¹⁵ As Fisher (1974) would later note, "theory tends to follow rather than precede practice." And as George Campbell (1776, pp. 16-17) remarked, in the same vein, "As speakers existed before grammarians, and reasoners before logicians, so doubtless there were orators before there were rhetoricians, and poets before critics."

The role of evaluation in rhetorical criticism from 1960—1970

The prevailing theoretical conception of criticism at this point, however, still holds that evaluation is central to rhetorical criticism. Consider thus Hillbruner (1960) who maintains that “[...] criticism has as its primary goal the artistic evaluation of any aspect of contemporary public address” (ibid., p. 7) and further that “[t]he ultimate function of criticism [...] is to evaluate all or any factors dealing with the public speaking process and its relation to any facet of current society and to do it in an individual, articulate, moving, and dynamic way.” In sum, the “ultimate aim” of rhetorical criticism is to “call attention to the best speaking of the day” and “castigate the poor speaking” (ibid., p. 9).

On the surface, then, Hillbruner thus appears to be reaffirming the traditional doctrine of rhetorical criticism in which evaluation is central. But this is not the whole story. For the motivation behind Hillbruner’s argument is his concern with a perceived lack of creativity among mainstream rhetorical critics. Hillbruner is making a case for a kind of criticism (and thus evaluation) “[u]nfettered by any pre-disposed critical formulae” (p. 6). He is arguing for a kind of criticism in which the basic characteristic of the critic, in fashioning his evaluation, in fact, the main if not the only one, is his individuality. By this is meant that each subject of his scrutiny is approached in a unique, subjective manner, dictated by the material being analyzed and appraised” (p. 7-8). What Hillbruner is reacting to here is, in other words, the kind of ‘cookie-cutter criticism’ that would later become a central issue in Edwin Black’s (Black, 1965/1978) seminal book on rhetorical criticism.¹⁶

Like so many before him, Black also considers evaluation to be central to rhetorical criticism. But Black holds that evaluation as it had been conceived of until this point in time had certain crucial limitations that needed to be overcome in order for criticism to break free of its creativity-hindering shackles. More specifically, Black argues that the mode of criticism he labeled “neo-Aristotelian” too unreflectively adopts a distinct perspective of rhetoric to the detriment of other viable alternatives. The problem with the neo-Aristotelian perspective, Black holds, is that “it circumscribes the conception of the context that will guide this criticism; it substitutes historical reconstruction for re-creative criticism; and *it limits judicial criticism to the evaluation of immediate effects.*” In this way, Black’s seminal work may be regarded as a sustained and focused argument

¹⁶ For another similar argument, see also Hillbruner (1963).

continuing the sentiments expressed earlier by critics such as Thompson, Nilsen, Redding, and Hillbruner. For these critics—in their different ways—all raise questions about prevailing disciplinary assumptions pertaining to the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism.¹⁷

But in questioning *why* and *how* evaluation should be part of rhetorical criticism, these critics do not question *whether* it should. It would not be long, however, before this discussion would begin, even though the traditional doctrine was still being reaffirmed: Ericson (1968) claims that “[a]t its roots, all criticism serves to evaluate”, Kane (1968) maintains that “the essential nature of criticism is that of formulating and presenting judgments” and further that “the critic, whether writing on historical or current matters, must make judgments in order to discharge his responsibility as a critic”, and Rosenfield (1968) asserts that “criticism does eventuate in, or at least has as an ultimate objective, assessment”.¹⁸ On this basis Rosenfield concludes that “we ought seldom to find a critic engaging in description of a rhetoric event for its own sake; and if we do, we ought perhaps proceed most cautiously in determining whether to label the product ‘criticism’.” But despite these repetitions of the traditional conception of criticism as necessarily evaluative, a keystone document in the field would soon appear. And surprisingly, at least to some critics, it contained very little talk of evaluation.

¹⁷ For a similar criticism of the tendency to apply a pre-ordained “method” of rhetorical criticism to rhetorical artifacts, see also Fisher (1969).

¹⁸ Rosenfield contrasts the term ‘assessment’ with ‘description’, and he seems to take it to be synonymous with ‘evaluation’, cf. Rosenfield’s (p. 54) verbatim quotation of Edwin Black: “At the culmination of the critical process is the evaluation of the discourse or of its author; a comprehensive judgment which, in the best of criticism, is the fruit of patient exegesis . . . Even the purely technical objective of understanding how a discourse works carries the assumption that it *does* work, and that assumption is an assessment. Similarly, to understand why a thing has failed is at least to suspect that it *has* failed, and that suspicion is an assessment. There is, then, no criticism without appraisal; there is no “neutral” criticism. One critic’s judgment may be absolute and dogmatic, another’s tentative and barely committal; but however faint the judicial element in criticism may become, it abides.” As an aside, a footnote to the footnote, it should be noted here that Black’s usage of the term ‘work’ is of course ambiguous. On the one hand, stating that a given object ‘works’ can clearly *in a sense* be taken as an evaluation. However, ‘understanding how a discourse works’ could also be understood along the lines of establishing cause and effect, and this does not imply an evaluation any more than ‘understanding how helium works to alter the pitch of the voice when inhaled’. Put differently, Black equivocates between ‘understanding how a discourse does what it is supposed to do’ and ‘understanding how a discourse causes whatever effect it causes.’ The first sentence implies, I think most would agree, an evaluation; the second does not, at least not in and of itself.

The role of evaluation in rhetorical criticism from 1970—1980

This document is the *The Prospect of Rhetoric. Report of the National Development Project* (Bitzer et al., 1971). The book contains essays, reports and recommendations prepared by some 40 prominent scholars who participated in the Wingspread Conference and the follow-up National Conference on Rhetoric.¹⁹ This ambitious project, sponsored by the Speech Communication Association, aimed to develop the discipline so as to meet current and future needs, and as such its conclusions were thoroughly studied at the time of publication—and to an extent they still are.²⁰

One of the most fundamental objectives of the project was to formulate a shared definition of rhetoric and of rhetorical criticism.²¹ The report's ultimate definition of a rhetorical critic was encapsulated in the following statement (Bitzer, Black, & Wallace, 1971):

We are arguing that any critic, regardless of the subject of his inquiry, becomes a rhetorical critic when his work centers on suasive potential or persuasive effects, their source, nature, operation, and consequences.

Even while this definition contains no direct reference to the task of evaluation, it may not be entirely possible to decide on the basis of the quotation whether evaluation should or could be considered part of the critic's tasks. But, according to Walter Fisher, this is not the case. In a polemic with Gary Keele, Fisher maintains that “the complete report does not justify the conclusion that the Committee [responsible for the above quotation] encouraged or even included a regard for normative judgment” and that “[w]hen it was first presented in open session at the Wingspread Conference, I asked the Chairman about the absence of any reference to the quality of rhetorical transactions and he said the Committee purposefully omitted it.” (Keele & Fisher, 1974).

For Fisher, the Committee's omission of evaluation as the central task of the critic is nothing short of unacceptable. As a response, he offered an alternative statement of the evaluative conception of rhetorical criticism (Fisher, 1974, p. 75):

More specifically, [this paper] may be taken as an antithesis statement on criticism to the one made by the Committee on Rhetorical Criticism at the National

¹⁹ The Wingspread conference was held Jan. 25-27, 1970 at the Wingspread Conference Center, Racine, Wisc., USA, and the National Conference on Rhetoric was held May 10-15, 1970 in St. Charles, Ill., USA.

²⁰ Cf., e.g., Mountford (2009), Enos (1997) and Carole Blair's restatement in Kiewe & Houck (2015).

²¹ This would prove—perhaps unsurprisingly—to be a difficult task. For more on this, see Mountford (1997).

Conference on Rhetoric. The Committee's thesis was this: "We are arguing that any critic, regardless of the subject of his inquiry, becomes a rhetorical critic when his work centers on suasory potential or persuasive effects, their source, nature, operation, and consequences." My antithesis is that the committee's statement ignores the essence of criticism, which I will take to be—a qualitative judgment.

While Fisher thus upholds the traditional doctrine of rhetorical criticism as evaluative, there is clear evidence (apart from the Wingspread report) that something is changing in the disciplinary conception of criticism around this time. As Sonja Foss notes (1983) Klyn (1968) talked about how criticism "does not imply a prescriptive mode of writing or any judgmental necessity".²² Further, Gary Keele—writing in opposition to Walter Fisher—is clearly open to the idea that rhetorical critics may choose a non-evaluative approach to criticism and "believe it [to be] a legitimate function of the critic to explain [as opposed to evaluate]" (Keele & Fisher, 1974). Similarly, we find in Baskerville an earlier expression of agreement with the non-evaluative stance of the Committee on Rhetorical Criticism: "Are you not forgetting that the ultimate purpose of criticism is judgment?", Baskerville asks rhetorically. His reply is a clear call for an attenuation of the evaluative component of criticism (Baskerville, 1971, p. 119):

Regardless of your position on the judicial function of the critic, we can probably agree that critics of speakers have of late been more prone than is entirely becoming, to assume the role of judge on the bench, handing down sweeping pronouncements of guilt and innocence, success and failure.

Further, Wayne Brockriede (1974) is also clearly open to the idea that evaluation is optional, not necessary, when he claims that criticism is "the act of evaluating *or* analyzing experience". This means that someone functions as a critic "*either* by passing judgment on the experience *or* by analyzing it for the sake of a better understanding of that experience or of some more general concept or theory about such experiences."²³ (my emphasis). Continuing along the same lines, albeit more cautiously, Hillbruner (1975) admits

²² This quotation is Foss' summary of Klyn's point.

²³ Brockriede provides an interesting clue to the state of the discussion at this point in time when he explains that "Marie Nichols, Edwin Black, and other writers may be well be right in claiming that criticism necessarily involves evaluation, judgment, discrimination among values. Others perhaps could make a case that criticism necessarily involves analytic description, classification, or explanation. I do not need to deny either claim [...]" (p. 165). The issue at this point in time, we may take it, is unsettled. It is worth noting, however, that Brockriede cites no proponents of non-evaluative rhetorical criticism.

that sometimes “a definitive judgment [...] cannot be made. If valuation is not possible,” he advises, “certainly analysis and interpretation [...] is.”²⁴

There seems to be evidence, then, that the dominant theoretical ideal of rhetorical criticism as necessarily evaluative is being seriously challenged around this time. But the challenge does not mean that the evaluative doctrine itself disappears entirely, nor that support for it vanishes in the journals after 1971. For instance, Campbell (1974, p. 40) states that “[i]n my opinion, evaluation is fundamental to the very idea of criticism; all critical acts express a judgment resulting from the application of appropriate criteria to phenomena of a particular type” and she repeats the same point in a later statement (1979), when she maintains that “evaluation will be an inevitable part of critical activity”. Similarly, Ewbank and Ewbank (1976) hold that “[d]escription is a necessary antecedent to and element in criticism, but it must not be confused with the end product of the critic's work, which is evaluation or judgment.”

The role of evaluation in rhetorical criticism from 1980—present

The first theorist in the discipline to investigate the disciplinary debate over the distinction between the analytical/descriptive and evaluative doctrines beyond the length of a single paragraph is, as far as I have been able to discover, Stephen E. Lucas (1981). His paper “The Schism in Rhetorical Scholarship”, however, does not aim to fully analyze how or when non-evaluative criticism came to be regarded as a viable type of rhetorical criticism. The purpose of his article is instead to examine the relationship between history and criticism. In attempting to develop a tenable distinction between history and criticism (a project that Lucas aims to show is bound to fail and which therefore should be put to rest), Lucas tests the conjecture that criticism is necessarily evaluative, while history is not.²⁵ This basis of differentiation between history and criticism, however, turns out to crumble—or so Lucas argues—for rhetorical criticism, he claims, is *not* necessarily evaluative. To support this claim, Lucas adduces four concrete sources: the Wingspread report from 1971, Wayne Brockriede’s distinction between explanatory and evaluative

²⁴ Hillbruner is writing specifically about *moral* evaluation of rhetoric, but for the purposes of this chapter, the distinction between different types of evaluation is not central.

²⁵ With regard to the differences between history and criticism in rhetorical studies, Lucas holds that “the boundary between the two is usually so fluid and indistinct that to insist upon a firm partition is fruitless” (1981, p. 19).

criticism from 1974,²⁶ Donald Bryant's (1973) dictum that "all analytic, interpretive, particularizing, or generalizing examinations of the arts broadly conceived—individual works, kinds, elements, aspects, and authors—are essays in criticism,"²⁷ and finally Philip K. Tompkins (1969), who argues that the fundamental purpose of rhetorical criticism is *explication* rather than *evaluation*.²⁸

Perhaps most interesting in the current context is Lucas' observations regarding critical practice (1981, p. 12):

Theories of rhetorical criticism often have little to do with the way criticism is practiced. In fact, relatively few essays in 'rhetorical criticism' truly entail explicit evaluation as either a necessary or sufficient procedure [...] In practice, if not in theory, most rhetorical critics produce scholarship that is essentially analytic rather than judicial.

In this way, Lucas repeats the idea already implied by Loren Reid as early as 1944, repeated by Baskerville in 1953, Albert Croft in 1956 and illustrated by the contributors to the three volumes of *The History and Criticism of American Public Address*, namely that *practicing rhetorical critics have in fact frequently ignored the evaluative dimension*.

But even in the face of the growing awareness and acceptance of the idea that rhetorical criticism need not be evaluative, the support for the evaluative doctrine was still strong at this point. Sonja Foss (1983) writes:

the critic [...] must [...] evaluate the symbolic activity of the rhetor being studied ... As a result of analyzing a symbolic act [...] the critic must have ideas about what could have been done to make the act function more effectively. To avoid making an evaluation as a result of the inquiry, then, is to denigrate human choice by refusing to make a choice when given the opportunity.

²⁶ We have already encountered these two sources.

²⁷ Even though this quotation would seem to indicate that Bryant does not regard evaluation to be part of rhetorical criticism, Lucas is moving a bit too quickly here. For, as Jasinski (2001) notes, Bryant (1973) *does* in fact include "supporting value judgments" as one of the constituent dimensions of rhetorical criticism.

²⁸ In support of this position, Tompkins cites as an authority the fierce opponent of evaluative *literary* criticism, Northrop Frye (1973), who in his "Polemical introduction" famously declared that "the study of literature can never be founded on value judgments." I return to the idea of explication in Chapter 5.

And, in a very direct fashion, Benoit and Dean (1985) offer their support for the evaluative doctrine of rhetorical criticism in the following way:²⁹

[R]hetorical criticism should render an evaluation or judgment. This is consistent with the meaning of the term “criticism”; it is consistent with usage by various rhetorical scholars; and we ought not be dismayed if it differs from usage in other disciplines. Many useful investigations of rhetoric exist which do not include judgments. However, strictly speaking, they should be referred to by a different label, since a study must evaluate if it is to qualify as “criticism.”

Dale L. Sullivan (1993) also joins the proponents of evaluation when he states that “[c]riticism is the process of evaluation i.e., the process of locating an object of criticism within a value system” (ibid., p. 341) and further that “[t]he ultimate aim of criticism is evaluation” (ibid., p. 344).

On the one hand, Sullivan’s conception of rhetorical criticism is supported by Nothstine, Blair, and Copeland (1994). But on the other, these authors simultaneously assert that there has been a decline in evaluative criticism when they write that “[w]hile one might expect criticism’s principal operations to be interpretative and/or evaluative, contemporary critics align themselves with scientists in describing their work as primarily explanatory in nature.” (I will return to Nothstine et al. in Chapter 3 to analyze and discuss their explanation of the decline).

To round off the survey, consider Jim A. Kuypers (2009) who—in a recent book aimed at educating students of rhetorical criticism—writes that “[g]enerally speaking your essay should contain three components: a description, an analysis, and an evaluation” and further that “[f]or our purposes, we are interested specifically in the analysis and evaluation of rhetorical acts.” Kuypers is the last—and therefore most recent—example to be adduced here, but he clearly seems to endorse the evaluative component and regard it as important for rhetorical criticism.

Conclusion

This chapter began by noting that prominent contemporary scholars such as James Jasin-ski, Leslie Olson, and David Zarefsky have independently asserted that the evaluative

²⁹ Notice the parallel between this position and Rosenfield’s (1968, p. 54) sentiment that “we ought seldom to find a critic engaging in description of a rhetoric event for its own sake; and if we do, we ought perhaps proceed most cautiously in determining whether to label the product ‘criticism’.”

dimension of rhetorical criticism declined during the twentieth century. The purpose of this chapter was to investigate and qualify their claim by scrutinizing a range of relevant sources consisting mainly of journal articles on rhetorical criticism containing passages bearing on the role of evaluation in rhetorical criticism.

The first thing to note on the basis of the foregoing review is that there is clearly a discernible point of disruption in the surveyed literature. Since Wichelns, the theoretical descriptions of rhetorical criticism either implied, asserted or argued that evaluation is a central or even constitutive dimension of rhetorical criticism. But the support for this doctrine began to wane around the middle of the century when Redding (1957) proposed that the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism could be omitted in order to focus instead on analysis. The Wingspread report from 1971 clearly strengthened the non-evaluative doctrine of criticism, and scholars like Tompkins (1969), Keele (1971) and Brockriede (1974) further gave support to this new doctrine. And by 1981, Lucas treated the idea of non-evaluative rhetorical criticism as largely uncontroversial.

But, in a way, perhaps it always was uncontroversial. For while *theorists* of rhetorical criticism only started to recognize non-evaluative criticism as a viable option around 1970, there is clear evidence that *practicing* critics at least since Wichelns have always produced non-evaluative criticism. Reid (1944), Baskerville (1953), Croft (1956), Lucas (1981), and Brock et al. (1989) thus all state or imply that *practicing* critics were to a large extent always non-evaluative. In this way, then, the decline of evaluative criticism asserted by Jasinski, Olson, and Zarefsky may be appreciated in a new light.

On the one hand, the present chapter has thus provided evidence for the claim that evaluation in rhetorical criticism declined in the twentieth century. On the other hand, the chapter has contributed to *qualifying* the story of decline by drawing a distinction between the theoretical ideals and the practical realities of rhetorical criticism. Among the remaining issues, however, is to understand the *causes* of the decline. How did the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism come to be marginalized? What caused it to move from the center of the discipline to the sidelines? By understanding the causes of this reconfiguration in as much detail as possible, it will hopefully be possible to discuss sensibly whether the decline should be accepted as inevitable.

CHAPTER 3

Explaining the decline of evaluative criticism

The point of departure of Chapter 2 was a specific claim about the development of rhetorical criticism made by prominent rhetorical scholars such as James Jasinski, Lester C. Olson, and David Zarefsky. According to the claim, *the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism declined during the twentieth century*. The aim of Chapter 2 was to survey a range of historical sources in order to examine and qualify the claim. And the survey produced evidence that Jasinski, Olson, and Zarefsky are correct – at least partially – when they claim that evaluation declined during the twentieth century. For around 1970, a widely supported theoretical conception of rhetorical criticism—according to which *evaluation* is its purpose—was supplemented, perhaps even supplanted, by an alternative conception of rhetorical criticism in which *explanation/analysis* is regarded as the purpose of rhetorical criticism.

James Jasinski describes the decline of the evaluative dimension as a “significant development” in history of rhetorical criticism (2001, p. 250). But this description, I would argue, amounts to an understatement. When the standardly accepted purpose of a whole field of inquiry is eclipsed by a markedly different alternative, it would be more fitting to say that a *radical reorientation* of that discipline has taken place. And radical reorientations of a field or discipline—any field or discipline—call for disciplinary self-examination. The aim of this chapter is to begin such a disciplinary self-examination. The means is to continue the historical mode of inquiry of Chapter 2, only this time with a different focus. This chapter thus examines *why* the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism declined.

Which factors can explain why evaluation went from being a central, even constitutive, part to a peripheral, optional, element of rhetorical criticism? This question is relevant, as just intimated, for the self-understanding of rhetorical criticism as a field. But, further, the question is relevant in the present context given an important hypothesis motivating this study, namely that evaluative rhetorical criticism contains a potential by virtue of which it deserves to be taken seriously alongside more “neutral”, descriptive-explanatory studies. This is the potential to *improve rhetorical practice* through its capacity to effect *reasoned change*. I thus contend that evaluative criticism ought to be more thoroughly practiced, studied and theorized—alongside other types of rhetorical criticism.

In this chapter, I therefore critically discuss—and ultimately reject—a possible explanation for the decline of evaluative criticism, namely the influence of professionalization on the field of rhetorical criticism as described by Nothstine, Blair, and Copeland (1994). Then, I go on to construct an alternative to the explanation intimated by Nothstine et al., and I argue that this alternative explanation has greater explanatory power. Lastly, I argue that neither of the explanations for the decline provide good reasons for today’s rhetorical critics to avoid engaging in evaluative rhetorical criticism.

Did professionalization cause the decline?

In their book *Critical Questions: Invention, Creativity, and the Criticism of Discourse and Media*, William Nothstine, Carole Blair, and Gary Copeland (1994) describe a particular movement in academia towards a culture or an ideology known as *professionalism*.³⁰ To see in more detail what professionalism entails, consider the following (ibid., p. 18):

Professionalism in academia is also a historically identifiable ideological edifice held together by three interlocking supports: disciplinarity, the creation and enforcement of academic disciplines, which divide knowledge into separate territories, each with its own proper methods of investigation; scientism, the reduction of all “knowledge” to a somewhat limited interpretation of the assumptions and

³⁰ Professionalism is not a term invented by Nothstine et al., but a term used widely to describe a specific and commonly recognized phenomenon within the Western academic world. See for instance Wilshire (2002) and Graff (2007).

techniques of modern science; and pressure toward civic and experiential disengagement on the part of the academic professional.

According to the Nothstine et al., rhetorical criticism—and a host of other disciplines, practices, and assumptions within the academy—are increasingly shaped and structured by professionalism. In fact, the effects of professionalism, the *increasing professionalization*, the authors hold, have been felt in “every field,” including literary studies, history, philosophy and political science (p. 26). But what are those effects?

Especially salient in our context, professionalization reduces the possibility and acceptability of evaluative criticism due to its impetus towards shaping the humanities and social sciences in the mold of the natural sciences (“scientism”). This impetus manifests itself in several different ways. One way is through the tendency of professionalism to *disengage* academics from “public experience and involvement.” According to Nothstine et al., this tendency is enforced through a pressure to construe critical judgments “in ever more technical senses, imperiling the sense of their broadly human significance, and of how they might be *true* of human life.” The fundamental questions or motivations guiding research thus change, so that they become “ideologically neutral, detached from historical and pragmatic considerations” (ibid., p. 23). The proper stance for the professionalized researcher becomes one of “objectivity—practical, ethical, and intellectual distance from the object of study.” This stance of objectivity amounts to a situation in which “the questions worth asking, and the answers worth having, are generally empirical in nature and positivist in temperament.”

Disengagement, then, is one consequence of the scientific impulse of professionalization obstructing the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism. But another consequence of professionalization and the accompanying scientism is that “explanation and prediction are to be distinguished [...] from the rendering of a judgment.” (ibid., p. 25). An important corollary of this development, according to Nothstine et al., is that “‘Theory’ has become virtually the singular objective of criticism; even ‘judgment,’ which might seem a definitional end of anything called ‘criticism,’ has become a secondary and often quite expendable goal.” (ibid., p. 32). Because of this development, “[w]hile one might expect criticism’s principal operations to be interpretative and/or evaluative, contemporary critics align themselves with scientists in describing their work as primarily explanatory in nature.” (ibid., p. 34) According to Nothstine et al., this emphasis on

theory and explanation leads to a situation in the academy in which “normative judgments of all varieties—ethical, political, and moral—are frequently devalued.” (ibid., p. 35).

Although Nothstine et al. invoke professionalization primarily in order to explain why *invention*, i.e. the process of developing questions that can productively drive rhetorical criticism, has been “systematically slighted” (ibid., p. 15), it is easy to see how professionalization with its emphasis on detachment and its devaluation of normativity and judgment is also in many ways incompatible with the evaluative dimension of criticism.

Professionalization is not a good explanation of the decline

The narrative of professionalization proposed by Nothstine et al. is, as far as I am aware, the closest thing to an explanation of the decline of the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism available in the rhetorical literature. But there is something about the narrative that seems to me to be imprecise. Congruent with the evidence we amassed in Chapter 2, Nothstine et al. seem to locate the effects of professionalization to around the time of the Wingspread conference in 1971,³¹ and according to the authors, professionalization impacted *virtually every discipline*. But if this is true, then we should expect to see the effects of professionalism not just in rhetorical criticism, but also in other disciplines. That is, we should expect to see the same positivist yearn for neutrality, objectivity, disengagement, and abstinence from normativity and judgment from all around the academy. And this, I believe, goes against the evidence. In fact, other disciplines closely related to rhetoric (such as political theory and informal logic) seem to have made the very *opposite* turn (away from detached explanation/analysis and toward engagement, normativity and judgment) at the very same time that the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism declined. That is, while many rhetorical critics seem to have retreated from their position as openly evaluative and normative around the time of the Wingspread conference in 1971, at least *some* disciplinary neighbors went the other way: from a detached and neutral attitude to a normative, evaluative and engaged one.

Consider for instance political philosopher John Rawls’ massively influential work *A Theory of Justice* (1971/1999). In the disciplinary self-understanding of political theorists, this work is commonly considered to mark the beginnings of a shift away from

³¹ Nothstine et al. do not offer discuss this in detail, but most of their illustrations of professionalization come from texts published around this time.

a sterile, positivist political theory preoccupied with linguistic analysis of political concepts (see Kymlicka, 2002, p. 10; List & Valentini, 2016).³² In the very same year as the Wingspread Report, then, we thus saw the publication of an immediately and hugely influential milestone in the revival of normative political theory.

While certainly an important factor, Rawls' book did of course not singlehandedly cause the revival of a normative political theory. Other events certainly contributed. Speaking of the issue of the revival of normative political theory in the early 1970s from the earlier grips of positivism during which the whole enterprise of political theory had been pronounced all but "dead" (Laslett, 1956, p. vii), Terence Ball states, "Vietnam raised anew and brought to the forefront exactly the sorts of normative questions that political theory was supposed to address—questions about the rights and duties of citizens, about one's obligation to fight for the state, about just (and unjust) wars, about active and passive resistance, and related matters." (Ball, 1994, p. 49).

Similarly, Brian Barry (1980, p. 285) notes:

If Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* was the internal stimulus to the outpouring of [normative] political philosophy that we have witnessed since 1971, the Vietnam war was unquestionably the crucial external stimulus. Individual choices had to be made about draft resistance and other forms of civil disobedience; and those who condemned the war had to develop the categories in which to show what was wrong with the means by which the war was being waged by the USA.

David Miller (1990, p. 422) agrees that the revival of normative political theory was in large part fueled by a "sharp rise in the level of ideological contestation in western societies, sparked off especially by the emergence of the New Left and the controversies surrounding the Vietnam War."

³² List & Valentini (2016, p. 530) note that "[t]he bulk of political theory in the decades prior to the publication of Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* was conceptual analysis" and further that "conceptual analysis is, in some sense, the least normative or evaluative part of political theory." Cf. also Brian Barry (1980, pp. 284–285) who asks about *A Theory of Justice*, "Why was this extremely long, poorly organized and stylistically undistinguished book such a smash hit? [...] I think for many social scientists, reared on simple-minded logical positivism in graduate courses on 'methodology', the most exciting thing about Rawls was that he showed one could sustain rational argument about questions of 'values' over 600 or so pages. Among philosophers, logical positivism, with its doctrine that all 'value judgments' are merely 'emotive utterances' - boos and hurrahs - had already been discredited. But Rawls was the first person to carry the message to non-philosophers."

Obviously, these explanations point to highly normative concerns, located well outside the neutral and “value free” epistemological realm championed by the positivists. And they spring from a deeply felt need to *engage* with matters external to academia judged to be humanly significant—sentiment in direct opposition to the aloof positivism that Nothstine et al. claim was and is (silently) dominant. At the very time of the Wing-spread Conference, then, aspirations of conducting political research in a neutral and detached fashion were being forcefully challenged: “The hope of establishing a positivistic political science,” writes Ball, “was dealt a decisive if perhaps not mortal blow by the United States’ experience in Vietnam” (1994, pp. 45–53).

These narratives from academic studies of politics, then, provide counter-examples to the narrative of professionalization offered by Nothstine et al. But the switch from a detached to an engaged attitude also occurred in other areas of the academy. For instance, the movement of *informal logic* arose as a response to the perceived inadequacies of formal deductive logic with respect to normatively engaging the kinds of discourse surrounding societal events that seemed most pressingly in need of study, such as the war in Vietnam. Howard Kahane (1971, p. vii), one of the founders of informal logic, describes the issue in the following way:

[I]n class a few years back, while I was going over the (to me) fascinating intricacies of the predicate logic quantifier rules, a student asked in disgust how anything he’d learned all semester long had any bearing whatever on President Johnson’s decision to escalate again in Vietnam. I mumbled something about bad logic on Johnson’s part, and then stated that *Introduction to Logic* was not that kind of course. His reply was to ask what courses did take up such matters, and I had to admit that so far as I knew none did.

According to informal logicians Johnson, Blair, & Hoaglund (1996, pp. 85-86 and p. 243), the admission by Kahane that the methods and tools of formal deductive logic could do little to engage or critique “real world” political discourse should be seen as an expression of a foundational impulse behind the movement of informal logic: Since the goal of informal logic is precisely to provide normative traction for the systematic evaluation of e.g. political discourse, and since formal deductive logic could not deliver appropriate means for doing so, it was necessary to abandon formal deductive logic or at least to amend it radically in order to develop the kinds of tools suitable for the normative enterprise yearned for by university students and staff alike.

Both political theory and informal logic—sometimes also classified as ‘argumentation theory’ (especially in European contexts)—are alive and well today. And mainstream theorists in both disciplines commonly advocate a squarely normative approach. Consider for example the political theorist Simone Chambers (2004), who—inspired by Habermas’ (1987) theory of communicative action—states that “theories of deliberative democracy should be developing critical standards of rhetoric” (ibid., p. 404) and calls for the development of “a substantive ideal of a speaker worth listening to” (ibid., p. 410). Conversely, in argumentation theory, the very influential pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation studies is representative of many other approaches in the specific sense that it begins from a clear normative premise (“the ideal model of a critical discussion”) and proceeds to analyze and evaluate argumentative artifacts from there.³³

Political theory and informal logic are by no means fringe cases when it comes to an increased openness and recognition of evaluative modes of scholarship. Many other disciplines have at various points in time seen an increased awareness and recognition of evaluative modes of scholarship. These include sociology, political science, literary studies, and the philosophy of art.

In large part due to Weber, sociology is a discipline typically regarded as committed to value-neutral and detached social scientific research. But although this mode of research may still be the mainstream ideal in sociology, the discipline is displaying increasing awareness and interest in evaluative and normative modes of scholarship. For an early and clear example of this reorientation in the discipline, consider for instance the introduction to Wardell and Turners’ *Sociological Theory in Transition* (1986). In the introduction, Derek L. Phillips notes that there is “clear evidence of a normative turn in sociology”. The traditional sociological doctrine in which sociologists view “normative concerns as out of bounds as concerns their own work” he rejects as old-fashioned, untimely and “a thing of the past”. What the normative turn in sociology invites and requires, he says, is to provide “a vision of a better society: a society that is more just, more legitimate, more authentic for the lives of full-fledged moral beings.” And he urges that sociologists begin to study which “rules, practices, and arrangements are morally justified and why” with the ultimate aim of developing a “theoretical understanding which can be used to help improve and transform society.”

³³ For an authoritative overview of the pragma-dialectical ideal model in particular and the pragma-dialectical approach in general, see van Eemeren et al. (2014).

For a more recent example from sociology, consider how Blau & Moncada (2015, p. 18) also notice a normative turn in sociology by referencing Michael Burawoy's presidential address at the 2004 meeting of the American Sociological Association in which he underscored the importance of a committed and engaged "public sociology" (Burawoy, 2005). His address, according to Blau and Moncada, "marks a shift away from the idea that scholars are neutral and objective observers and instead [contends] that scholars can be clear about the ideals and aspirations they have for a good society [...]".

Moving from sociology to political science, Gerring and Yesnowitz (2006) propose a "normative turn in political science". Sensing a "growing uneasiness with the venerable fact/value dichotomy" (ibid., p. 101, p. 104) among political scientists in recent decades, they see political science as a field ready for integration with normative modes of scholarship. Such a "normatively informed political science" (ibid., p. 133), they hold, will make for a more "relevant and useful political science discipline" (ibid., p. 101).

In the field of literary studies, Barbara Herrnstein Smith asserts in her article "Contingencies of Value" (1983)³⁴ that evaluative literary criticism is grossly under-explored and deserves much more attention:

It is a curious feature of literary studies in America that one of the most venerable, central, theoretically significant, and pragmatically inescapable set of problems relating to literature has not been a subject of serious inquiry for the past fifty years. I refer here to the fact not merely that the study of literary evaluation has been, as we might say, "neglected," but that the entire problematic of value and evaluation has been evaded and explicitly exiled by the literary academy.

And, moving from literary studies to philosophy of art, Susan L. Feagin (2012, p. 149) has recently illustrated its current evaluative agenda by pointing out that "[o]ne of the liveliest debates in contemporary philosophy of art concerns whether it is possible for reasons to provide at least some measure of rational or logical support for evaluative judgments of works of art." In fact, even in the discipline of philosophy of science, openly evaluative and normative scholarship is now emerging (Shrader-Frechette, 2014).

As we have seen, the narrative offered by Nothstine and his colleagues posits *professionalization* as the cause of the decline of evaluative criticism in rhetorical criticism. Professionalization, they hold, is a pan-academic development, and therefore it also affects rhetorical criticism causing it to move towards detached explanation and away

³⁴ The article was later followed up by a book-length study of evaluation (Smith, 1988).

from evaluative judgment. But as I have argued here, this narrative does not seem entirely accurate, for competing narratives in the disciplines of political theory and informal logic reveal that engagement and normative modes of scholarship actually *increased* around 1970. And, moreover, other disciplines such as sociology, political science, literary theory and philosophy of art seem to be increasingly interested in evaluative issues. So perhaps professionalization is not the key factor in the decline of the evaluative dimension in rhetorical criticism. But if professionalization cannot account entirely for the decline of evaluative rhetorical criticism, what alternative explanations could?

A rival explanation: Less authority and tradition, more rigor

The decline of evaluative rhetorical criticism is undoubtedly a complex development to explain in full detail. And any fully-fledged explanation of such a reorientation of an academic field must take into consideration a wide range of factors. Pursuing such an explanation in detail unfortunately lies outside the scope of this dissertation.

But I would nevertheless like to venture an alternative explanation, however hypothetical it will have to be, for the decline of evaluative rhetorical criticism. My explanation focuses on two separate factors. One factor is related to the *scientism* accounted for by Nothstine, Blair, and Copeland and the accompanying increase in demand for *scholarly rigor*. The other factor is the general atmosphere of revolution and protest, the counterculture, prevalent around 1970.

In *The Death of the Critic* (2007), literary theorist and critic Rónán McDonald argues that questions of quality, value and evaluation have been “pushed aside” in academic circles (ibid., p. viii) due to the rise of cultural studies, which has led to a “radical change in emphasis” in the humanities (ibid., p. ix) promoting “a general suspicion not just of canon formation but of aesthetic judgement as a whole.” This has led to a tendency for academic literary criticism to become “increasingly inward-looking and non-evaluative” (ibid., p. xi). The status of the critic across the arts, according to McDonald, is thus “much lower now than it was in the 1950s or 1960s.” (ibid., p. viii).

While McDonald is quick to point out that there is “no one cause for the death of the critic”, he traces the beginning of the evaluative critic’s downward slope to the time around 1970—congruent with the development in rhetorical criticism. This period, McDonald explains, is when academia and especially the humanities experienced the onset of three connected intellectual trends, namely structuralism, poststructuralism and,

finally, cultural studies. Crucially, as McDonald sees it, these intellectual paradigms are not compatible with a serious focus on literary values and evaluative criticism.

What was the problem with evaluative criticism according to the three paradigms? First of all, evaluative literary criticism was—to its detractors—associated with “wayward, unquantifiable 'hunches'” and with expressions of “taste and personal preference” (ibid., p. 116). Evaluative criticism was, viewed from this angle, “mere exercises of taste, a dubious sort of frippery that was shot through with unacknowledged prejudice and elitism.” (ibid., p. 124) And this kind of talk was not welcome in the academy. The sentiment was this: “Least of all [criticism] is about communicating our enthusiasms or value judgments. We can have our individual proclivities, however bizarre, but they should be confined to the privacy of our own homes.” (ibid., p. 117).³⁵

But what was *behind* this damning view of evaluative criticism? What were the motivating factors, or causes, that brought about this reorientation of literary criticism? McDonald does not pursue this question fully, but he hints at two possible important answers. One has to do with satisfying a disciplinary anxiety in the English Departments, namely the wish “to deliver a long-elusive quarry: disciplinary rigour.” As McDonald explains, post-1970 there was an “urge to gird up ‘Eng Lit’, to give it some scientific trappings,” in order to “[get] rid of the subjective dimension, and repudiating the elitist associations of canons, traditions and evaluative judgments.” (ibid., p. 117).

McDonald is thus clearly in line with the explanation offered by Nothstine, Blair, and Copeland captured by their concept of scientism. But McDonald also offers another possible factor to account for the decline of evaluative criticism. For, as he notes, the time of 1970 was a time marked by a “generational conflict with authority, flushed with the spirit of 1968 [...]” The concern with literary values was simply considered outdated:

³⁵ McDonald’s diagnosis aligns well with literary theorist Chris Baldick’s (2006, p. 94), who writes: “From the 1960s, indeed, evaluative criticism began to lose its pre-eminence in the academy. More ambitious, and apparently more rigorous, even scientific-looking projects emerged to threaten it. The Canadian academic Northrop Frye launched a grand universal theory of literary forms and genres in his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), explicitly sidelining questions of critical valuation. The growing influence of structuralist and post-structuralist theories in the 1970s and after, accompanied by the impacts of Marxism and psychoanalysis, tended to displace critical evaluation further, in favour of ‘scientific’ or otherwise value-free accounts of literature in the academy. The home of pure criticism—normally the English Department—became increasingly contaminated by neighboring academic disciplines such as philosophy, linguistics, sociology, history, and psychology, giving rise to new politicized interdisciplinary structures: Cultural Studies, Women’s Studies, Gender Studies, and Post-Colonial Studies.”

“Talk of canons, great traditions or timeless beauty belonged to the older, fustier generation, like bowler hats or monocles. How refreshing to able to get past all that cloistered, quasi-religious chatter, with its defence of elite sensibility and its palpable disdain for popular culture and the modern world.” (ibid., pp. 115-116) Literary studies post-1970 was thus influenced by “a radical politics” in “the spirit of the 1968 student revolutionaries, and their intellectual inspirations”. And this led to an “Oedipal assault on the old order.”

And perhaps in this *assault on the old order* we find a plausible explanation for the opposite developments of fields such as literary and rhetorical criticism on the one hand, and political theory and informal logic on the other. For a radical break from the “fustier generation” would mean, in the former cases, a movement *away* from evaluation, and, in the latter cases, a movement *towards* evaluation. As such, the generational conflict with authority highlighted by McDonald gains an explanatory power which helps account for the opposite attitudes taken by various disciplines in relation to evaluative modes of scholarship.³⁶

I mentioned earlier that my explanation also would take into account another factor, namely scientism. Scientism entails, at its heart, a search for disciplinary rigor. It can be interpreted as an attempt to guard against the accusation that knowledge creation is fundamentally subjective and biased to the point where its credibility is undermined. And we can interpret the opposite movements in literary and rhetorical criticism on the one hand and political theory and informal logic on the other hand as different responses to this demand for rigor. For Rawls’ normative project was also an attempt to show how evaluative scholarship can rest on rigorous foundations. The same goes for the rise of informal logic. Both developments can be interpreted as attempts to undergird certain evaluative intuitions about society and argument with systematic frameworks capable of meeting the increase in demand for scholarly rigor. As McDonald points out, literary criticism, and perhaps the humanities more broadly, took another route. Instead of providing their evaluative tradition with suitable frameworks to replace the hitherto dominant subjectivity and elitism, they instead abandoned the attempt to save evaluation in favor of an analytical-explanatory research program designed to counter all accusations of

³⁶ I would like to thank Christian Kock (personal communication) for guiding me towards this insight.

subjectivism. This aligns with the development of rhetorical criticism away from evaluation and judgment as central to the field.

To be sure, offering these counter-narratives cannot *disprove* that professionalization actually caused the decline of evaluation in rhetorical criticism. But at the very least, the counter-narratives offered here do invite questions as to how inevitable the movement away from evaluative criticism really was. In other disciplines, a lively evaluative dimension is seen as closely connected with the disciplines' relevance in society at large. Maybe it is time for rhetorical critics to join their colleagues from political theory, argumentation theory, literary studies, philosophy of art in asking whether and how the relevance of evaluative modes of scholarship ought to be reconsidered.

Evaluative criticism has the potential to improve a practice

But what could such relevance consist in? What are the benefits of evaluative criticism? What does it have to offer that we cannot get from non-evaluative criticism? Unless some answer to this question can be mustered, the reason for the decline of evaluative criticism could simply be that it does not offer anything that non-evaluative criticism could not do just as well. In order to make the case for the continued relevance of evaluative criticism, this last section of the chapter investigates what rhetorical critics themselves have said about the purpose of evaluative criticism. The answer that emerges is roughly this: Evaluative criticism and normative theorizing enable *reasoned improvement of the target practices* (in our case rhetoric). Further, evaluative criticism and normative theorizing more directly engage the concerns that are relevant to the communities of which universities are a part. Therefore, evaluative criticism and normative theorizing are scholarly enterprises that ought to be taken seriously—and are being taken seriously in other disciplines.

As we saw in the Chapter 2, the evaluative dimension has been held to be central to rhetorical criticism by a long line of distinguished theorists and critics. Given the importance of this particular aspect of rhetorical criticism, it seems natural to inquire into the reasons for its centrality: Wherein lies the importance of the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism? Interestingly, this question is actually left unaddressed by the majority of rhetorical scholars writing about evaluation. It seems that these theorists and critics generally rely on a kind of stipulative definition of criticism from which it follows that evaluation is a necessary part of criticism because criticism—as a matter of semantic

entailment—contains an evaluative dimension. In other words, because evaluation is part of the *meaning* of criticism, critics who do not evaluate actually fail at “doing criticism”. But not all critics rely on this semantic strategy to explain the purpose of evaluation. Notable rhetorical critics and theorists such as Barnet Baskerville, Anthony Hillbruner, and Barbara and Henry Ewbank offer explicit justifications of the centrality of the evaluative dimension in criticism.

Barnet Baskerville (1953, p. 2) offers the earliest discussion of the purpose or point of evaluation that I have been able to find. In discussing his conception of criticism as an instrument aimed to “distinguish quality from shoddy” (a clearly evaluative aim), he remarks that “[c]ompetent criticism [...] can do much to guide and improve public taste [...] and by so doing can force eventual modifications in practice.” For Baskerville, then, there is a clear connection between evaluative criticism of a rhetorical practice and the potential for improving the quality of this practice. According to Baskerville (1953, p. 2) “[t]he critic, as a dealer in values, has a responsibility to see that both speaker and audience learn to value the right things, and in the right order.” The purpose of evaluation, for Baskerville, is thus ultimately practical and pedagogical. As he concludes (1953, p. 5):

It is the function of criticism to render intelligent and relevant judgments, and in so doing ultimately to elevate standards and improve practice. In the field of speech, as elsewhere, a continual re-evaluation of criteria, both as to individual worth and relative importance, is vital to the highest fulfillment of this function.

To sum up: The purpose of evaluation in rhetorical criticism is to improve the quality of rhetoric by making judgments. And it does so by formulating, reflecting upon and employing evaluative criteria suitable to this task.

In a later publication, Baskerville expands on the dynamic relation between evaluative criticism and the practice it takes as its object. In a discussion of the vagaries of earlier evaluative critics and their now abandoned criteria for evaluation, Baskerville remarks (Baskerville, 1959, p. 45):

Then, as now, theory, criticism, and practice worked hand in hand. Critics admired what it was fashionable to admire, and in a manner acceptable at the time. Speakers obliged by producing oratory of the kind that was admired. Rhetoricians and schoolmasters observed great orators in action and formulated principles on the basis of what they saw. In such a continuous chain it is impossible to distinguish

cause from effect; all were causes and all effects. Each acted on the other, and together they contributed to the forming of public taste, to establishing the fashion.

Once again we encounter the idea that the purpose of evaluative criticism is closely related to the fundamental idea that *a practice can be improved by being subjected to evaluative criticism*.

This point about the relation between evaluative criticism and its object is echoed by Anthony Hillbruner (1960). Writing at a time when the quality of public speaking was generally considered to be of a depressingly low quality (this seems to be a perennial challenge for democracies), Hillbruner writes: "Our point is very simple; although it has its attendant complex ramifications, public speaking as an art is not flowering because contemporary criticism as an art is not flowering" (1960, p. 5). Just as Baskerville before him, Hillbruner is thus calling attention to the perceived relationship between evaluative criticism and the practice it takes as its object. Since evaluative criticism is taken to be a means of improving rhetorical practice, the low quality of the practice is explained (in part) by the low quality of evaluative criticism. This situation, Hillbruner holds, is detrimental to rhetorical criticism as an academic discipline. For a vital aspect of the justification of rhetorical criticism lies in its connection with rhetorical practice (1960, p. 6):

But something more is needed, something of a larger nature is required if contemporary rhetorical critics are to make salient contributions to today's society and if they are to stimulate the growth of public address as an art. That something is the original and productively creative rhetorical critique of contemporary public address.

Hillbruner further describes the kind of criticism he has in mind (1960, p. 9):

It should call attention to the best speaking of the day. It should castigate the poor speaking. It should, through its criticisms, improve the practice of public speaking in contemporary society. It should attempt to make modern public address an art form coordinate and congenial with, perhaps even superior to, that of the previous "Golden Ages of Oratory." It should stimulate a social climate in which public awareness of the proper role of oratory and its accompanying criticism would be as natural to the body politic as the value of the other forms: writing, painting, or architecture, is. Finally, it should bring into proper perspective for layman and expert alike the ideal, so often theoretically announced and so seldom practically demonstrated, that public address is one of the primary tools of a democracy and should hasten the day of its ascendancy.

Hillbruner's vision for rhetorical criticism, then, is clearly normative. But how, more exactly, can evaluative criticism improve the quality of the practice it takes as its object? Hillbruner argues by way of analogy (1960, p. 9):

What reason is there to believe, however, that even with this kind of creative criticism of public address that the desired changes would take place? Basically, because change, growth, and development in the other art forms have come about in part at least because of the scope and variety of the criticism of those art forms and that in most cases such criticism was of the dynamically creative character. Contemporary writers are aware of what the critics have to say about them and their writing. And even though some rugged individualists, such as Faulkner, for instance, claim that they never read reviews of their work, much less make conscious attempts to profit from them, there is little doubt that such criticism is influential. Moreover, if this group of recalcitrants do not utilize the specific critiques of their works, still most of them have read evaluations of their predecessors or of their colleagues and have profited. As a result, the art of literature has changed, has constantly grown and developed. As with the development of literature under the influence of the critics, so too with the other arts. The painter has profited from the evaluations of both his friendly colleagues and of the art historians and critics. Look at the development of art from its earliest beginnings to the present day and observe the constant alteration and change. Although not all, certainly much of this change has come about through the suggestions, proddings, and even condemnations of the art critics. Music, too, that is serious music, has profited from the analyses and evaluations of the critics who have urged it to constant mutation and change. And at every stage stand and have stood the music critics, constantly evaluating their contemporaries; certainly their contribution to the evolution of modern music is not a negligible one.

There is no doubt that Hillbruner is wise to hedge his claim somewhat by saying that that “change, growth, and development” in practices such as literature, painting, architecture and music come about only “in part” due to evaluative criticism of those practices. For it must be admitted that the causes of change and development of these practices are multifarious and exceedingly difficult to pin down in any precise manner. This, however, does not detract from Hillbruner's basic point, namely that evaluative criticism holds the potential to influence and improve a practice. And, moreover, the influence of evaluative criticism on a practice is—if the criticism is well-argued—a reflective and rational one. Economic fluctuations, demographic changes, new technologies, politics and other macroscale factors of course wield an influence on arts and practices such as literature, architecture, painting, music—even rhetoric (think of Twitter). But this influence is marked neither by its reliance on reasons or reflection. In comparison, reasoned and reflective

evaluative criticism can produce changes in its object that come about as a result of a much more rational process. While such “rational development” might not always be something to strive for in arts such as literature, music and painting (in part because these practices seemingly rely on subconscious inspiration and sensibility), reasoned change and development seems to me to be very much appropriate for social and political arts (or practices) such as political rhetoric.³⁷

Ultimately, then, evaluative criticism, according to Hillbruner, holds the potential to “improve our speech-making and make a contribution to our role as molders of a democratic society.” (Hillbruner, 1960, p. 7). And the idea of the link between evaluative criticism and something larger than the discipline itself (idealistic as it may seem) is shared by Walter R. Fisher. He states the issue in this way (Fisher, 1974, p. 77):

The natural province of criticism is praise and dispraise rather than guilt and innocence. And the functions of criticism are in line with those of epideictic discourse: to educate men to excellence, celebrate it, and provide “wise counsel for the state.”

This connection to democratic engagement (the very thing that professionalization is supposed to eradicate) is a topic to which Hillbruner returns when he writes that “[t]he lack of candor in today's political and social life makes the teaching and use of moral criteria in rhetorical criticism particularly germane.” (1975, p. 228) From this quotation alone it is not entirely possible to gauge what exactly Hillbruner means by “lack of candor”, but perhaps we may take our lead from another passage in which Hillbruner reveals his preference for an engaged type of criticism (1975, p. 247):

It is time for the rhetorical critic to abandon the ideal of aloof scholarship that analyzes but does not condemn ethical transgressions, that examines but does not laud the upholding of moral values. A significant aim of the teacher critic, then, is to become passionately involved in the questions of moral values, both individual and

³⁷ I note in passing that the term ‘art’ is ambiguous. Depending on the selected point of view, rhetoric may be defined or viewed as an aesthetic art (closely related with painting, music, literature, dancing, etc.); or, it may be defined or viewed as a practical art (more closely related to shoemaking, carpentry, cooking, etc.). For the distinction between these two understandings of ‘art’, see e.g. Iseminger (2004, p. 2). Whether the kind of rational evaluative criticism is more plausible to lead to improvements among the ‘practical arts’ than among the ‘aesthetic arts’ is of course debatable. But insofar that ‘taste’ is more prominently involved in making judgments of quality among the aesthetic arts, this may be so. Suffice it to say that if one accepts that idea that evaluative criticism can improve aesthetic arts such as literature, painting, etc. (like Hillbruner), it seems to me that one should also accept the idea that the practical arts can be improved through the same means.

social, in the real world today. Only then may we be able to say as proud a word for rhetorical assessments as can the literary and social critics for their own disciplines.

For Hillbruner, then, the larger goals of evaluative criticism seem directly related to the issues of the surrounding society. He is not content with neutral analysis but urges a much more engaged and normative criticism aimed at improving the target practices. And improvement is also what Ewbank and Ewbank cite as their ultimate aim of evaluative criticism. More specifically, criticism exists “in order to sustain and to enhance standards of rhetorical performance and acceptance.” (1976, p. 285). So, as with Baskerville, the idea that *standards* can be *enhanced* (and therefore that they can be poor to begin with) is key to understanding the road to improvement through criticism: “Through time, as appreciation and understanding gain sophistication, the standards of technical excellence and of taste which comprise the theory of the art will be modified.” And ultimately, this back-and-forth movement between the observation and analysis of practice and the development of improved standards is hoped to make a difference outside of the academy: “The language in which criticism is set forth is necessarily prescriptive. Critical appraisal of a work of art is expressed as a judgment or a verdict because it is *intended to influence future conduct* [...]" (Ewbank & Ewbank, 1976, p. 294, my emphasis)

Baskerville, Fisher, Hillbruner, Ewbank and Ewbank thus all express a fundamentally identical vision: Evaluation in general and the development and application of evaluative criteria to rhetorical artifacts in particular is the proper province of rhetorical criticism. Moreover, this type of criticism holds the potential to accomplish something that detached analysis will not be able to, namely a *reasoned improvement of the target practice* through the development of appropriate evaluative criteria.

Conclusion

The decline of evaluative rhetorical criticism as intimated by people like Jasinski, Olson, and Zarefsky seems to have gained traction around 1970. More specifically, this period of time saw a disciplinary discussion and questioning of the central place of evaluative criticism in rhetorical criticism. This prompted the following question: *Why* did evaluative criticism decline? What were the reasons or factors that caused this significant re-configuration of rhetorical criticism? In this chapter, I discussed two conjectural answers to this question. The first was the narrative of professionalization as presented by

Nothstine, Blair, and Copeland. As they describe it, professionalization is a pan-academic movement causing researchers to act in a detached manner, foregrounding questions of explanation and analysis rather than evaluation and judgment. I have argued that this explanation—while it may contain some truth—cannot account for the normative development in fields including political theory and informal logic. And so, at the very least, it does not show convincingly that evaluative and normative modes of scholarship have become impossible in academia. For while evaluative rhetorical criticism seemed to fade around 1970, disciplines like political theory and informal logic—both rather closely linked to rhetoric—saw an opposite turn away from neutral and detached frameworks and modes of scholarship toward much more value-laden and engaged default modes of operation. In an attempt to offer a rival explanation, I focused on the revolt against authority prevalent in the 1960s and the increase in demand for academic rigor. I argued these factors contained more explanatory power than the narrative of professionalization, but also that these factors do not at present constitute good reasons for rhetorical scholars to jettison evaluative criticism, which still has something crucial to offer: reasoned improvement of its target practice.

PART TWO: THEORY AND METHOD

CHAPTER 4

Criteria and function

This chapter sets the stage for a case-based examination of certain problems inherent in the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism. In the first part of the chapter, I argue that evaluative criteria are indispensable for evaluation—the critic cannot do without them. This situation leads to the two problems of the *origin* and of the *appropriateness* of evaluative criteria: Where do these criteria come from? And given that criteria can be more or less appropriate for the artifact in question, how can the critic justify their appropriateness for a particular artifact? These central questions have only been cursorily answered in the field of rhetorical criticism, and so the second part of the chapter proposes a potential solution to the problems origin and appropriateness. This solution is, simply put, to derive evaluative criteria from the function of the artifact. This approach to solving the problems of origin and appropriateness, however, comes with its own difficulty: the problem of how to establish the function of the artifact; or what I refer to as the problem of *function ascription*.

The criteria requirement

In order for evaluation to get off the ground, the critic needs to draw on evaluative criteria either implicitly or explicitly. There is no way around it. This ‘criteria requirement’ has been noted by a number of rhetorical critics.

“What interests us,” wrote Herbert Wichelns (1925/1995, p. 4), “is the method of the critic: his standards, his categories of judgment, what he regards as important.” In the very essay that inaugurated modern rhetorical criticism, we thus find that *standards*—i.e. evaluative criteria—comprise the first element of the critic’s approach to evaluation. Similarly, Barnet Baskerville (1953) calls attention to the centrality of criteria. He explains that the critic “bear[s] responsibility for establishing and refining standards of

performance.” Further, he holds that the critic’s task is “making reasoned judgments based on certain standards of excellence,” and that “[t]he critical study moves beyond [descriptive analysis] into the realm of evaluation in terms of explicit or implied standards.” Following the lead of Wichelns and Baskerville, Albert Croft (1956, p. 284) points out that “[i]n order to criticize a speech, the standards or criteria against which it is to be measured must first be established.” Walter R. Fisher (1974, pp. 75–76) concurs when he states that “[t]he essence of [criticism] consists in the comparison of an object or act with an implicit or explicit set of norms [or an] implicit or explicit model of excellence.” And finally, Stephen E. Lucas (1981, p. 12) describes the activity of rhetorical criticism as one in which “rhetorical critics must forthrightly judge rhetorical works against some set of criteria”, and, quoting Ernest G. Bormann, Lucas states that “[t]he critic [...] must assess the critical object against ‘standards of excellence’ [...]” (ibid., p. 10).

The above quotations should suffice to show that the presence of evaluative criteria is a central requirement of the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism. This is the *criteria requirement*.

The problem of origin

Evaluative criteria do not walk up to the critic and introduce themselves. As noted by Barnet Baskerville above, the critic has to furnish these criteria somehow. This raises *the problem of origin*: Where do evaluative come from? What is their source?

One rather confusing attempt at answering this question can be found in Baird and Thonssen’s paper on “Methodology in the Criticism of Public Address” (1947). The paper foreshadowed the central elements of their landmark book *Speech Criticism: The Development of Standards for Rhetorical Appraisal* (1948). Noting, along the lines of Baskerville, that it is “part of [the critic’s] task to set up standards,” they consider how this may be done:

Where shall he find [the standards]? He may turn to Aristotle, whose principles are adequate for most scholars. Or the critic may adopt the tenets of a group of rhetoricians and logicians. As an alternative, he may erect standards of worth based upon the united wisdom of his colleagues. Together the “experts” may listen to many speakers, classify them as superior, excellent, good, fair, or poor, cast the performances into comparable columns, and describe statistically and in detail the characteristics of the “superior” performers. Whatever yardstick is used, the critic will wisely refuse to succumb to the rigidities of any formula.

Taken as a solution to the problem of origin, this proposal by Thonssen and Baird may be practically feasible (since it immediately equips the critic with a set of evaluative criteria), but it is hardly a theoretically satisfactory approach. It must of course be admitted that if criteria have been proposed and employed by Aristotle, other rhetoricians and logicians, or if the criteria are expressions of the united wisdom of one's colleagues, this lends some credence to their validity. However, the fact remains that such credence does not explain or justify the appropriateness of the criteria. If someone asked, "why do you assume these criteria are appropriate for the artifact?", the only possible answer would be "because other people are using them." We may thus follow Edwin Black (1978, p. 63) who criticized Parrish for adopting precisely the strategy of invoking Aristotle in order to establish evaluative criteria:

While it is eminently true that the endorsement of an idea by a genius of Aristotle's stature is certainly a *prima facie* reason for giving that idea careful and serious consideration, still such an endorsement does not reinforce or justify the idea in any logical sense. Therefore, we might not be unfair in taking the citation of authority and tradition in the Parrish paper as immaterial to the argument.

Appeals to authority, custom or tradition are unsatisfactory in themselves as solutions to the problem of origin. But Thonssen and Baird in fact confuse the issue even further when they explain that the judgment to be rendered by the critic concerns "the effect of the discourse" in terms of the audience's response. For if *this* is indeed the relevant yardstick, what becomes of their advice from before? Would the critic adhering to the doctrine of effect not be forced to denounce Aristotle's principles or the standards based upon the united wisdom of his colleagues if these should happen to conflict with the effect criterion? As should be clear, it is not at all obvious from Thonssen and Baird's work on developing evaluative standards just how the critic is supposed to accomplish this task in a sound way.

But it has to be conceded that the problem is not a simple one. As Brock, Scott and Chesebro (1989, p. 17) write in their textbook on rhetorical criticism: "If evaluation continually manifests itself in criticism, the question, 'On what ground shall I evaluate?' is inevitable. The question is difficult to deal with." And the difficulty is also noted by Barnet Baskerville (1953, p. 2) who can think of no greater difficulty than that of

employing the appropriate criteria: “The problem of selection and validation of criteria is unquestionably the most vexing aspect of the critical process.”³⁸

The problem of appropriateness

Barnet Baskerville in fact highlights two separate problems in the quotation above. One is the issue of *selection* of criteria, which I have discussed above under the rubric of the problem of origin. The other is the issue of validation of criteria—or, as I think it ought to be called—the problem of appropriateness. The basic problem of appropriateness is this: the critic cannot simply stipulate, import or invent any set of criteria from any origin. The criteria must in some sense of the word be *appropriate*. They must be the right criteria. This was already recognized by Herbert Wichelns (1925/1995), whose essay concerns the problem of appropriateness: The appropriate evaluative criteria for the rhetorical critic are not identical to the appropriate evaluative criteria for the literary critic. Whereas the literary critic is concerned with evaluative criteria such as permanence and beauty, the rhetorical critic should—according to most interpretations of Wichelns’ essay—instead assess the persuasive effect of the artifact. Wichelns puts the point in the following way (1925/1995, p. 25, my emphasis):

In short, the point of view of literary criticism *is proper only to its own objects*, the permanent works. Upon such as are found to lie without the pale, the verdict of literary criticism is of negative value merely, and its interpretation is false and misleading because it proceeds upon a wrong assumption.

If this difference between literature and rhetoric is not respected, says Wichelns, “[t]he result can only be confusion.” As early as Wichelns, then, we find the distinct idea that evaluate criteria must be *appropriate* for the object in question. The same idea is expressed a few years later by William Norwood Brigance (1933, pp. 556–557):

Next, I think we shall agree that oratorical literature is a special form, quite distinct from poetry, essays, drama, and other forms of prose literature with which it is often confused by biographers and literary critics. The tools of rhetoric may indeed be the same as those of literature, but the atmosphere and purpose are different. The literary artist writes with his eye on his subject. "His form and style are organic

³⁸ That the selection and validation of criteria is a difficult aspect of rhetorical criticism is not surprising since even in the field of evaluation theory, this aspect has still not received much attention. Thus the Swedish evaluation theorist Evert Vedung (2017, p. 10) states: “The selection of criteria of merit is a crucial, albeit little debated, issue in evaluation.”

with his subject," says Hudson. He is concerned with permanence and beauty. But the statesman who must dominate a crisis, or the advocate who must mold the mind of a court or a jury, has no time to polish plaudits for posterity. He is concerned with deadly and immediate effect. [...] *To apply the literary tests of permanence and beauty to rhetorical literature borders on the fantastic, if not the grotesque.*

In this rather dramatic fashion, Brigance thus echoes Wichelns in warning critics against violating the relation of appropriateness between object and criteria: rhetoric ("oratorical literature") is a special form distinct from, but often confused with, poetry, essays, etc. And, because of the distinction between rhetoric and literature, it is inappropriate to evaluate rhetoric and literature using the same criteria.

This basic point intimated by both Wichelns and Brigance is also recognized by a number of later writers. For instance, Barnet Baskerville (1953, p. 2) notes that "[t]he canons of literary criticism are not, however, always applicable to the criticism of speeches, since there are basic differences in the thing being criticized." Walter R. Fisher (1974, p. 77, my emphasis) argues that "[w]hether one considers the most unsophisticated or the most sophisticated act of criticism, one can see that it is based on a theoretical conception of the nature, functions, and norms *appropriate* to the artifact it concerns or it leads to the possibility of such conceptions." Karlyn Kohrs Campbell (1974, p. 40, my emphasis) concurs when she states that "[i]n my opinion, evaluation is fundamental to the very idea of criticism; all critical acts express a judgment resulting from the application of *appropriate criteria* to phenomena of a particular type." And while the critics Ewbank & Ewbank (1976, p. 293, quoting social scientist Eugene J. Meehan) caution that "[a]lmost any standard or principle can be applied in *some* situation, but the fact that a standard *can* be applied doesn't mean that it *should* be applied", David Zarefsky (1979/2014, p. 63) worries that "when we invoke normative standards [...], we are likely to do so hastily and select standards that may not be pertinent to the particular controversy we wish to evaluate."

What all these writers agree on, then, is the importance of the problem of appropriateness: Evaluative criteria should in some sense be appropriate to the object of evaluation. But how do we know when and why this requirement of appropriateness is fulfilled? Barnet Baskerville (1953, p. 2) acknowledges the predicament in this way:

It is discouraging, but it is true that no permanent solution can ever be reached. We can never know finally what standards are 'best,' since that too is a judgment, based upon other standards, founded in turn upon other assumptions. Moreover,

conditions and values change; tastes change; and what was ‘best’ for one age may be unimportant to another. Where does the critic turn for his standards of judgment? To the theorist, the philosopher—whose theorizing, incidentally, probably arose originally out of his observation of practice.

And he goes on to explain that “[t]here is, to be sure, no dearth of applicable criteria by which to judge a public speech. The difficulty lies in determining their value, the order of their importance, and the manner of their application,” which leads him to conclude that “[h]ere we run headlong into a welter of conflicting criteria and emphases, differing standards of literary excellence, questions of sincerity and appropriateness, which render ‘agreement among observers’ virtually impossible.” And this problem is only exacerbated when Walter Fisher (1969, pp. 106–107) writes that “a speech may be profitably criticized from any humanistic perspective—political, psychological, moral, logical, literary, and so on.”

We seem to be in a situation, then, where rhetorical critics and theorists agree on the following points: The origin of evaluative criteria is obscure, especially if we are not satisfied with simply employing criteria inherited from Aristotle or other experts. It is possible to apply an almost indefinite range of evaluate criteria to any given rhetorical artifact, but doing so is not necessarily appropriate. Whether evaluative criteria are appropriate or not depends somehow on a relation between these criteria and the rhetorical artifact, but the exact nature of this appropriateness relation is unclear. We may add to our agenda for the remainder of the dissertation, then, this “most vexing aspect of the critical process,” as Barnet Baskerville calls it: The need to explain the origin of evaluative criteria and the way in which their appropriateness may be justified.

The Functional Goodness Intuition

In this second section of the chapter, I propose the outline of a solution to the problems of origin and appropriateness. To anticipate, the solution will take shape through a review of a widely shared intuition about evaluation which, I will argue, also plays a central role in the evaluative thinking of at least some rhetorical critics. I call this the Functional Goodness Intuition, or the FGI for short. The FGI may be stated in the following way: *The quality of an object depends on its capacity to fulfil its function.*

A number of corollaries follow from the Functional Goodness Intuition. First, evaluative judgments may, at least in many cases, be understood or reconstructed as judgments of function fulfilment. On this view, when a rhetorical critic evaluates a rhetorical

artifact positively, the critic may be understood to be estimating that the artifact fulfils (or at least has the capacity to fulfil) its function above some relevant threshold. And conversely, when a critic evaluates an artifact negatively, the underlying basis for this judgment is an estimation that the artifact does not fulfil (or does not have the capacity to fulfil) its function above the relevant threshold. For example, according to FGI, if the function of a knife is to cut, then a critic would judge the knife to be good (excellent, satisfactory, etc.) if and only if it cuts well or has the capacity to cut well; and bad (defective, insufficient, etc.) if it does not cut well or does not have the capacity to do so.

Second, I submit that the FGI makes for a promising solution to the problem of origin. It follows from the FGI that the origin of evaluative criteria is intimately connected to the function of the object to be evaluated. The futility of the suggestion made by some authors (highlighted earlier in this chapter) that critics should simply inherit their criteria from other critics is, on this interpretation, clear. For the criteria used by other critics may ultimately have been appropriate only for artifacts with completely different functions. And so a critic who unreflectively adopts the criteria of other critics for his own critical purposes is basically making an unwarranted decision.³⁹

Third, I also submit that the Functional Goodness Intuition also makes for a promising solution to the problem of appropriateness. For it also follows from the FGI that evaluative criteria are appropriate for a specific artifact if these criteria are derived from an appropriate conception of the function of the object and vice versa: If the function of a knife is to cut, then criteria related to cutting (reasonable sharpness, rigidity of the blade, an ergonomic handle, etc.) are appropriate for the knife. On the other hand, it is inappropriate to assume that the function of a speech is to toast bread, and any attempt at deriving criteria for evaluating argumentation based on this inappropriate function will yield inappropriate criteria. However, as I will argue later in the chapter, even though the FGI thus apparently offers a solution to the problem of appropriateness, the solution actually only shifts the problem to a deeper level. On this level, the problem for the critic is to establish the function of the object in question. This is the problem of function ascription. But before turning to this problem, let us first consider how a range of thinkers have expressed the Functional Goodness Intuition.

³⁹ It should be immediately be noted that in many cases, different critics will end up using the same criteria—say the criterion of persuasive effect. But this should be result of critics evaluating objects with the same function, not the result of simply copying criteria from each other.

Proponents of the Functional Goodness Intuition

The Functional Goodness Intuition goes back to antiquity, and one of its earliest proponents is Aristotle. In his *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE1.71097b22–33),⁴⁰ Aristotle confronts the problem of identifying the chief good of man. He therefore outlines a strategy for figuring out just what this good might consist in, and the strategy involves considerations of the *function* of man:

Presumably, however, to say that happiness is the chief good seems a platitude, and a clearer account of what it is is still desired. This might perhaps be given, if we could first ascertain the function of man. For just as for a flute player, a sculptor, or any artist, and, in general, for all things that have a function or activity, the good and the “well” is thought to reside in the function, so it would seem to be for man, if he has a function. Have the carpenter, then, and the tanner certain functions or activities, and has man none? Is he naturally functionless? Or as eye, hand, foot, and in general each of the parts evidently has a function, may one lay it down that man similarly has a function apart from all these?

For our purposes, the interesting aspect of passage from Aristotle is not so much the result of Aristotle’s reasoning (after having considered several candidate functions, Aristotle concludes that the chief good for man is a life lived in accordance with rationality, which of course is a highly debatable position). Instead, the interesting aspect is Aristotle’s explicit connection of function and goodness across a range of domains: For just as a good eye is an eye capable of fulfilling its function of seeing well, and the good flute player is a flute player capable of fulfilling his function of playing well, Aristotle concludes that the good (for) man consists in the fulfilment of his function.⁴¹ And what makes Aristotle conclude this is the premise that for all things that have a function or activity (*ergon*), the good and the “well” is thought to reside in that function. This is the Functional Goodness Intuition. In other words, when faced with the problem of finding out what constitutes *the human good or the good human*, Aristotle employs the Functional Goodness Intuition from which it follows that if an object has a function, one needs to know this function in order to reach evaluative conclusions about the object.

⁴⁰ I have used the following translation: Aristotle, Ross, & Brown (2009).

⁴¹ That Aristotle has been accused of equivocating between *goodness of* and *goodness for*, and that his specific idea of the function of man is exceedingly controversial and has been attacked from all angles need not delay us here.

Although Aristotle’s function argument is perhaps the most famous example of using the notion of function to derive evaluative criteria, Aristotle is neither the only, nor the first ancient thinker to propose this strategy. As noted by philosopher Christine Korsgaard (2008, p. 129), Aristotle’s function argument is actually predated by a similar argument by Plato in his *Republic* (1937). Towards the end of the first book of the *Republic* (R 352d—354b), Plato uses a parallel strategy in his search for a conception of the “completely good city” by developing a sketch of the Functional Goodness Intuition based on analogies with objects such as eyes, pruning knives and horses. Gerasimos Santas (2003, p. 125), the noted interpreter of Plato’s thinking, summarizes the relevant reasoning in this way:⁴²

A thing with functions is good of its kind if it performs well the function(s) of things of that kind. And a thing with functions has the virtue(s) of its kind if it has the “qualities” (properties, structure, composition) which enable it to perform its function(s) well. Thus the presence of the virtues appropriate to a thing of a given kind makes it good of its kind and enables it to perform its functions well [...] This theory of goodness of kind and of virtue clearly suggests a three-step procedure for discovering the virtue(s) of things with functions. First, discover the function(s) of a thing of a given kind; second, discover (or imagine) things of that kind that function well (and others that perform poorly); and finally, discover the qualities of the thing which enables it to perform its function(s) well (and in the absence of which it performs poorly), and these will be the virtues of the thing.

Plato’s three-step procedure highlights the importance of discovering the function of a thing as the essential first step towards an evaluation of that thing. And the function of a thing—its *ergon*—may importantly also be understood as the purpose, end, aim, goal or “for-ness” of that thing (Korsgaard 2008, p. 8 and pp. 134-135). Once the function has been found, our understanding of the thing and its function gives rise to an understanding of certain qualities as virtues—so-called *constitutive standards*—against which to judge that thing. Philosopher Christine Korsgaard expresses this idea in the following way (Korsgaard, 2008, p. 8, my italics):

If it is the function of a house to provide shelter from the weather, then it is a constitutive standard for houses that they should be waterproof. If it is the function of an encyclopedia to provide information to those who consult it, then it is a

⁴² Plato’s argument is developed in the course of a dialogue that cannot easily be condensed here. For the purposes of this chapter, the summary from Santas will suffice. I take up Plato’s reasoning again in Chapter 9.

constitutive standard for encyclopedias that their statements should be true. [...] someone who asks why a house should have to be waterproof, or an encyclopedia should record the truth, shows that he just doesn't understand *what these objects are for*, and therefore, since they are functional objects, what they are."

In both Aristotle and Plato, then, we find early expressions of the Functional Goodness Intuition in their moral and political philosophy in which the function of an object plays a leading role in deriving evaluative criteria for the evaluation of that object.

These ancient examples of the Functional Goodness Intuition may be supplemented by more modern ones inspired by Aristotle. Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre thus follows Aristotle in endorsing the same view (2007, p. 59, my italics):

To call a watch good is to say that it is the kind of watch which someone would choose who wanted a watch to keep time accurately (rather than, say, to throw at the cat). *The presupposition of this use of 'good' is that every type of item which it is appropriate to call good or bad—including persons and actions—has, as a matter of fact, some given specific purpose or function.*

Philippa Foot is another contemporary philosopher inspired by Aristotle who subscribes to the same line of reasoning (Foot & Montefiore, 1961, p. 48): "Where a thing has a function the primary (but by no means necessarily the only) criterion for the goodness of that thing will be that it fulfils its function well."

Despite all its strengths, Aristotelian philosophy is of course not always uncontroversial. But the Functional Goodness Intuition is also recognized outside this tradition. Consider for example David Hume's thinking about aesthetics in his classic essay "Of the Standard of Taste" (Hume, 1757/2015):

Every work of art has also a certain end or purpose, for which it is calculated; and is to be deemed more or less perfect, as it is more or less fitted to attain this end. The object of eloquence is to persuade, of history to instruct, of poetry to please by means of the passions and the imagination. These ends we must carry constantly in our view, when we peruse any performance; and we must be able to judge how far the means employed are adapted to their respective purposes.

Although Hume substitutes the term 'function' with the synonymous terms 'end,' 'object' and 'purpose,' the Functional Goodness Intuition remains intact. And, interestingly in the present context, Hume connects the FGI directly to *criticism*—understood as evaluation (perusal and judgment) of a performance.

Hume's contemporary, Immanuel Kant, also made use of the Functional Goodness Intuition in his work on aesthetics. In his notoriously convoluted work *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant thus intimates that our judgments of the goodness of an object, as opposed to our judgments of their beauty, must presuppose an objective purposiveness, i.e. they must rely on us seeing the objects as having a certain function (Kant, 1790/2000, §15):

Objective purposiveness can be cognized only by means of the relation of the manifold to a determinate end, thus only through a concept. From this alone it is already clear that the beautiful, the judging of which has as its ground a merely formal purposiveness, i.e., a purposiveness without an end, is entirely independent of the representation of the good, since the latter presupposes an objective purposiveness, i.e., the relation of the object to a determinate end.⁴³

Contemporary writers on art share Hume's and Kant's sentiments. Jonathan Gilmore (2011) states that he will "defend a functional view of art and its evaluation" and he suggests that "a work of art typically possesses as an essential feature one or more points, purposes, or ends, in the satisfaction of which the work can be evaluated qua art". Gilmore then goes on to explain that this principle implies that works of art have constitutive functions and further that:

[t]o evaluate a work of art with reference to its constitutive function is one way to evaluate it as a work of art. Here, if an artwork has a constitutive function, and one of its artistic properties counts against the satisfaction of that function, then that property is a defect in the artwork considered as the work of art that it is.

Another contemporary writer on the philosophy of art, Noël Carroll, expresses the same view, connecting the function of a work of art (also called "objective") with the criteria ("good-making features" or "virtues") according to which it ought to be evaluated (2009, p. 168):

Once we establish the objective of slapstick comedies—say, the provocation of laughter through physical business, often of an apparently accidental sort—we can

⁴³ The original German text from §15 of *Kritik der Urteilskraft* reads: "Die objektive Zweckmäßigkeit kann nur vermittelt der Beziehung des Mannigfaltigen auf einen bestimmten Zweck, also nur durch einen Begriff erkannt werden. Hieraus allein schon erhellt: daß das Schöne, dessen Beurteilung eine bloß formale Zweckmäßigkeit, d. i. eine Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck, zum Grunde hat, von der Vorstellung des Guten ganz unabhängig sei, weil das letztere eine objektive Zweckmäßigkeit, d. i. die Beziehung des Gegenstandes auf einen bestimmten Zweck, voraussetzt."

ground the principle that pratfalls, *ceteris paribus*, are good-making features in slapstick comedies. The function of slapstick comedy indicates to us why the possession of pratfalls is good for the genre, just as the function of steak knives grounds sharpness as a virtue of this sort of cutlery, since there is a teleological relation between the purpose of a kind and what counts as an excellence of that kind.

And similarly from the philosophy of art, Gary Iseminger (2004, p. 11) writes that “if something’s nature consists in having a certain function, then it is good as a thing having that nature just in case it can fulfill that function.”

In various traditions across various times, then, we seem to find expressions of the FGI. And the intuition is also present among contemporary writers in a field close to rhetoric—namely informal logic. Ralph Johnson (2000, p. 181) thus states:

Let us begin the discussion of the normative question with the view that a good argument is one that fulfills its purpose. The standpoint of this work has been that the primary purpose is rational persuasion. That is, the purpose of the argument is to persuade the Other of the truth of the thesis imbedded in the conclusion and on the basis of the considerations advanced in the argument. If the Other is persuaded by the argument to accept the conclusion but not for the reasons cited, then the argument has not truly achieved its purpose although it may have advanced the cause of rationality.

And, perhaps not surprisingly, the same view can also be found expressed by rhetoricians. Here Robert C. Rowland (1984, pp. 192–193) makes the point with reference to evaluation of arguments:

Critics of argument should not merely borrow evaluative standards from the law, science, or any field. Rather they should begin their analysis of any argumentative activity by identifying the function of that activity and move from that function to the appropriate model for describing and evaluating arguments. Descriptive models and evaluative criteria should follow function.

And finally, Edwin Black (1978, p. 161) may also be taken to endorse the Functional Goodness Intuition:

“Clearly no critical theory can proceed much beyond its most rudimentary formulations without some firm conception of the functions of the activity it is designed to understand and appraise.”

The above quotations should suffice to make the point that the Functional Goodness Intuition is not a stray thought, but rather a commonly held belief across disciplines and

traditions connecting objects and evaluative criteria. And moreover, the FGI seems to solve both the problem of origin and the problem of appropriateness in the following way: First, the critic establishes the function of the object (purpose, goal, end, aim, telos, ergon). This function may roughly be defined as “what the object is for”, the characteristic work or activity of the object, what the object is supposed to do or be, or what it ought to accomplish. Next, certain features of the object ostensibly enabling the object to fulfil this function are established. These are the virtues or good-making characteristics of the object—its appropriate evaluative criteria. Finally, the extent to which the specific object in question meets these evaluative criteria is assessed in order to reach an evaluative judgment.

The problem of function ascription

But notice the first step of this procedure: *The critic establishes the function of the object.* This is not particularly informative. Where does this function come from? Just how does the critic establish it? These are crucial questions pertaining to the problem of appropriateness. For while the Functional Goodness Intuition offers a promising start to understanding evaluative reasoning and seems to be widely shared, one aspect of it is still unexplained: If, in order to arrive at the appropriate evaluative criteria viz. a particular object we must begin from a conception of the object’s function, how do we get such a conception? In other words, how do we determine the function of an object? What does it mean that it is “given” or that we have to “discover” it, as Santas states in the summary of Plato’s function argument?

From my office chair I can look out of my window and observe a wide range of objects. I can see cars in the parking lot, trees, blackbirds in trees, pebbles on the pavement and so on. Of some of these objects I am inclined to say intuitively that *they have functions*. Roughly, the car is for driving, the parking lot is for parking cars, the pavement is for walking. But of other objects, I am not so inclined. The function of a blackbird is not obvious to me, and neither is the function of a pebble on the pavement. In other words, it seems that sometimes objects or types of objects intuitively have a function, but in other cases they do not. And what is more, most objects do not have a tag on them telling us their function. It is therefore conceivable that there may be disagreement over the function of a particular object. Consider for instance the case of Aristotle above, who claims

that the function of man is, roughly, rational activity. As we noted earlier, this conclusion has been attacked from all sides and is still being discussed today:

Have the carpenter, then, and the tanner certain functions or activities, and has man none? Is he naturally functionless? Or as eye, hand, foot, and in general each of the parts evidently has a function, may one lay it down that man similarly has a function apart from all these? (NE 1.7 1097b22–33)

Aristotle's question is seemingly posed to elicit an affirmative response from the reader ('yes, one must lay it down that man has a function), but as W.F.R. Hardie, the renowned Aristotle commentator, remarks, "the obvious answer is that one may not [...]". Or consider Hume, who states without hesitation that the function of history is to instruct. Or Ralph Johnson who stipulates that the function of argument is to persuade the Other of the truth of a thesis. These are by no means uncontroversial claims, and they have been denied by reasonable people.

At the basis of the Functional Goodness Intuition, then, lies another type of judgment, namely *a function ascription*. Sometimes function ascriptions are seemingly uncontroversial and based on commonly held intuitions such as when we take for granted that the function of a heart is to pump blood, or that the function of a knife is to cut. But sometimes function ascriptions are controversial, and when they are, they become the crux of the problem of appropriateness.

It is one thing to posit that objects have functions and proceed to derive evaluative criteria based on this function. However, it is quite another thing to be able to *justify* to others through a process of reasoning open to scrutiny and criticism that an object has a function. As Jean Goodwin has noted in the context of argumentation theory, unsubstantiated function claims basically amount to normativity on-the-cheap. It is in a sense (too) "easy to talk function talk" (Goodwin, 2007, p. 74), because merely positing a function for the artifact in question begs the question. It is fine to have intuitions about functions, and they may be valuable as a starting point in theorizing. But unexamined, they sometimes tend to blur the very areas of inquiry that are most in need of explanation and illumination. As soon as any intuition gives rise to even a modicum of controversy, it becomes very problematic, in my opinion, to let such an intuition do any heavy lifting for purposes of theory building or analysis without any further defense. In those situations, the task at hand should shift immediately to justifying the intuition.

Conclusion

This chapter began by considering *the criteria requirement*, i.e. the idea that for evaluation to take place, criteria must be present. The criteria requirement gives rise to the problems of *origin* and *appropriateness*—two problems recognized among rhetorical critics interested in evaluation. I proposed that a potential solution to the problems of origin and appropriateness comes from the Functional Goodness Intuition, a widely held intuition across a range of thinkers from various times and disciplines. The Functional Goodness Intuition, however, cannot explain on its own how objects get their functions. This is the problem of function ascription, and it is the focus of the upcoming case studies. How could such case studies be fruitfully carried out? Providing an answer to this question is the focus of the next chapter on rational reconstruction.

CHAPTER 5

Rational reconstruction

As we have seen, many of the most prominent rhetorical scholars from Herbert Wichelns (1925/1995) onward regard evaluation as constitutive of rhetorical criticism. In other words, the presence of an evaluative dimension was widely regarded as a necessary condition for anything worthy of the label ‘criticism’. Given the historical importance of the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism, the modest amount of theorizing about this dimension is paradoxical. Few sustained accounts and treatments of the intricacies of evaluation exist in the literature on rhetorical criticism, even though there is agreement among rhetoricians that evaluation is far from trivial.⁴⁴

If there is a lack of knowledge about evaluation of rhetoric, then a strategy is needed to create more of this knowledge. Evaluation is of course a tremendously broad and unwieldy issue, so to make the task more manageable, I delimited the problems to be dealt with in following way: Firstly, I want to understand the *origin* of evaluative criteria applied by critics (i.e., from where do critics get their evaluative criteria?). Secondly, I want to understand how the appropriateness of these criteria in relation to a specific artifact can be justified (i.e. how can critics make a case that *these* criteria are appropriate for *this* artifact?). As indicated in the Chapter 4, one potential solution to these two problems hinges on providing a solution to a third problem concerned with determining or discovering the function of an object, i.e., the *problem of function ascription*.

This chapter introduces an approach to or strategy for creating knowledge about these problems. This approach or strategy is sometimes referred to as *rational*

⁴⁴ If evaluation had been central to rhetoric but *trivial*—spelling comes to mind as a case of such a topic—then perhaps the lack of a sustained treatment would be understandable.

reconstruction.⁴⁵ In the remainder of this chapter, I will introduce a particular understanding of rational reconstruction based primarily on Jürgen Habermas' work.⁴⁶ The reasons for introducing rational reconstruction here in some detail are, first, that understanding the aims and strategies of rational reconstruction should make it easier to follow the general project pursued in the case studies of Chapter 6-9, and, second, that it seems necessary to clarify my particular understanding of rational reconstruction, since the term has several rival meanings.⁴⁷

Rational reconstruction illustrated

Before discussing the aims and strategies of rational reconstruction, it will be helpful to consider a few examples of this kind of analysis to get a sense of its basic form as I will be employing it. Rational reconstruction is widely employed across disciplines (frequently without mentioning the term itself), and here is one well-known example from moral philosophy focused on the famous trolley problems: Trolley problems are thought-experiments aimed at bringing to light characteristics and structures of our morality (introduced by Philippa Foot, 1967, but discussed and utilized extensively by many others, including Frances Kamm, 2009). A basic version of one such problem proceeds like this: As you are strolling along some railway tracks you realize much to your horror that a runaway trolley is hurtling down the track toward five railroad workers who, oblivious to the danger, are busy repairing the rails. In despair, you look around to assess your

⁴⁵ Habermas, whose thoughts have inspired this chapter, typically speaks of “the method” of rational reconstruction. But the term “method” is somewhat unfortunate, because it implies a kind of mechanical, algorithmic procedure for creating knowledge or handling data. As I use it here, rational reconstruction is, in its style of knowledge creation, much closer to cognitive acts such as interpretation or close reading than it is to “objective” methods like statistical analysis or other quantitative methods.

⁴⁶ I should note that I will be referencing the most authoritative English translations of Habermas' work instead of relying on the original German texts.

⁴⁷ Jürgen Habermas is by no means the first scholar to talk about rational reconstruction, let alone the first to employ it as an analytical tool. In philosophy of science, Rudolph Carnap (1928), Hans Reichenbach (1938/1961), and Imre Lakatos (1971) frequently speak of rational reconstruction. In practical philosophy, Habermas (1976/1998) and Rawls (1951) are probably the most well-known proponents of rational reconstruction. In the field of rhetoric, Karen Tracy and Robert Craig (1995), and Edward Schiappa (2013) talk about rational reconstruction even though they seem to mean quite different things by the term. Perhaps as a testament to the confusion sometimes surrounding the term, Schiappa decided to change ‘rational reconstruction’ to ‘contemporary appropriation’ in the second edition of his book *Protagoras and Logos*, since some readers were confused by the term (2013, p. x). Tracy and Craig seem to be drawing on Habermas in their understanding of the term, but they only cursorily introduce the term, and they do not refer to their source of inspiration.

options and find that you are standing next to a lever controlling a switch. If you pull the lever, the runaway trolley will be directed onto a side track and the five workers will be saved from their otherwise certain death. Unfortunately, you notice a single worker repairing the side track. If you pull the lever, he will surely die. Your only options are to refrain from pulling the lever, which will result in the trolley killing the five workers on the main track or, alternatively, to pull the lever and direct the trolley onto the sidetrack, which will result in the trolley killing one worker. What should you do—and why?

One important point of so-called trolley problems in moral philosophy is their capacity to aid in the *rational reconstruction of our sense of morality* or, to use a near-synonymous term, to aid in the *explication of our sense of morality*. Having considered the dilemma above we may intuitively feel that diverting the trolley onto the sidetrack would be the right thing to do. Perhaps we may ask ourselves *why* we reach this judgment and our answer might be that diverting the trolley would mean the net saving of four lives. If we ask why the net saving of four lives is the right thing to do, we would perhaps answer that this is because by saving the four lives, our action will conform to a plausible moral principle according to which one should always act so as to minimize undue suffering. In this sense, by going back in the chain of reasons from our initial judgment, our reflections will result in candidate moral principles that in some sense characterize our sense of morality and help explain our judgments. In other words, by reflecting on those principles that could plausibly guide our judgments, we shed light on these principles.

In order to see what is meant by the term “candidate” principles, consider now the following variation on the above trolley problem: As you are walking across a bridge over some railway tracks, you notice a runaway trolley hurtling down the track. Like in the previous case, five workers on the track will die if no one takes action. You look around and see a large man, oblivious to the situation, leaning over the side of the bridge immediately above the track. Here are your options: You can choose not to act, and the five workers will die. Or you can gently push the large man so he falls over the side of the bridge in front of the trolley, bringing it to an immediate halt and surely killing him. In this case, what would you do and why?

Empirical evidence shows that most people choose to pull the lever in the first case, and most people choose to do nothing in the second case (Hauser, Young, & Cushman, 2008, pp. 126-135). How can this be? Our explanation of our judgment in the first case brought out the candidate *utilitarian* moral principle that we should act so as to

minimize undue harm. If we were to also act on this principle in the second case, we arguably ought to push the large man. The thought experiment amounts to a test of the principle to see if it will hold universally. For most people, this does not seem to be true, so something morally significant about this case must be different in order to explain that candidate principle from the first case does not hold in this second case, and we must thus look for a different principle to explain the judgment. Perhaps, as some have argued, the operative principle in the second case involves Kantian considerations of the moral impermissibility of using others (the large man) purely as means to an end (saving the workers) even when doing so would minimize undue harm. Thus, in reflecting upon the second case of the trolley problem, another candidate principle of morality has been explicated which can account for our judgment that the morally best “action” would be to do nothing. Further, in explicating these principles, we have learned something about our moral sense or capacity. In rationally reconstructing some of our moral principles governing our moral judgments, we have seemingly understood some of the substance of morality.

As mentioned earlier, rational reconstruction is applied in a number of disciplines. The above example comes from moral philosophy, but in order to illustrate the general applicability of rational reconstruction, consider briefly the example of Danish linguist Paul Diderichsen. Diderichsen’s most original contribution to the study of Danish grammar was the Danish Sentence Model, which Diderichsen used to characterize sentence structures of medieval Danish and later modern Danish (Diderichsen, 1941, 1946). Diderichsen’s Sentence Model, i.e. a fundamental structure of Danish sentences, was abstracted from empirical studies of native language users’ choice of sentence structure and condensed into principles explaining the ostensible “logic” behind the sentence structure.⁴⁸ What Diderichsen did, then, was in a certain methodological sense analogous to the exercise in moral philosophy above: Both examples highlight the fundamental aim of rational reconstruction, which consists of explicating the governing principles of a certain competence – moral, grammatical, or otherwise.

At its most fundamental level, then, the term rational reconstruction signifies a mode of inquiry aimed at creating knowledge of human practices such as, e.g., law, morality, reasoning or language by shedding light on the principles that seem to be operative

⁴⁸ I say “logic” because native language users typically do not rely on a conscious grammar. They follow principles that are simply tacitly operative without, usually, being consciously held.

in the behavior of those subjects participating competently in the practice.⁴⁹ The fundamental data or input of a rational reconstruction is the presumably competent, i.e. successfully norm-guided behavior, of participants in the practice. With these illustrations of the fundamentals of rational reconstruction, I now turn to Habermas' more detailed exposition of what this style of analysis involves.

Habermas on rational reconstruction

For Habermas, rational reconstruction is the default style of inquiry in those disciplines he designates as the *reconstructive sciences*. His most frequently cited example of rational reconstruction is Noam Chomsky's generative grammar, but Habermas also mentions ethics, logic, mathematics, argumentation theory, and developmental psychology as examples of reconstructive sciences.

Again, what these disciplines have in common is their aim of creating knowledge about certain human practices by translating—i.e. *reconstructing*—the implicit, intuitive knowledge possessed by competent subjects into a more explicit and precise form. A crucial underlying assumption in rational reconstruction is that subjects in various practices *know how* to act competently without necessarily being able to provide a full, explicit account of their competence that others would be able to follow.

As a case in point, think again of a native speaker of a language: In the context of the practice of speaking her native language, the speaker can normally be assumed to be competent. But this does not imply that the speaker is able to provide a detailed account of how to speak the language to others outside of the practice. In a rational reconstruction of linguistic competence, the aim might then be to translate the competence of the native speaker into a form—a grammar—that can be grasped by subjects outside of the practice. This would enable outsiders to increase their understanding of the practice and its concomitant competence, and this understanding could potentially be used as a starting point

⁴⁹ Habermas does not define the idea of a practice, but the general idea is, I think, captured well by Alasdair MacIntyre, who defines a practice as: “any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.” Criticism, and especially evaluative criticism, to me is a kind of meta-practice, the aim of which is to accelerate the systematic extension of those human powers to achieve excellence in various ground-level practices. Meta-criticism, then, is a kind of meta-meta-practice.

for transferring the competence from one set of subjects to another or even for criticism of the behavior of competent subjects.

Habermas' "A Postscript to Knowledge and Human Interests" (Habermas, 1973a) is the earliest publication in which Habermas directly describes his view of rational reconstruction. In the paper, Habermas addresses some of the criticisms and doubts that his seminal book *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1972) had occasioned. Among these were Habermas' own concerns about the term 'reflexion' that he had used without being aware that he had thereby conflated two quite different kinds of thinking: self-criticism and rational reconstruction (1973, p. 182).

In order to clear up the confusion and flesh out the meaning of rational reconstruction, Habermas describes rational reconstruction in the following way (1973, p. 183): (1) Rational reconstruction is "based on 'objective' data like sentences, actions, cognitive insights, etc., which are conscious creations of the subject [...]" (2) Rational reconstruction "tries to understand anonymous systems of rules which can be followed by any subject at all provided it has the requisite competence." (3) Reconstructions "explicate correct know-how, i.e. the intuitive knowledge we acquire when we possess rule-competence [...]"

These ideas may be translated to the agenda of Chapters 6-9 in the following way. Clearly, exploring the practice of evaluation as this is exhibited in the work of evaluative rhetorical critics involves examining the kind of data that Habermas refers to, i.e. sentences, actions, and cognitive insights consciously created by the critics. Moreover, this exploration is aimed at understanding whether and to what extent there are systems of rules in operation which may be followed by others who can be brought to understand those rules (i.e. it builds on the assumption that evaluation is not a subjective and arbitrary practice). And finally, we may assume, at least as a guiding principle, that the critics whose reasoning we are to examine possess competence in the practice of evaluation, which—if true—will yield an explication of correct know-how.

The idea that rational reconstruction leads to a kind of knowledge of competence is further deepened in Habermas' book *Theory and Practice* (1973). In this work, Habermas specifies that rational reconstructions are a kind of 'theoretical knowledge' (p. 22) or 'theoretical reflection' (p. 285fn42) of 'rule systems which we have to master if we wish to process experience cognitively or participate in systems of action or carry on discourse.' (p. 22). From these early and rudimentary descriptions of rational

reconstruction, Habermas soon turns to a more fully-fledged explanation of the notion. His most detailed exposition of rational reconstruction (even to this day) thus occurs in his paper “What is Universal Pragmatics?” (Habermas, 1976/1998). In this work, Habermas reiterates the point that rational reconstruction is characteristic of those sciences that systematically reconstruct, i.e. explicate, the intuitive knowledge of competent subjects. (ibid., p. 29) and that this explication can take place at several levels (ibid., p. 31).

Pertinent to project to be pursued in the Chapter 6-9, Habermas explains that explication of meaning has a range that starts on the surface level and can penetrate through to explication of “the deep structures of a reality accessible to understanding—a reality of symbolic formations produced according to rules.” (ibid., p. 31) This distinction helps us understand the difference between interpretation and rational reconstruction.

In interpretation, meaning explication is directed at the semantic content of the ‘symbolic formation’. At this level of explication, Habermas explains, the researcher takes up the same position as the “author” of the symbolic formation when this author wrote the sentence, performed the gesture, used the tool, applied the theory, and so forth. In explicating the meaning of the symbolic formation in this way, the understanding of the content “pursues connections that link the surface structures of the incomprehensible formation with the surface structures of other, familiar formations. Thus, linguistic expressions can be explicated through paraphrase in the same language or through translation into expressions of another language; in both cases, competent speakers draw on intuitively known meaning relations that obtain within the lexicon of one language or between the lexica of two languages.” (ibid., p. 31)

Relevant to the agenda of Chapters 6-9, Habermas contrasts interpretation with a second level of meaning explication that goes beyond the semantic contents of the ‘symbolic formation.’ This kind of meaning explication is carried out, Habermas explains, when the researcher alters his or her attitude. Instead of an attitude directed towards understanding content on the level of surface structures in which the task is to look through the symbolic formations to the world about which something is uttered, this second kind of meaning explication goes deeper. In the second kind of meaning explication, the researcher focuses on the “generative structures of the expressions themselves.” (ibid., p. 32). “The interpreter then attempts to explicate the meaning of a symbolic formation with the help of the rules according to which the author must have produced it.” Habermas expands on this distinction (ibid., pp. 32-33):

“In normal paraphrase and translation, the interpreter draws on semantic meaning relations (for instance between the different words of a language) in an ad hoc manner, so to speak, in that she simply applies a knowledge shared with competent speakers of that language. In this sense, the role of the interpreter can (under suitable conditions) be attributed to the author himself. The attitude changes, however, as soon as the interpreter tries not only to *apply* this intuitive knowledge of speakers but to *reconstruct* it. She then turns away from the surface structure of the symbolic formation; she no longer looks through it *intentione recta* to the world. She attempts instead to peer into the symbolic formation—penetrating through its surface, as it were—in order to discover the rules according to which this symbolic formation was produced (in our example, the rules according to which the lexicon of a language is constructed). The object of understanding is no longer the content of a symbolic expression or what specific authors meant by it in specific situations but rather the intuitive rule consciousness that a competent speaker has of his own language.”

Even though Habermas speaks of “competent speakers” in the above quotation, the scope of his method is clearly broader and applies to all competent subjects in norm-governed practices and so, I hold, also to rhetorical critics. It is this deeper level, beyond the surface structure, that is my interest in the coming case studies. The aim of the case studies is not merely to understand or to clarify through paraphrase what various evaluative critics have said, but instead to bring out (to extent possible) those rules, principles and assumptions that may be presumed to be operative in the background and according to which the critics have produced their evaluations. In other words, the aim is to bring out the “intuitive rule consciousness” of the critics.

In a further move of clarification (*ibid.*, p. 33), Habermas explains this second kind of meaning explication by referring to the British philosopher Gilbert Ryle, who distinguishes two kinds of knowledge: *know-how* and *know-that*. *Know-how* refers to the “ability of a competent subject who understands how to produce or accomplish something”, and *know-that* refers to the “explicit knowledge of how it is that he is able to do so” (so a kind of knowledge-of-knowledge.) Habermas illustrates the distinction between *know-how* and *know-that* in the following way (*ibid.*, p. 33):

In our case, what the author means by an utterance and what an interpreter understands of its content are a first-level *know-that*. To the extent that his utterance is correctly formed and thus comprehensible, the author produced it in accordance with certain rules or on the basis of certain structures. He knows how to use the system of rules of his language and understands their context-specific application; he has a pretheoretical knowledge of this rule system, which is at least sufficient to enable him to produce the utterances in question. This implicit rule consciousness

is a know-how. The interpreter, in turn, who not only shares but wants to understand this implicit knowledge of the competent speaker, must transform this know-how into explicit knowledge, that is, into a second-level know-that. This is the task of reconstructive understanding, that is, of meaning explication in the sense of rational reconstruction of generative structures underlying the production of symbolic formations.

Another currently relevant point made by Habermas has to do with what he calls the ‘evaluative accomplishments of rule consciousness.’ What he means by this phrase is that there is a difference between the explicating the surface level meaning of an utterance and explicating the underlying structures of utterances (or other symbolic formations) (ibid., p. 34):

Reconstructive proposals are directed toward domains of pretheoretical knowledge, that is, not to just any implicit opinion, but to a proven intuitive preknowledge. The rule consciousness of competent speakers functions as a court of evaluation, for instance with regard to the grammaticality of sentences. Whereas the understanding of content is directed toward any utterance whatever, reconstructive understanding refers only to symbolic objects characterized as ‘well formed’ by competent subjects themselves. Thus, for example, syntactic theory, propositional logic, the theory of science, and ethics start with syntactically well-formed sentences, correctly fashioned propositions, well-corroborated theories, and morally unobjectionable resolutions of norm conflicts, in order to reconstruct the rules according to which these formations can be produced.

Habermas then goes on to provide the example of Chomsky’s grammatical theory which aimed to (ibid., p. 35):

reconstruct the intuitive rule consciousness common to all competent speakers in such a way that the proposals for reconstruction represent the system of rules that permits potential speakers, in at least one language *L*, to acquire the competence to produce and to understand any sentences that count as grammatical in *L*, as well as to distinguish these sentences well-formed in *L* from ungrammatical sentences.

Why do rational reconstruction?

This last point is illustrative of the kind of use that reconstructive knowledge may be put to. It can *transfer* competence or skill from one set of subjects to another and enable this new set of subjects to participate in the practice in question in a more qualified manner (i.e. understand, evaluate and produce sentences in a language or, more generally, comprehend, evaluate and perform actions in a kind of activity hitherto not understood, let alone mastered, by these subjects). This idea is also a motivating consideration in the

current dissertation. If evaluation of rhetoric is a skill that can be learned, i.e. an activity governed by certain principles, it may be possible to increase our understanding of the skill through a rational reconstruction of those who already possess the skill. If the pre-theoretical knowledge of evaluative critics is based on principles and these principles can be reconstructed, it becomes possible for aspiring critics to appreciate evaluation in a new light and to use the governing principles in practice.

Evaluation is typically characterized as a *dimension* of rhetorical criticism. Another way to conceptualize evaluation is to regard it as a specific domain or type of action carried out by subjects known as rhetorical critics. When seen from this angle, evaluation becomes a kind of practice, ostensibly structured or governed by certain assumptions, norms, and principles that can be understood, learned and criticized by anyone with the right kind of competence.

One problem with the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism is, I have argued, that the assumptions, norms, and principles governing this practice are not understood to a degree that matches the central place afforded to evaluation in rhetorical criticism. Rational reconstruction should make us see more clearly what is going on, to see patterns of evaluative reasoning in a clearer light, thus making it easier to understand, follow and perhaps criticize the reasoning.

Also, rational reconstruction can make it easier to compare and contrast cases of reasoning and argumentation across multiple authors. As such, it is a technique that enables one to discover features of similarity and difference between authors that reason about the similar issues but do so from different perspectives. Hopefully, the four case studies to be presented in Chapter 6-9 will make it clear how this is a beneficial aspect of rational reconstruction.

Discussion

Although my analytical approach in the case studies of the proceeding chapters is inspired by Habermas' idea of rational reconstruction, there are also certain differences that need to be mentioned.

Firstly, the scope of Habermas' idea of rational reconstruction is deeper than mine. Habermas' conception of rational reconstruction is aimed at uncovering or explicating "species-wide competencies." I see no need to follow Habermas in this regard. Much less general competencies may also be explicated through rational reconstruction.

Of course, this distinction between my understanding of rational reconstruction and Habermas' is to some extent a matter of straight-forward definition. If Habermas, as a matter of stipulation, would like rational reconstruction to pertain to only species-wide competencies, then that is his right. But I see rational reconstruction as a valuable style of analysis regardless of whether the competence is species-wide or more local. A case in point is the rational reconstruction of Danish grammar mentioned earlier. Rational reconstruction does not have to aim at general linguistic structures shared across the human species in the style of Chomsky. Another case in point regards the scope of moral competence. Moral competence may or may not be universal across the human species, but rational reconstruction can still be used to explicate certain local customs or patterns of cooperation that could count as morality for the group in question.

A second difference pertains to the domain of competence to be reconstructed. Habermasian rational reconstruction as presented above aims in the first instance at specifically pragmatic-linguistic insights. And my project here does not. Unlike Habermas, I am not concerned with linguistic competence per se, but rather with explicating certain resources of reason-giving that I claim to be central for the evaluative judgments found in rhetorical criticism (to be sure, these judgments are of course expressed in linguistic form). So, in this sense there is another difference between my project and Habermas'. But, I will maintain, the underlying ambition of explicating a kind of knowing-how inherent in a practice is retained.

Lastly, I would like to briefly clarify the difference between rational reconstruction and a related style of analysis, which is argumentation analysis. The idea of rational reconstruction as I use it here is closely related to (indeed partially overlapping with) argumentation analysis. One similarity between the two is found in the attempt to explicate tacit assumptions and principles that seem to be operative in the reasoning under analysis. In argument analysis, this typically would involve formulating warrants that allow for the connection between data and claim. Engaging in this kind of analysis necessarily involves interpretations and projections on the part of the analyst, and the result will always be a conjecture and subject to revision if convincing reasons can be marshalled against the interpretation. These epistemological limitations are also found in rational reconstruction.

Another similarity between argumentation analysis and rational reconstruction is found in the assumption that the subject whose reasoning is being analyzed is behaving

rationally. This assumption ensures that any analysis or reconstruction is performed on the basis of a principle of charity. This involves considering the utterances from a perspective that will yield the most convincing and consistent explanation of the subjects' actions.

One major difference between argumentation analysis and rational reconstruction, however, is found in the aim of the two pursuits. Whereas argumentation analysis ultimately aims at bringing to light the structure of argumentation for the sake of understanding the practice of argumentation, rational reconstruction aims at bringing to light a deeper, "field-dependent" knowledge (a kind of know-how) assumed to be operative in the subject. This may be the knowledge of grammar, law, morality, justice—or evaluation of rhetoric. In other words, whereas argumentation analysis aims at elucidating the practice of argumentation in order to better understand this practice, rational reconstruction aims at elucidating principles and assumptions operative in any human domain governed by rules and principles. In this sense, rational reconstruction may be considered to be a somewhat broader endeavor than argument analysis, even though argumentation analysis is clearly also a kind of rational reconstruction.

Conclusion

The fundamental problems to be dealt with in the analytical part of the dissertation concern the structure of the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism understood as the assumptions, norms, and principles governing the activity of evaluation as this is carried out by rhetorical critics. In this chapter I have introduced a style of analysis suitable for shedding light on these aspects of evaluation. Rational reconstruction as understood here promises to produce knowledge of a domain of practice through explicating more or less implicit aspects of the domain of practice. In this sense, rational reconstruction paves the way for increasing understanding, learning and criticism of the practice, which, I have argued, is an appropriate agenda when taking into consideration the central role of evaluation in rhetorical criticism and the paradoxically modest amount of theorizing about this phenomenon.

PART THREE: ANALYSIS

CHAPTER 6

Function from designer intentions: Herbert A. Wichelns

One of the main aims of this dissertation is to investigate the origin of evaluative criteria for rhetorical artifacts and the issue of how their appropriateness for particular artifacts may be justified. In Chapter 4 I posited that a promising avenue for answering this question may be intimately related to the notion of function. More specifically, I showed that according to a widely shared intuition (the Functional Goodness Intuition), evaluative criteria may come from, and therefore presuppose, a conception of function. In this sense, in order for an object or artifact to be evaluated positively, it must fulfil or be able to fulfil its function, and, conversely, for an artifact to be evaluated negatively, it must not fulfil or be able to fulfil its function.⁵⁰ If this basic intuition is correct, a rhetorical critic with evaluative pretensions must therefore somehow be able to identify, establish or ascribe a function to an artifact. But this insight only shifts the problem of the origin of evaluative criteria to another level. Instead of asking ‘where do criteria come from’, we instead have to ask, ‘where do functions come from?’ Just how can a rhetorical critic establish an artifact’s function?

⁵⁰ A distinction can of course be made between artifacts that ‘fulfil their function’ and artifacts that ‘are able to fulfil their function.’ An artifact may fulfil its function due to exceptional contextual circumstances without it necessarily having much to do with the artifact, such as when a knife cuts without being sharp due to the softness of the material cut by the knife. Conversely, an artifact may also fail to fulfil its function due to exceptional circumstances such as when a sharp knife does not cut due to the rigidity of the material to be cut. Cf. here the challenge of rhetors confronting an audience that is very easy to persuade or an audience that is very difficult to persuade.

In this chapter, I propose that one answer to this question can be found by studying Herbert A. Wichelns' essay on "The Literary Criticism of Oratory" (1925/1995). In the essay, Wichelns' famously argues that critics of oratory too frequently have applied criteria that are somehow inappropriate for oratorical artifacts. As a corrective to this situation, Wichelns proposes a set of alternative—and in his opinion—more appropriate criteria. This explicit focus on criteria and their appropriateness makes Wichelns' landmark paper a suitable case for reconstructing knowledge of evaluation.

The question to be pondered here concerns the structure of Wichelns' evaluative reasoning. Where do Wichelns' criteria come from, how is their appropriateness justified, and how are these questions in turn connected to the concept of function? Explicating Wichelns' reasoning requires reconstruction in the sense explained in the Chapter 5, i.e. it requires identifying and explicating certain assumptions, concepts, principles etc., operative in Wichelns' evaluative practice. We must work from the hypothesis that Wichelns bases his criteria on identifiable and justifiable principles (i.e. he is a 'competent subject' in the practice of evaluation as explained by Habermas), rather than from the hypothesis that Wichelns employs more or less arbitrary preferences. The challenge is to identify those principles—to transform Wichelns' know-how into know-that.

To anticipate, I will argue here that gaining a proper understanding of Wichelns' reasoning requires paying close attention to a substantial portion of his paper largely ignored by many commentators—the middle section.⁵¹ In this section of the paper, Wichelns compares and contrasts different approaches to evaluation employed by literary critics while he explains why some of these approaches are more appropriate for rhetorical artifacts (oratory) than others. By paying close attention to these passages, I propose, it transpires that Wichelns uses a specific approach to function ascription which I will term the "designer approach to function ascription." Reading Wichelns as using a designer approach to function ascription accomplishes three things: it explains the source of his 'persuasive effects' criterion; it explains his claim that permanence and beauty are inappropriate criteria for rhetorical artifacts; and it explains the claim that persuasive effect is an appropriate criterion for rhetorical artifacts.

⁵¹ As Gaonkar (1990, p. 293) notes: "Although Wichelns' essay consists of eight sections, later commentaries generally dwell on the last two sections, especially section seven."

The basics of Wichelns' position

Wichelns' essay is written at a time when rhetorical criticism as a discipline was largely non-existent. In order to carve out a space for a specifically rhetorical form of criticism, Wichelns therefore had to establish rhetorical criticism as distinct in certain ways from literary criticism.

The structure of Wichelns' essay is specifically designed to do so. Wichelns opens his essay by noting a certain deficiency in the extant scholarship on oratory. According to Wichelns, the deficiency consists in the lack of serious scholarship dealing with an "interesting" and "important" (ibid., p. 3) issue, namely "the judging of orators", i.e. evaluation. According to Wichelns, the compelling reason why this is a problem is that "the conditions of democracy necessitate ... the study of the art" (ibid., p. 4). Oratory is "a permanent and important human activity" (ibid., p. 4) and as such the critical study of oratorical method must be taken seriously. Notice here how this justification immediately distinguishes rhetorical criticism from literary criticism by referring to democracy.

Based on this fundamental premise, Wichelns describes in outline how he will contribute to solving the problem. He wants to "spy out the land, to see what some critics have said of some orators, to discover what their mode of criticism has been." (ibid., p. 3) He concedes that his project is "limited" (ibid., p. 3) in the sense that he will only be able to focus on a small portion of criticism, namely "the verdicts on [a few well-known orators] found in the surveys of literary history, in critical essays, in histories of oratory, and in biographies." (ibid., pp. 3-4). But even though Wichelns is interested in the verdicts of these critics, the substance he is really after lies behind those verdicts. He wants to interrogate "the method of the critic: his standards, his categories of judgment, what he regards as important." (ibid., p. 4) In other words, Wichelns aims to reconstruct the principles employed by critics in building cases for their evaluative verdicts.⁵²

The designer approach to function ascription

I will defend the view that Herbert Wichelns employs what I will call a designer approach to function ascription in order to arrive at and justify the appropriateness of his criterion of effect. What does this approach entail? At its most basic level, the designer approach

⁵² In this sense, there is a methodological parallel between Wichelns' project and my own. But Wichelns of course ultimately aimed at promoting a specific set of criteria, whereas I aim to investigate methods for arriving at and justifying criteria.

to function ascription entails the view that the function of an object is what its designer intended the object to be for. Translated to a context of rhetoric, this means that the function of, say, Lincoln's speech is to persuade the audience of the basic need for liberty if persuading the audience of the basic need for liberty is what Lincoln intended the speech to be for. Notice how the designer approach to function ascription is fully compatible with the Functional Goodness Intuition according to which the quality of an object depends on its capacity to fulfil its function.

To flesh out these general and quite abstract propositions, consider the following explanation. As a matter of definition, artifacts are always brought into existence by someone—typically humans although other animals such as tool-using monkeys could also in a sense create artifacts. On the standard definition, artifacts will always have designers. The idea of a designer should be understood broadly. A designer is not necessarily someone working at a computer, making sketches of toys, clothes, graphics, etc. A designer is simply someone who—through a rather ineffable thought process—brings into existence (or perhaps plans to bring into existence) an object or entity with the intention that the object or entity has a certain purpose—that it is for something. In this sense, a designer can be everyone from a granddaughter making a clay ashtray for her grandfather, a shoemaker, toolmaker, chef, artist, author and rhetor.

The designer approach to function ascription entails that *because* an object was designed by someone with the intention that the object has a certain purpose, this purpose constitutes the function of the object. Or, as a variation on this theme, the approach can entail that because an object was designed to be of a kind that has a certain purpose, the purpose of the kind constitutes the function of the object.

In a widely cited article from the literature on functions, philosopher Larry Wright (1973) explains the idea in the following way:⁵³

[...] if something is designed to do X, then doing X is its function even if doing X is generally useless, silly, or even harmful. In fact, intention is so central here that it allows us to say the function of *I* is to do *C*, even when *I* cannot even *do C*. If the windshield washer switch comes from the factory defective, and is never repaired, we would still say that its *function* is to activate the washer system; which is to say: that is what it was *designed* to do.

⁵³ It should be noted that Wright himself does not support the designer approach in the simple version outlined here.

This is an intuitively appealing approach and it illustrates two central issues, namely how objects get their functions and how they are evaluated by their ability to perform this function. In Wright's example, the windshield washer switch is thus negatively evaluated ("defective"), and the reason for this is simply that the switch will not perform its function, i.e. do what it was intended to do by its designer.

In the contemporary literature on functions, Wright is perhaps the first to articulate the above conception of function ascription, but the view is commonly acknowledged by a range of thinkers from the literature on functions. Ariew and Perlman (2002, p. 1) thus opine:

Humans often create objects with a purpose in mind, endowing the objects with particular functions from the intentions of their inventors. It is taken to be relatively unproblematic to have artifacts receive their functions from the intentions of their inventors. For example, can-openers are invented with the function of opening cans.

We see again here how the function of the artifact flows from the intentions of the designer ("inventor"). The designer is in a position from which he can endow certain material objects with functions, thereby bridging the gap from the purely objective, material realm into the realm of socially constructed facts.

Peter McLaughlin, another noted thinker on functions, also expresses the idea that functions are derived from the intentions of a designer (McLaughlin, 2001, p. 52):

In the case of the functions of whole artifacts the determination of their functions or purpose is completely external. It lies in the actual intentions of the designer, [...], however socially determined these intentions may in fact be. Such functions or purposes can be changed by a change of mind, and we can use the terms purpose and function interchangeably.

Karen Neander, another prominent function theorist, also makes a point to the same effect: "I suggest that the function of an artifact is the purpose or end for which it was made [...] by an agent [...]" (Neander, 1991a, p. 173).

In the context of art criticism, Jonathan Gilmore holds a similar view. According to Gilmore (2011, p. 302), we find "the source and determination of [...] functions in art in its creator's intentions." And he goes on to say that:

[...] the standard case is that an artist intends to create a work of art that has a function and some capacity to discharge it and acting on that intention explains (in

the right way, i.e., without a deviant causal chain) why the work she creates has that function and capacity.

In the context also of art criticism, Noël Carroll writes (p. 67):

[K]nowing what the artist is intending to do also gives us access to the purpose her work is supposed to sub-serve—which, *pari passu*, supplies the critic with an important goalpost against which to measure the achievement of the work under scrutiny.

And returning briefly to Aristotle's rhetorical question from his *ergon* argument described in Chapter 4, commentator W.F.R. Hardie apparently also subscribes to a kind of designer approach to function ascription, for he rejects Aristotle's suggestion that humans could have a function "unless one is prepared to say that a man is an instrument designed for some use." (Hardie, 1980, p. 23).

The preceding remarks illustrate the intuition behind the designer approach to function ascription. In general, according to this approach to function ascription, objects get their functions from the intentions of the designer, either directly or through membership in a category or a kind, which in turn is derived from the intentions of the designer. Let us take a closer look at how Wichelns uses this approach to function ascription to derive and justify the appropriateness of his proposed evaluative criterion—and to argue against the appropriateness of literary criteria such as permanence and beauty.

Reconstruction of Wichelns' approach to function ascription

In his paper, Wichelns notes that "the section of the history of criticism which deals with judging of orators is still unwritten. Yet the problem is an interesting one, and one which involves some important conceptions" (Wichelns, 1995, p. 3). On this background, he therefore sets out "to spy the land, to see what some critics have said of some orators, to discover what their mode of criticism has been." (ibid., p. 3) He limits his investigation of criticism to those critics who have written on the oratory of such major public figures as Burke, Webster, Lincoln, Gladstone, Bright and Cobden. (ibid., p. 3) And he further delimits his study in order to make it a squarely meta-critical one: "What interests us is the method of the critic: his standards, his categories of judgment, what he regards as important. These will show, not so much what he thinks of a great and ancient literary type, as how he thinks in dealing with that type. The chief aim is to know how critics have spoken of orators." (ibid., p. 4)

In order to get a handle on his survey, Wichelns offers an initial categorization of the criticism he wishes to survey. First, there is a type of criticism which is “predominantly personal or biographical” in the sense that it focuses on the character and the mind of the orator in order to shed light on the human being. Second, there is the type of criticism which divides its attention between the biographical aspect of the speaker on the one hand and his oratorical products on the other. Last, Wichelns includes a category of criticism, which “is occupied with the work and tends to ignore the man.” Wichelns finds problems in all three categories and I will argue in the following that this fact can ultimately be explained by Wichelns’ specific conception of function ascription (which it is the purpose of this chapter to reconstruct). After having conducted his survey, Wichelns ends up with two broad groups of critics. One group he labels ‘literary critics,’ and the other he labels ‘rhetorical critics.’

The fundamental problem that Wichelns finds in the group of literary critics is this: Despite all their differences in point of view, in styles of description, and in their differing propensity toward making evaluative judgments, the literary critics are—according to Wichelns—characterized by a unity of purpose (*ibid.*, p. 21). This unity of purpose consists “in the attempt to interpret the permanent value that they find in the work under consideration. That permanent value is not precisely indicated by the term beauty, but the two strands of aesthetic excellence and permanence are clearly found, not only in the avowed judicial criticism but in those writers who emphasize description rather than judgment.” For these writers, Wichelns claims (*ibid.*, p. 22):

there is implicit in the critic’s mind the absolute standard of a timeless world: the wisdom of Burke’s thought (found in the principles to which his mind always gravitates rather than in his decisions on points of policy) and the felicity of his language are not considered as of an age, but for all time. Whether the critic considers the technical excellence merely, or both technique and substance, his preoccupation is with that which age cannot wither nor custom stale.

And this attitude is common to all the literary critics. “They are all, in various ways, interpreters of the permanent and universal values they find in the works of which they treat” (*ibid.*, p. 22). In short, these critics are preoccupied “with the thought and the eloquence which is permanent.” (*ibid.*, p. 22)

In contrast to this attitude common to those writers who Wichelns designates as literary critics, Wichelns characterizes the project of *rhetorical* critics thus (*ibid.*, p. 22): “If we now turn to rhetorical criticism as we found it exemplified in the preceding section,

we find that its point of view is patently single. It is not concerned with permanence, nor yet with beauty. It is concerned with effect.”

The basic point made by Wichelns on the difference between literary criticism and rhetorical criticism thus concerns the appropriateness of evaluative criteria employed in the two types of criticism. Criticism of literary objects will appropriately apply the criteria of permanence and beauty, while criticism of rhetorical objects must instead apply the criterion of effect. In Wichelns words (*ibid.*, p. 25):

the point of view of literary criticism is proper only to its own objects, the permanent works. Upon such as are found to lie without the pale, the verdict of literary criticism is of negative value merely, and its interpretation is false and misleading, because it proceeds upon a wrong assumption.

But what makes literary objects distinct from rhetorical ones? Clearly, it will not do to answer that literary objects are different from rhetorical ones, because they ought to be evaluated using different standards. An answer to the question must begin from the opposite direction, namely by noting that these objects ought to be evaluated using different standards, because literary objects are different from rhetorical objects. And, as I will suggest, the beginning of an answer to this question lies in Wichelns’ approach to function ascription which we can begin to understand by noting Wichelns’ insistence throughout his paper that literary critics fail to see the orator as orator and instead misconceive the orator as something other than an orator.

Failing to see the orator as orator

As noted earlier, Wichelns divides his survey of critical methods into three portions. The first, in which critics are grouped according to their propensity to “seek the man behind the work” is treated briefly only to be dismissed as irrelevant for oratory in Wichelns’ brief Section II. The problem with critics adopting this attitude, according to Wichelns, is their failure to conceive correctly of the speaker in question (*ibid.*, p. 5):

But [these critics] do not occupy themselves with Burke as a speaker, nor even with him as a writer; their first and their last concern is with the man rather than with his works [...] These critics, in dealing with the public speaker, think of him as something other than a speaker.

Albeit in a preliminary form, in this passage we find a key to understanding the fundamental premise of Wichelns’ argument against the appropriateness of criteria of

permanence and beauty for oratorical objects. For the basic failure of all the literary critics surveyed in the paper comes down to the implications of their misconception of the speaker as speaker (or, in other words, the orator as orator).

This basic failure is highlighted by Wichelns in Section III, which deals with the kind of criticism which focuses on both the person and the work. Regarding this kind of criticism, Wichelns holds that “[a]t its best, the type of study that starts with the orator’s mind and character is justified by the fact that nothing can better illuminate his work as a persuader of men.” (ibid., p. 5). What we see here is Wichelns’ definition of an orator as ‘a persuader of men.’ Moreover, we sense the importance that Wichelns places upon this definition of an orator as a persuader of men. But, as Wichelns notes, there is also a danger in this kind of criticism focusing equally on the person and the work (ibid., p. 5):

[W]hen not at its best, the description of a man’s general cast of mind stands utterly unrelated to his art: the critic fails to fuse his comment on the individual with his comment on the artist; and as a result we get some statements about the man, and some statements about the orator, but neither casts light on the other.

This passage highlights once more that, for Wichelns, it is of the utmost importance that rhetorical critics see the speaking subject in the correct light; not as a person or an individual, but as an orator—a “persuader of men”. This is emphasized when Wichelns complains that in in Grierson’s criticism of Burke, the “analysis of the orator is incomplete, being overshadowed by the treatment of Burke as a writer” and that in other cases the critics fail to make the best critical choices, perhaps because they “habitually take large views of the orator himself, considered as a personality”. The same problem of failing to see the orator as an orator reveals itself in Wichelns’ comments on the critic Elton’s treatment of Burke. “For Professor Elton, evidently, Burke was a man, and a mind, and an artist in prose; but he was not an orator.” (ibid., p. 7). And the same goes for the critic Stephenson’s analysis of Lincoln: “But though we find in Stephenson’s pages a suggestive study of Lincoln as a literary man, we find no special regard for Lincoln as orator.” (ibid., p. 8)

In Section IV, Wichelns turns his attention to those critics who are “more distinctly literary in aim.” (ibid., p. 10). This group he further subdivides into judicial critics, interpretive critics, and the critics who “regard the speech as a special literary form.” Of the judicial critics, Wichelns concludes that they all make the same mistake. That is, in addition to their failure to ground their evaluative standards of which permanence is one,

their “point of view is always that of the printed page.” (ibid., p. 12) Likewise with the interpretive critics, who also in general “take the point of view of the printed page, of the prose essay. Only to a slight degree is there a shift to another point of view, that of the orator in relation to the audience on whom he exerts his influence; the immediate public begins to loom a little larger; the essential nature of the oration as a type begins to be suggested.” (ibid., p. 12)

From this exposition of passages from the first four sections of Wichelns’ essay, a distinct pattern or topic in Wichelns argument may thus be identified: Those critics who fail to see the speaker as a speaker—the orator as orator—and conceive of the speaker instead as a man, a mind, a writer, or a person, have simply premised their criticism on a mistake. In order to see in more detail wherein this mistake lies, let us consider what Wichelns has to say about those critics who avoid this mistake (at least partially) and the implications this has on the validity of their criticism.

Succeeding in seeing the orator as orator

In the structure of Wichelns’ argument, these more successful critics appear towards the end of Section V and through Section IV. One example is the critic Saintsbury, who manages to grasp something central about Burke’s oratory and focus his critical point of view accordingly (ibid., p. 13):

Saintsbury’s attitude toward the communicate, impulsive nature of the orator’s task is indicated in a passage on the well-known description of Windsor Castle. This description the critic terms ‘at once ... a perfect harmonic chord, a complete visual picture, and a forcible argument.’ It is significant that he adds, ‘The minor rhetoric, the suasive purpose [presumably the argumentative intent] must be kept in view; if it be left out the thing loses’; and holds Burke ‘far below Browne, who had no needs of purpose’ It is less important that a critic think well of the suasive purpose than that he reckon with it, and of Saintsbury at least it must be said that he recognizes it, although grudgingly; but it cannot be said that Saintsbury has a clear conception of rhetoric as the art of communication: sometimes it means the art of prose, sometimes that of suasion.

Saintsbury, then, according to Wichelns, understands something central about oratory and the “orator’s task” that the previously analyzed critics did not; namely the idea of “suasive purpose” or, in Wichelns paraphrase, “argumentative intent.” And this understanding elevates Saintsbury above the previous critics who failed to see the orator as orator.

For the critic Hazlitt, says Wichelns, the topic of ‘suasive purpose’ is still out of reach. Although Hazlitt has the merit of focusing attentively on the style of Burke, Hazlitt still lacks “a clear sense of Burke’s communicative impulse, of his persuasive purpose, as operating in a concrete situation”, and this omission leads Hazlitt to mistakenly conceive of Burke as “speaking to the judicious but disinterested hearer of any age other than Burke’s own” and thus misunderstand the “problem of the speaker.” (ibid., p. 13).

In contrast, the critic Whipple understands, according to Wichelns, that “an orator has as his audience, not posterity, but certain classes of his own contemporaries.” Whipple’s criticism of Webster is thus premised on the realization that “Webster was not a writer, but a speaker” and this, to Wichelns, makes him an example of those critics who recognizes “the orator’s function” and in whose criticism “the minor rhetoric, the suasive purpose’ is beginning to be felt, though not always recognized and never fully taken into account.” (ibid., p. 15)

Through this acknowledgement of Whipple’s criticism, Wichelns segues to examine the final group of critics, who together represent the most appropriate form of rhetorical criticism. What makes this group stand out, according to Wichelns, is that “[t]he writers now to be mentioned are aware, more keenly than any of those we have so far met, of the speech as a literary form” in which the critics view “oratory as oratory”. To illustrate, Wichelns quotes the critic Lord Curzon (ibid., p. 16):

In dealing with the Parliamentary speakers of our time I shall, accordingly, confine myself to those whom I have myself heard, or for whom I can quote the testimony of others who heard them; and I shall not regard them as prose writers or literary men, still less as purveyors of instruction to their own or to future generations, but as men who produced, by the exercise of certain talents of speech, a definite impression upon contemporary audiences, and whose reputation for eloquence must be judged by that test, and that test alone.⁵⁴

According to Wichelns, Lord Curzon’s point of view in which the speaker is recognized as a speaker and not as something else (a writer, author, etc.) is what makes this approach to criticism valid. And, in the same vein, Wichelns applauds the critic H.M. Butler’s criticism focusing on “Chatham as an orator” by “thinking of the speech as originally delivered to its first audience rather than as read by the modern reader” (ibid., p. 16) and, next,

⁵⁴ Wichelns immediately corrects Lord Curzon and notes that “the judgment of orators is not solely to be determined by the impression of contemporary audiences.” (p. 16). Those who take Wichelns to be a proponent of an “immediate effects” criterion should therefore reconsider.

the critic Lecky's account of Burke in which Lecky regards "Burke as primarily a speaker" and also in the critic Bryce's account of Gladstone, which deals "explicitly with the orator as orator." Similarly, Chauncey A. Goodrich is commended for his "powerful grasp" and "comprehensive view" on criticism, which entails a "consistent view of his subject as a speaker."

In sum, what the critics of this last section accomplish that the lesser critics did not, according to Wichelns, is this: They all adopt "a different attitude towards the orator; his function is recognized for what it is: the art of influencing men in some concrete situation. Neither the personal nor the literary evaluation is the primary object. The critic speaks of the orator as a public man whose function it is to exert influence by speech." (ibid., p. 21)

The function of the orator

I have claimed that Wichelns derives the function of oratory from the intentions of the designers, i.e. the orators. Let us see more specifically how Wichelns does this.

I suggest that the place to start is by looking at Wichelns' definitions and remarks about the nature of the orator. Wichelns is concerned to show that criticism of oratory suffers if we do not take into account the orator as orator. But how should we see an orator, then?

Several passages indicate Wichelns' answer to this question. For example, Wichelns posits that the orator should be seen as a "persuader of men." In fact, this is defined as the work of an orator. (ibid., p. 5) In another passage, Wichelns advises the critic to take into consideration the strategic purpose of the oratorical works, in their function as speeches delivered by a "public man" (ibid., p. 7) In a third passage Wichelns commends the critic Elton for recognizing not only that Burke was a speaker (as opposed to a man) but further that Burke *therefore* "is to be judged in part at least as one who attempted to influence men by the spoken word." (ibid., p. 9) This idea is followed up when Wichelns commends the critic Grierson for realizing "better than the others that Burke's task was not merely to express his thoughts and feelings in distinguished prose, but to communicate his thoughts and his feelings effectively." (ibid., p. 9) And this "task" is soon supplemented with a description of "the problem that confronts every orator: so to present ideas as to bring them into the consciousness of hearers." (ibid., p. 10)

Wichelns then goes on to talk of oratory as a type of object that has a purpose. He notes the failure of many critics to realize this. For these critics, he says, “the speech is regarded as a musical meditation might be regarded: as a kind of harmonious musing that drifts pleasantly along, with little of inner form and nothing of objective purpose.”⁵⁵ Further, Wichelns notes that the critic Hazlitt is “lacking a clear sense of Burke’s communicative impulse, of his persuasive purpose, as operating in a concrete situation.” And Wichelns goes on to note some of the more accomplished critics are to be commended because in their criticism “the presence of a persuasive purpose is clearly recognized.” (ibid, p. 15)

Wichelns also discusses how Lecky has managed to elevate his criticism by regarding Burke as a public man (ibid., p. 17,) and he commends Morley’s work on Gladstone, which again regards Gladstone as a public man. Wichelns also praises Goodrich who “consistently thinks of the speeches he discusses as intended for oral delivery” and on p. 20, Goodrich is commended for taking the “point of view of public address.” On p. 20, Wichelns summarizes his conclusion in the following way: “But we have arrived at a different attitude towards the orator; his function is recognized for what it is: the art of influencing men in some concrete situation. Neither the personal, nor the literary evaluation is the primary object. The critics speaks of the orator as a public man whose function it is to exert influence by speech.”

Wichelns quotes with approval the following (p. 23): “The writer of rhetorical discourse has his eye upon the audience and occasion; his task is persuasion; his form and style are organic with the occasion.”

Wichelns (p. 24) notes a crucial distinction between poetry—rightly judged by literary standards—and rhetoric. The difference is that poetry “always is free to fulfil its

⁵⁵ Although Wichelns does not reference Kant, the distinction between objects with an objective purpose and those without such a purpose seems to me to be very much inspired by Kant’s ideas of free beauty (*pulchritudo vaga*) and adherent beauty (*pulchritudo adhaerens*) introduced in §16 of his *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Kant, 2000). As explained by Paul Guyer (2005, ch. 5), Kant’s first kind of beauty presupposes no concept of what the object ought to be (and therefore no given function), whereas the second kind of beauty does presuppose a particular end (i.e. a *for-ness*, a function). Wichelns, it seems to me, would see oratory as subject to adherent judgments (i.e. functional judgments), whereas music is subject to judgments of free beauty. Beauty, even adherent beauty, is something different from, e.g., persuasive effect, but the passage seems to reveal that functional goodness intuition seems to be very much present in Wichelns’ reasoning.

own law”, whereas rhetoric—due to the suasive purpose—is “perpetually in bondage to the occasion and the audience.”

Similarly, as a critic of rhetoric, “one must conceive of the public man as influencing the men of his own times by the power of his discourse.”

This marks another distinction between rhetorical criticism and literary criticism. For due to its focus on permanent values, literary criticism does not take into consideration crucial aspects of rhetorical criticism, namely the notion that in rhetoric there is a special purpose and thus misses to interpret the discourse “in the light of the writer’s intention”

To illustrate this point, Wichelns quotes Morley: “The statesman who makes or dominates a crisis, who has to rouse and mold the mind of senate or nation, has something else to think about than the production of literary masterpieces.” In other words, the mental events, i.e. the intentions, of the statesman—the public man—are different than those of the writer of literature. This is further underlined, when Wichelns notes that rhetorical criticism should “reconstruct the author’s own intention”.

What all of these passages suggest is the following: Orators are “public men”, who have as part of their very definition certain tasks that they must grapple with. It is built into the fabric of the concept of public man that he must intend to influence and persuade. This is his *ergon*, and these intentions imbue the oratory of “public men” with a certain function. This is an interesting variation on the idea of the designer approach to function ascription in which the function of the object is derived from the actual intentions of the designer. As would later be noted by writers in discussions of the so-called intentional fallacy (Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1946), actual intentions are to some extent beyond the scope of the critic. But Wichelns’ interestingly bypasses this problem by incorporating in the definition of an orator an intention to persuade. On the basis of this assumption, Wichelns thus bypasses problems of the uncertainty of actual intentions and levies instead idealized intentions that in turn make the possibility of function ascription a reality.

Conclusion

Although the focus of this dissertation is evaluation, the aim of this chapter has not been to describe the criteria posited in Herbert Wichelns’ essay, nor has it been to attempt an evaluation of the appropriateness of those criteria. Instead, the aim has been

reconstructive; to get behind the criteria proposed by Wichelns in order to see where those criteria come from and to ascertain how Wichelns' justifies their appropriateness. This kind of approach is in part made feasible by the fact that Wichelns was responding to a set of opponents. He did not have the luxury of being able to simply propose criteria in a domain hitherto devoid of such criteria. Wichelns had to show that his criteria were in some sense superior to—i.e. more appropriate than—the criteria he intended to replace. This in turn means that Wichelns had to build a case for his criteria, and this situation formed the basis for selecting Wichelns' paper as a viable case study.

How, then, did Wichelns derive his criteria and defend their appropriateness? The answer to this question, I have argued, is intimately related to the notion of function. More specifically, Wichelns' case for the appropriateness of the criterion of persuasive effect in the evaluation of oratory rests on the idea that literary and oratorical objects constitute different kinds of objects in the sense that they have different functions; and this claim is in turn based on the idea that the designers or creators of these objects have different intentions in bringing the objects into existence.

Through his essay, Wichelns weaves an ideal type in the form of a designer of messages (the public man). This designer is defined in part by his "task" and his intentions as "a persuader of men." The public man is dissociated from the ideal designer of literature and poetry who has different intentions. This move of constructing a designer with certain intentions lets Wichelns imbue oratory (i.e. designs of the public man) with a general function, which is to persuade. Once this function of oratory is in place, the evaluative criteria will follow: If a message persuades (i.e. fulfils the purpose as intended by its designer), then it should be positively evaluated, if not, then it should be negatively evaluated.

In ascribing functions to oratorical objects in this way, Wichelns' essay may thus be said to instantiate a general approach to function ascription which may be called the designer approach to function ascription. The designer approach to function ascription thus constitutes one strategy for systematically deriving evaluative criteria and justifying their appropriateness.

CHAPTER 7

Function from user needs: Christian Kock

For critics who subscribe to the Functional Goodness Intuition, the relevant evaluative criteria are derived from the function of the object in question. For Wichelns, this function was in turn derived by appealing to the (idealized) intentions of the designer of the artifact, “the public man”. But is this kind of function ascription the only possible one?

In this chapter, I examine Christian Kock’s evaluative reasoning in order to provide an answer to this question. The evaluative thinking of Christian Kock warrants its own case study for several reasons. First of all, Christian Kock’s work is interesting from the point of view of this dissertation, because Kock is a contemporary rhetorician who explicitly holds that evaluative criticism is central to rhetoric. This commitment to normativity suggests that his work will contain indications as to how to actually go about evaluating rhetoric. Secondly, as I will argue, although Kock clearly makes use of function ascription, he does so in a fashion that leaves some of his key evaluative assumptions and premises somewhat ambiguous. And third, despite this ambiguity, Kock’s work clearly illustrates that Wichelns’ designer approach to function ascription is not the only possible approach.

More specifically, the main claim I will be defending in this chapter is that passages of Christian Kock’s work illustrates the so-called *user approach to function ascription*. This means that evaluative criteria are derived from considerations of the user of the rhetorical artifact rather than its designer. This approach to function ascription corresponds roughly to function theorist Peter Achinstein’s (1983) notion of “user-function.”

Beyond the reconstruction of Kock’s approach to function ascription, the chapter also considers a criticism of Kock’s normative reasoning by David Zarefsky (2013). I argue

that Zarefsky's criticism of Kock is ultimately premised on their different intuitions about function ascription, and further that there are good reasons not to adopt Zarefsky's approach to function ascription.

Christian Kock's commitment to normativity

The first point to be established is that Kock's conception of rhetoric as a discipline is thoroughly normative. In a number of publications this commitment to normativity has been explicitly communicated through programmatic statements as well as through more implicit acts of evaluative criticism.

Perhaps Christian Kock's most clear commitment to normativity can be found in his paper "The Identity of Rhetoric as a Discipline and a University Program" (2011).⁵⁶ In this paper, Kock sets out his vision of rhetoric, which entails that "[r]hetoric is an empirical and normative discipline" about utterances regarded in their total context.

According to Kock, adopting this view of rhetoric involves studying both the production and reception of utterances in their complete situational contexts. Rhetoric, Kock says in another publication (2004), "will teach us not only to do certain things with words, but also to do these things well [...]".

Drawing on Bitzer's (1968) ideas about the rhetorical situation, Kock maintains that rhetoric as a discipline contains a crucial focus on evaluation which sets it apart from other communication disciplines in that it "starts with the situation in which something is to be uttered—and from that point of departure it raises normative discussions about every choice. Most significant is the fact that rhetoric will pronounce on the *quality* of the content of the utterance" (Kock, 2011, p. 49, my emphasis).

Judgments of quality imply the presence of evaluative criteria. And these, according to Kock, are also central to the rhetoric as a scholarly discipline, since the study of rhetoric "asks what the criteria are for the value, merit or quality of utterances. Rhetoric takes it upon itself to pronounce, as a scholarly discipline, on the value of its objects of study; it will not merely describe them according to their essential characteristics, it will also appraise them [...]" (ibid., p. 48)

The quotations should suffice to illustrate that Christian Kock holds a fundamentally normative view of rhetoric as a discipline. The point of the discipline is not merely

⁵⁶ This article is Christian Kock's own English translation of an earlier publication (Kock, 1997).

to gain a deeper understanding of the characteristics of concrete utterances in their situational context, but also crucially to understand the quality of these utterances, which in turn requires an understanding of evaluative criteria. The question becomes, then, where do these criteria come from and how are their justified?

Kock's normativity is functional

A key aspect of understanding the source and justification of evaluative criteria lies, I propose, in Kock's understanding of rhetoric as functional. The claim that Kock subscribes to the Functional Goodness Intuition can be supported by considering the following passages in several of Kock's publications.

For instance, Kock states that “[rhetoric’s] emphasis on production as well as reception implies that it must consider how utterances function; the normativity of rhetoric implies that it considers how well they function.” (2011, p. 47) Later in the same paper when contemplating the fundamental rhetorical question “what ought to be said here and why?”, Kock proposes that any answer to this question “and all other choices made by the rhetor are to be made with reference to aim or function.” (ibid., p. 49) In a similar vein, Kock (2004) explains that “in general rhetoric teaches us that the function a message is meant to serve very largely determines all the properties that the message should have, which again implies that messages meant to serve different functions will have very different properties.” And this perspective of rhetoric as function-oriented is further substantiated when Kock states (2011, p. 42) that “Burke, Booth and Perelman are undoubtedly among the principal architects of what rhetoric as a contemporary scholarly discipline ought to be: what they teach us is to look at a specific, authentic utterance in its entirety, primarily its ideational content, its invention, and its correlated function.”

These remarks about rhetoric and function are situated at a general level as a proposal of what rhetoric as a discipline ought to focus on. But they also consistently permeate the more specific conception of rhetoric as public discourse that Kock has outlined in a number of publications. For instance, when discussing public discourse and the media, Kock maintains that “Rhetoric takes a view of media and of public communication generally that we may call functionalist.” And this functionalist perspective should in turn inform the stance of rhetorical critics: “Today, the media are the forum where public discourse is conducted. It follows that we should criticize the media when they fail to

perform this function, and we should try to suggest how they could do it better.” (Kock, 2004).

The idea that rhetorical normativity is grounded in function becomes even more clear when Kock contrast his perspective with other approaches to communication such as critical discourse analysis. A major difference between critical discourse analysis and Kock’s conception of rhetoric is the lack of a functional perspective in the former: “[...] Critical Discourse Analysis is a purely descriptive pursuit. There is no theory of how public communication ought to be in order for it to fulfil a constructive role in society, no notion of a constructive function for public discourse at all.” (Kock, 2004, my emphasis.⁵⁷)

The idea that public political discourse has a function—or several functions—leads naturally to a normative, ameliorative role of rhetorical critics (Kock, 2004):

[...] Rhetoric believes that there is good discourse and bad discourse, i.e. some properties of public discourse will hinder and some will serve the functions for which public discourse is needed. Hence, Rhetoric is informed by the wish to identify these properties and to suggest or demand specific changes in current social discourse practices.

In line with Aristotle’s and Plato’s Functional Goodness Intuition (cf. Chapter 4), Kock thus emphasizes that virtues and vices—the properties that help or hinder the fulfilment of function—are central topics for the rhetorical critic. But notice how the singular notion of function has now become a plural notion of *functions*. The idea that public discourse may serve several functions is thus highlighted (Kock, 2004) :

As stated before, it is a key point in a rhetorician's approach to the media that a given medium has several widely differing functions. Consequently, it makes little sense to speak of the function of that medium as such, or to assume that the medium as such imposes specific conditions on whatever content it is used to mediate. The function of a medium is to mediate the functions of the content that it carries. And each medium may carry many types of content, each with its own distinctive function.

And the same idea can be found in yet another publication where the term ‘function’ has been substituted by the term ‘purpose’ (Kock, 2008):

⁵⁷ Christian Kock’s current position is that it is imprecise to characterise CDA as a purely descriptive pursuit. According to Kock it is a pursuit that always results in a kind of negative evaluation, since it contains no conception of a positive function of public discourse (personal communication).

Behind this programmatic statement lies an important premise; namely that public debate as a matter of fact has a purpose (or purposes)—i.e. it serves the common interest and the interests of society (e.g., by being important for the best possible functioning of democracy). This premise stands in opposition to the idea that public debate is merely to be seen as maneuvers by individual political actors to promote their own power and maximization of interests.⁵⁸

To sum up this section, Kock subscribes to a conception of rhetoric as a discipline and public discourse as a domain of empirical study in which functions play a central role. In other words, Christian Kock's writing places him squarely amongst those thinkers who subscribe to the Functional Goodness Intuition.

Kock rejects the designer approach to function ascription

It follows from the Functional Goodness Intuition that in order for Christian Kock's normative conception of rhetoric to get off the ground, we may assume that he employs some kind of approach—or several approaches—to function ascription. But in the above sections, we have still not seen any clear examples of just how Christian Kock would go about ascribing functions to rhetorical artifacts.

The first thing to note in search for an answer to Kock's approach to function ascription is that it departs from Wichelns' approach. In a paper on what Kock calls the 'cynicism syndrome',⁵⁹ he clearly distances himself from the view that the intentions of the designers of public messages are the most relevant aspect of an evaluation of public discourse (Kock, 2009, my translation):

And so we arrive at the final characteristic trait of the cynicism syndrome. Despite its cool view of politics as a cynical-selfish game, politics is not simply described in a cold and 'value-neutral' fashion. Instead, there is a definite "normative" superstructure attached. Since it is the politicians' primary motive to attain, protect or expand their own position of power, it is also natural to find on the part of the political commentators a normative position based on the politicians' skill to promote these selfish purposes. [...] A natural correlate of the cynical evaluation is

⁵⁸ Translated from Danish: "Bag denne programerklæring ligger en vigtig præmis: nemlig at offentlig debat faktisk har formål (et eller flere) – dvs. at den tjener fællesskabets og samfundets interesser (f.eks. ved at den er vigtig for demokratiets bedst mulige funktion). Denne præmis står i modsætning til den opfattelse at offentlig debat kun skal anskues som de enkelte politiske aktørers manøvrer til at fremme deres egen magt og interessemaksimering."

⁵⁹ The cynicism syndrome is a constellation of assumptions shared by political commentators, which, on the whole, amount to a cynical view of political discourse, according to Kock.

therefore, paradoxically, a lack of interest in evaluating communicative quality in any other way [...]

The above excerpt is in effect a rejection of the designer approach to function ascription adopted by those political commentators who base their criteria on the alleged “primary motive”, i.e. intention, of the politicians (which, according to cynical commentators is always to advance their own position of power) and their skill in promoting this kind of selfish purpose. According to Kock, basing an evaluation of public discourse on the intentions of the designers of public messages in this fashion is not appropriate.

This rejection of designer intentions as the basis for ascribing functions to rhetorical objects is supported in other places. For instance, in defining the proper normative orientation of rhetorical argumentation, Kock has distanced himself from other definitions of rhetorical argument that involve considerations of the intentions of the designer (Kock, 2013):

It is worthwhile focusing on this question because various misleading definitions of rhetorical argumentation have been in circulation for almost as long as rhetoric has existed. Some misleading definitions see the defining property of rhetorical argumentation in the arguer’s aim. And that aim, which is often assumed to override all the arguer’s other considerations, is strategic: the persuade his hearer(s) by any available means and, if possible, to “win” the argument.

Christian Kock expands on this idea in his paper “Choice is Not True or False” (Kock, 2009a):

Leading contemporary argumentation theories such as those of Ralph Johnson, van Eemeren and Houtlosser, and Tindale, in their attempt to address rhetoric, tend to define rhetorical argumentation with reference to (a) the rhetorical arguer’s goal (to persuade effectively), and (b) the means he employs to do so. However, a central strand in the rhetorical tradition itself, led by Aristotle, and arguably the dominant view, sees rhetorical argumentation as defined with reference to the domain of issues discussed. On that view, the domain of rhetorical argumentation is centered on choice of action in the civic sphere, and the distinctive nature of issues in this domain is considered crucial. Hence, argumentation theories such as those discussed, insofar as they do not see rhetoric as defined by its distinctive domain, apply an understanding of rhetoric that is historically inadequate. It is further suggested that theories adopting this understanding of rhetoric risk ignoring important distinctive features of argumentation about action.

What this passage highlights is that the function of rhetoric, according to Kock, is not the advancement of an arguer's goal of persuading effectively, but rather something akin to facilitating the choice of collective action in the public domain.

Based on these passages, it seems that Kock rejects the designer approach to function ascription. But what does he put in its place? My suggestion is that Kock employs an alternative which can be called the user approach to function ascription. What this amounts approach to will be the topic of the next section.

The user approach to function ascription

In a discussion of various types of function, the philosopher of science Peter Achinstein makes just the distinction I hold is at issue in the case of Christian Kock and his rejection of the appropriateness of the designer approach to function ascription. That is, Achinstein notes that although it may be common and reasonable to assume that the function of an object is related to the intentions of the designer, it can also be relevant to focus on the user of the object. According to Achinstein (1983, p. 275)

Although what function an object has been designed (or produced, etc.) to serve often coincides with the function it is used to serve, sometimes it does not. Something may have been designed or even placed where it is to serve as a means of doing y, although it is in fact never used, or although it is used only as a means of doing z. The function that trough may have been designed and placed where it is to serve is to water the pigs, even though it is never used or the only function it is used to serve is to water the flowers. Moreover, x may be used to serve a given function without this being so by design. The function a mosquito's wings are used to serve is to enable the mosquito to fly. We need not say the mosquito uses them by design or that they were designed or created by design.

Another point, relevant for our purposes is that functions derived from the use of an object can also contain a normative aspect according to Achinstein (1983, p. 275):

Use-function, like design-function, sentences can be prescriptive. Someone who claims that the function of a college education is to arouse intellectual curiosity and not just to get a job might mean that this is the function it ought to be used to serve, not that it is in fact used to serve this.

Achinstein's clear recognition of a use function is supplemented by other function thinkers. For instance, Peter McLaughlin proposes a conception of function which—though broader—includes the idea of use-function (2001, p. 47, my emphasis):

The function or purpose of an artifact is the end to which it is a means – whether successful or unsuccessful – for whoever made it, acquired it, *used it*, is expected to purchase it, or is supposed to be given it as a present. The same artifact in the same material circumstances can have different functions and different kinds of functions according to the various mental events that accompany behavior dealing with it.

In a similar vein, philosopher Karen Neander includes the notion of a user in her conception of function (1991, p. 462, my emphasis):

I suggest that the function of an artifact is the purpose or end for which it was designed, made, or (minimally) put in place or retained by an agent ... Since there will often be several agents involved, and each might have a different purpose, we might want to distinguish between ‘design functions’, ‘*user functions*’, ‘occasion functions’, and so on. The everyday notion of an artifact’s function is context sensitive, and in some contexts one intentional agent can take precedence over another [and] the particular context might highlight the intentions of the user, rather than the designer [...]⁶⁰

These passages spell out a clear alternative to the idea that the function of an object is determined by the intentions of the designer of that object. But how does Christian Kock argue for the function of rhetorical objects? Let us consider some relevant candidate formulations from Kock’s work.

Reconstruction of Kock’s approach to function ascription

In one paper, Christian Kock suggests that the function of an utterance with “what it does for, or to, its receiver.” (Kock, 2011, p. 42) This is clearly a different approach to function ascription than the designer approach. But there is a kind of equivocation going on here, for it is clearly possible for there to be a difference between what an utterance does “for” its receiver and what it does “to” its receiver. For instance, an utterance may convince its receiver that the Earth is flat. This kind of effect could be described as something the utterance does “to” its receiver, but it does not seem reasonable to describe it as something the utterance does “for” the receiver. For in doing something “for” the receiver, the utterance is implied to confer some good on the receiver, which is not implied in saying

⁶⁰ Although Neander clearly recognizes the relevance of use in her conception of function, she is in fact a proponent of a conception of function which includes the notion of selection as a central factor. At this point, though, the point is simply that *use* is taken to be a possible part of the notion of function and, consequently, of function ascription.

that an utterance does something “to” the receiver. Ascribing a function to an utterance on the basis of “what it does for or to its receiver”, although clearly oriented towards the “user” of the utterance, is still not entirely precise.

Further, the formulation seems to ascribe function too liberally. For clearly an utterance can be said to “do something for or to its receiver” on an almost indefinite range of levels, including seemingly (rhetorically) irrelevant sensory and psychological levels. For instance, if we were to accept the above formulation as Christian Kock’s preferred approach to function ascription, we would have to include such things as “vibrating the eardrum” and any number of other effects as a function of the utterance, and this seems odd. But at the same time, the formulation seems to restrict function ascription in an unfortunate sense. For, according to Kock’s formulation, the object in question—i.e. the utterance—is in fact required to have an actual effect in order for it to have a function. This would mean that many utterances which we would intuitively want to describe as “having a function” (for instance, an argument that fails to persuade or is not heard) would in fact have no function. The above formulation, then, is too ambiguous, too broad, and too narrow to be a successful approach to function ascription.

But there are other candidate formulations. Consider for instance this passage (Kock, 2011, pp. 47-48):

[W]hat do these utterances do when they are received? Do they do what they were intended to do? Is what they do what the sender intended them to do? Or what the receiver intended them to do? Do they perform – and this question is particularly relevant in relation to utterances in the public sphere – a function situated at a level above purely personal motives, for example by filling a given function in society or democracy?

The quotation actually contains three possible approaches to function ascription. The first is squarely centered on the intentions of the designer, the “sender”, which is a position we rejected earlier. The second focuses on the intentions of the receiver. And the third focuses on “a level above purely personal motives” and considers instead the utterance from the perspective of society or democracy.

The idea that the function of rhetoric in the sense of political discourse is somehow connected to a society or democratic perspective is also found in the following quotation (Kock, 2008, p. 59, my translation):

Theories of democracy which imply that deliberative debate has a function and a value for society as such, must as a consequence also concern themselves with the issue of what in principle makes a deliberative debate good. All things which have an important function may be thought to perform this function better or worse. But when does it do the former and when the latter?

And we find the societal or democratic perspective again in the following quotation, where Kock speaks about the rhetorical perspective (as he sees it) on the role of communication in society (Kock, 2017, p. 348):

[...] a rhetorician looks at public communication and the media with a functionalist eye [and] recognizes that we need public communication for society to exist at all, and [...] asks not only: “How well does public communication perform the social functions it is meant to perform?” but also: “How could it perform them better?”

We thus now start to get a sense that the function of rhetoric—at least in its significance as political discourse—has to do with a social aspect. But what, more specifically, does such a function consist of? One answer to this question is related to the task of citizens in democracies (Kock, 2008, p. 59, my translation):

My general answer to the question of the function of public debate is that it must serve to give decision-makers and voters/citizens a better foundation for making a choice about important issues [...]

And this function is the basis of the evaluative criteria (so-called ‘rules for public debate’) preferred by Kock (2008, pp. 63-64, my translation):

At the beginning of the article I argued that such rules are necessary, at least if one believes in deliberative democracy and if one believes that public debate has a function for society [...] Much of what politicians and other public debaters do causes confusion and obfuscation of those topics we are to decide upon and undermine the conditions for a common dialogue [...] The rules have been formulated on the basic premise that whatever is said by the debaters has to be useful for the voters. It must serve to throw light on the topic and not darkness, and thus help the voters make more qualified decisions.

In the above quotations, there is, I suggest, a particular movement—a narrowing—of the conception of function that Kock employs. For the purposes of criticism of public debate, or political discourse, he rejects the designer approach to function ascription. Instead, he shifts the perspective to that of the audience or the receiver of the utterance to be evaluated. This is akin to the perspectival shift taken by those function theorists (such as

Achinstein) who explain that the user rather than the designer sometimes takes priority as the relevant agentive genesis of certain functions. But crucially, Kock talks of user *needs* and not actual, empirical use. How does Christian Kock determine what the user or receiver needs? I suggest that he does this in an idealizing move, which parallels that of Wichelns. Kock constrains the relevant user needs by placing or embedding the user of rhetorical artifacts in a system (a society or a democracy) in which users of rhetorical objects are charged with a task, an *ergon*, which is defined by the role in the system as voters or citizens. The needs of the citizens are thus constrained. This move has normative implications as I will argue in the next section.

Discussion of Zarefsky's criticism

As we have seen, Christian Kock clearly subscribes to a functional view of rhetorical objects, and the way in which he ascribes functions to rhetorical objects can be described as a version of the user approach to function ascription. I call it 'a version' of the user approach to function ascription, because Kock introduces the notion of user need in order to idealize the users of the rhetorical objects and thus constrain the relevant use of the objects by relating them to a system (democracy) in which the users (citizens) play a certain role. This is analogous to the move by Wichelns who also idealizes the speaker or orator by conceiving of him as a "public man" whose intentions are fixed by the task he is to perform in a democracy.

In a commentary, David Zarefsky criticizes Kock's norms for public discussion derived from his idealized user approach to function ascription as he notes that there "is a problem in using Kock's criteria to evaluate actually existing political debate [...]" (Zarefsky, 2013):

Kock rightly begins by saying, "we should assess the virtues of political argumentation from the point of view of citizens," but he posits that what citizens need is a "basis for making choices." That is some of what some citizens need. But we know, for example, that most viewers of political debates already have decided for whom they will vote, at least provisionally. What they need from the argumentation is reinforcement of their beliefs, or motivation to act on them by turning out to vote, or rehearsals of refutation that they might use in response to friends or co-workers who disagree with them. And for those who are using political argumentation as a basis for making choices, some will make a choice on the balance of considerations of all the major issues of the campaign, some on the basis of a single issue or a small group of key issues, and some on the basis of the ethos or likeability of the candidates. Some will decide on the basis of what is congruent with their self-

interest and some may decide on the basis of a transcendent appeal that may even run counter to their own self-interest (Frank, 2004). It is, in short, a mistake to assume that the audience for political argumentation is composed entirely of *tabulae rasa* who are prepared to make their choices on the basis of criteria such as Kock proposes. Some are, but to posit that as the model case for political argumentation is as limiting as it is to posit the analytic deductive syllogism as the model for argumentation in general

The most pertinent point of Zarefsky's criticism is this: Zarefsky disagrees with Kock on what citizens need from political rhetoric. This means, in effect, that Zarefsky disagrees with Kock's approach to function ascription. But what does Zarefsky offer as an alternative? Zarefsky lists a number of conceivable uses to which public discourse may actually be put as a matter of empirical fact, and there can be no quarrel with the idea that some citizens actually use political arguments for the purposes that Zarefsky lists. But the problem with this criticism is that political discourse may as matter of fact be used for any number of more or less random purposes. It may be used as entertainment or any range of other conceivable purposes, but this does not mean that political discourse therefore suddenly has a range of functions that we should evaluate it against. Precisely this criticism is contained in one of Kock's discussions of the so-called uses-and-gratifications theory (Kock, 2008):

A trend in media studies that rhetoric has much in common with is uses-and-gratifications theory. Rhetoric shares with it the notion that utterances are used for different, specific purposes. However, uses-and-gratifications theory assumes, optimistically and individualistically, that each user selects and uses media content for his or her individual purposes. Rhetoric takes the social angle: how can we have communication that will perform these social functions for us? As a result, rhetoricians look closely at specific properties of media content, often with a view to how it could be different, whereas uses-and-gratifications theory, in a much broader approach, describes what each medium, considered as such, is used for.

In order to avoid the problem of frivolous function ascription where the function of an object is made dependent on the actual use of the object, there must be a mechanism of idealization or constraint of the relevant uses. Precisely such a mechanism is absent in Zarefsky's notion of "user need" whereas it is present in Kock's notion of "user need" as argued above. In other words, even though Zarefsky talks about "need", it seems to me that he comes close to equating need with actual use and bases his function ascription of political discourse on the actual uses to which people put political discourse—thereby in effect eroding a normative foundation.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued through a rational reconstruction of Christian Kock's evaluative thinking that the designer approach to function ascription should be supplemented with a user approach to function ascription in which the needs of an idealized user of rhetorical artifacts is the main factor in ascribing a function to these objects. This is consistent with the view of function theorist Marcel Scheele who writes (Scheele, 2006, p. 34):

As it stands, the designer is privileged with respect to the function ascription of the artefact [...] The designer need not be privileged in this way: if my arguments are correct, there are cases in which the designers' intentions regarding the function ascription are not the only relevant considerations. The current users overrule these intentions and use the object in an alternative way, which is just as 'proper' as the use intended by the designer.

The chapter also revealed that when focusing on candidate formulations for function ascription in Christian Kock's work, we find a number of them not always pointing in the same direction. For instance, sometimes Kock acknowledges that rhetoric should focus on the intentions of the designer, while in other places he dismisses this focus as irrelevant.

Ultimately, though, this discrepancy can be resolved if we consider that Kock's conception of rhetoric is not exclusively critical. He also thinks about rhetoric, consistently with its ancient roots, as an art related to production of utterances. It seems reasonable to assume that in thinking about how to produce or design rhetoric, Kock acknowledges the relevance of the designer's intentions, but in the more critical aspect, he prefers to focus instead on the needs of the user of a rhetorical artifact conceived as a citizen in a democracy and that rhetorical objects in this particular context get their functions thus.

CHAPTER 8

Function from etiology: J. Jeffery Auer

In this chapter I reconstruct the evaluative reasoning in J. Jeffery Auer's famous essay on "The Counterfeit Debates" (1962). The point of the reconstruction is to show how a rhetorical critic can derive evaluative criteria for a rhetorical artifact by ascribing a function to the artifact without appealing to the intentions of a designer (the approach taken by Herbert Wichelns) or the needs of a type of user (the approach taken by Christian Kock), but instead by appealing to the historical evolution of the artifact. This is an example of the so-called etiological approach to function ascription.

The basics of Auer's position

Before going into the specifics of Auer's approach to function ascription, let us briefly introduce his general project. In 1962, communication scholar Sidney Kraus (1962) edited and published a comprehensive anthology containing more than 30 essays devoted to studying the first televised presidential debates between candidates John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon from 1960. Among these essays was J. Jeffrey Auer's contribution "The Counterfeit Debates" (1962). In his paper, Auer aims at "judging" (*ibid.*, p. 142) the Kennedy-Nixon debates, and for our present purposes Auer's explicit emphasis on evaluation makes his paper a good case for increasing our understanding of the evaluative dimension in rhetorical criticism.

Even to this day, Auer's essay on the Kennedy-Nixon debates is a widely cited example of criticism of presidential debate.⁶¹ It is a rather short essay, consisting of eight short pages, and it does not engage in close textual analysis of any kind. But the essay may still provide us with interesting insights—maybe not primarily about the Kennedy-Nixon debates, but about evaluation more generally. For, as noted above, Auer frankly sets out to judge the debate and so he openly proceeds, as Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles (2015, p. 116) note with slight consternation, “[p]rogrammatically, indeed normatively.”

So what does Auer make of the presidential debates? His evaluative conclusion is clearly negative. Although he admits that some ameliorating aspects can be found in the debates, his overall judgment is perhaps best captured by his point that “it is unhappily necessary to conclude that ‘the Great Debates’ were not debates in the American tradition, and the rhetorical critic sighs for what they might have been.” (Auer, 1962, p. 148).

Auer bases his negative verdict on a list of five evaluative criteria that debates must meet if they are to be evaluated positively. The first criterion is ‘confrontation’ (ibid., p. 147). In order for this criterion to be met, the candidates must engage each other rather than primarily a journalist, moderator, panel or the TV cameras. The second criterion is ‘equal and adequate time’. Auer concedes that Kennedy and Nixon had equal time, but he maintains that they did not have adequate time, because the important questions could not be meaningfully answered in the allotted time of three minutes. And proceeding as if they could, says Auer, contributed to creating “the illusion that public questions of great moment could be dealt with in 180 seconds. This is a dangerous fiction in a time when the future of the free world may depend upon the decision of the American president.” (ibid., p. 147) The third criterion is ‘matched contestants’, and according to Auer, this criterion was in principle fulfilled as “the candidates were closely enough matched for a real debate, had they been willing to hold one.” The fourth criterion is that the topic of debate must be ‘a stated proposition’. This criterion was not fulfilled, says Auer, since instead of debate “on a single and significant issue, the listeners were exposed to a catechism as far-ranging as Allen Ludden’s questions on the GE College Bowl.”⁶² The fifth and final criterion is to gain a decision. And judged by this criterion, states Auer, “the

⁶¹ For two recent examples of publications discussing Auer's text, see Jamieson (2015) and, for commentary, Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles (2015).

⁶² “College Bowl” was a student quiz show hosted by Allen Ludden airing on American radio stations from 1953, and moving to television from 1959.

‘debates’ were least adequate.” The debates did not “contribute to the enlightenment of listeners, or provide them a rationale for thoughtful decisions on the issues,” partly because the broadcast format “emphasized personality rather than issues.”

So, to sum up, on four out of five criteria, the debates were judged to be inadequate. But the relevant question in the context of the current project, however, is not so much whether the debates fulfilled the posited criteria. More importantly, we want to understand where Auer’s criteria come from and how they are justified. My suggestion, as stated above, is that we may understand Auer to be employing an *etiological approach to function ascription*.

The etiological approach to function ascription

The etiological theory of function and its approach to function ascription is perhaps the most widely endorsed current theory in the literature on functions. A wide range of thinkers subscribe to versions of the etiological theory of function, but it is most frequently associated with philosophers Larry Wright (1973), Ruth Millikan (1984, 1989, 1999), Karen Neander (1991a, 1991b), and to some extent Beth Preston (1998, 2009, 2013).⁶³

The word etiology is derived from the Greek *aitiologia* (αἰτιολογία) meaning “giving a reason for”⁶⁴ and denotes a focus on causation or origination. Translated to the context of function, the etiological theory looks to the historical origin of the item in question and uses this origin to infer the item’s function. Consider for example our intuition that items such as hearts have a function. How can this be explained if these items have no designer and they are not “used” in any conscious way? (Of course, a religious appeal could be made such that we could say that the function of a heart is what its designer, i.e. God, intended it to be, but for now we may disregard this option.) The etiological theory of function attempts to explain our intuitions about items such as hearts by appealing to the origins of those items—more specifically, their evolutionary history.

Philosopher Ruth Millikan, one of the leading proponents of the etiological theory of function, proposes the following formulation to explain what it means to have a function (1993, p. 41):

⁶³ Preston aims to build a pluralistic theory of function, but it clearly incorporates elements of the etiological theory.

⁶⁴ *Aetiology*. *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press. 2002.

Items have functions when their being there depends on reproduction from ancestors having similar traits, these traits having been causally efficacious in helping to produce these items, and these traits have been selected at some point in this history for their capacity to make this kind of contribution.

Clearly, on the above formulation, hearts have a function. After all, hearts play a major role in the production of new hearts, and it is surely reasonable to say that the capacity of hearts to do so has been selected for at some point in their evolutionary history. But the above formulation still gives us no indications as to what the function of a heart might be. This problem is solved with the following formulation from Karen Neander. According to her, “the central element of the etiological approach should be seen as the simple idea that a function of a trait is the effect for which that trait was selected” (Neander, 1991b, p. 459) And she goes on to make the formulation more exact (Neander, 1991, p. 174):

It is the/a proper function of an item (X) of an organism (O) to do that which items of X 's type did to contribute to the inclusive fitness of O 's ancestors, and which caused the genotype, of which X is the phenotypic expression, to be selected by natural selection.

This formulation gives us clearer picture of how to discern the function of a heart (presumably to circulate blood). For the given heart (X) in my body (O) circulates blood just like my ancestors' hearts did, and this effect (circulating blood) caused hearts to be selected by natural selection due to its contribution to the fitness of my ancestors. Notice how the above formulate rules out a whole range of effects that hearts might have. For instance, hearts make a thumping sound, but we do not want to say that this is their function. And since the thumping sound is not an effect for which hearts are selected (as far as we know), the above formula is capable of distinguishing between proper functions (the capacity or effect that an item *ought* to have) and accidental functions (fortuitous capacities or effects of an item).

The distinction between proper functions and accidental functions is exemplified by Beth Preston (1998, p. 222):

Hearts, for example, have proliferated not because they make noise, but because they circulate blood. Thus, even a heart that comes into the world so badly deformed that it is never capable of circulating a single drop still has circulating blood as its proper function. It is still relevantly similar to its ancestors which did circulate blood, and whose circulation of blood in the past accounts for the production of the

deformed heart (though not for its deformation) in the present. Similarly, vegetable peelers have proliferated—this time in virtue of deliberate selection on the part of manufacturers and consumers—because they remove peels from fruits and vegetables. So even if a manufacturing defect makes it impossible for one of them to peel anything at all, peeling is still its proper function.

Summing up the discussion so far, we may quote philosopher Peter McLaughlin on the general structure of etiological function theories (2001, p. 83):

Thus, in order to have a function, an item must instantiate a type whose tokens are – or at least once were – in general disposed to have certain effects. It must also have the right kind of history, in which the effects of tokens of the function bearer’s type have led to that type’s being instantiated in later generations or at later times. In some recent literature, a trait with the proper (evolutionary) history is then said to have a “proper function.”

As I mentioned earlier, the etiological theory of function are among the most widely endorsed current theories in the literature on functions. It is a theory subject to many competing conceptions among its proponents, but they share a central commitment to ascribing functions to objects in virtue of those effects of the item that have led to that type’s “being instantiated in later generations or at later times”, as McLaughlin puts it above. And as I will argue below, it is the basic idea that lies at core of Auer’s evaluative reasoning.

Reconstruction of Auer’s approach to function ascription

As seen earlier, Auer explicitly posits a set of five evaluative criteria. We may assume that Auer takes these criteria to be appropriate for evaluating the rhetorical artifact in question (the debate between Kennedy and Nixon), but he is not very explicit about where these criteria come from or how their appropriateness is established. The task of this section is to reconstruct Auer’s evaluative reasoning to get a clearer picture of these issues.

The first possibility to consider is that Auer simply relies on custom or convention in order to establish his criteria. After all, in positing his five criteria, Auer explains that these are the criteria “commonly agreed upon by writers on debate” (Auer, 1962, p. 146) and, further, that these are the “accepted criteria of debate as we have known it in the American tradition.” (ibid., p. 147). What these formulations suggest upon first estimation is that Auer follows the unsatisfactory model proposed by Thonssen and Baird (1947, p. 136), who proclaim that the critic in deciding upon evaluative criteria may “erect

standards of worth based upon the united wisdom of his colleagues.” But while this may in fact be how Auer has proceeded, we may be able to more charitably reconstruct the argument of his short essay.

In doing so, the first thing to note about Auer’s essay is that he squarely places the practice of debate in the larger context of democracy: “In short”, he says, “debate has historically been regarded as an essential tool of a democratic society. (Auer, 1962, p. 142). And Auer goes on to substantiate this claim at length by showing three different dimensions in which debate has contributed to democracy: as an educational method, as a legislative procedure, and as a judicial procedure.

In his review of debate as an educational method (*ibid.*, pp. 142-143), Auer showcases a number of different historical highlights all pointing to the idea that the practice of debate has been used extensively in this domain. Beginning in ancient Greece, Auer points out that “one Protagoras of Abdera” had his pupils argue both sides of questions similar to those facing the elders. And apart from pointing to Protagoras, Auer also notes that debate featured in the educational system of the schools of the Middle Ages at Oxford and Cambridge, at American colleges in the nineteenth century and in the “extensive programs of debate” of the modern-day educational system. Auer concludes his review of the educational use of debate with a quotation from the then current president John F. Kennedy, who observes that debate is “a most valuable training whether for politics, the law, business, or for service on community committees such as the PTA and the League of Women Voters [...] The give and take of debating, the testing of ideas, is essential to democracy.”

The perspective taken by Auer in reviewing the history of debate as an educational method spans generations. And the same broad approach is adopted in his consideration of debate as a legislative process (*ibid.*, p. 143). Here, Auer points to the American Congress and the British Parliament. In both places, debate occurs when final decisions about the policy of the nation are made based on elected representatives having a “real voice in the affairs of the government.” The generational perspective is highlighted when Auer notes that the debates of the American Congress have been part of the institution since “the first colonial legislatures, and the history of the American Congress could well be written in a sequence of chapters focusing upon significant debates over the bank question, the slavery issue, imperialism, the tariff, the League of Nations, the neutrality

controversy before World War II, and involving such stalwarts as Benton, Beveridge, Calhoun, Clay, Corwin, LaFollette, Lodge, Taft, Vandenburg, and Webster.”

The generational perspective also features prominently in Auer’s description of the importance of debate as a judicial procedure (ibid., p. 144). Over time, Auer states, debate has been used in courts “where each party is represented by a lawyer, debating the same issues before the same judge and for the decision of one jury.” The perspective is enforced when Auer explains that “[e]ach generation in the history of jurisprudence has its roster of distinguished legal debaters, from Cicero to Grotius, and down to Morris Ernst and Thurgood Marshall.” (ibid., p. 144, my emphasis).

And Auer’s focus on tradition continues in his discussion of debating societies (ibid., pp. 144-145): “[P]erhaps the most significant elements of the debate tradition in America have been the forensic clashes in debating societies and in public debates on political, social, and religious questions.” For Auer, the participation in this tradition of a range of historically important figures of distinction such as Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Henry Clay, Tom Corwin, and Alexander Campbell is a sign of the importance of this practice in democracy. “In short,” Auer notes, “whether the critical questions of the day concerned slavery, the gold standard, socialism, public power, or evolution, public debate was in order [...]”.

Auer’s emphasis on tradition whether in education, legislative, juridical or amongst debating societies is reaffirmed even in Auer’s discussion of debate in a media society (pp. 145-146). “It was inevitable,” writes Auer here, “that the electronic age should strengthen and perpetuate the debate tradition via the broadcast media.” Notice here how the emphasis is not on change or adaption to a new media ecology, but rather on continuity. The introduction of broadcast media into democratic society does not modify this tradition in any relevant way, but instead strengthens and perpetuates it. Auer cites three examples of popular radio shows solidly built on the foundations of the debate tradition. The first is “American Forum of the Air”, which Auer uses to exemplify the aforementioned strengthening and perpetuation of the tradition. The second is “America’s Town Meeting of the Air”, which according to Auer was “fashioned [...] from the same tradition.” And the third is “Face the Nation”, which Auer notes “continued the tradition.” And besides the regularly scheduled radio shows, Auer also mentions singular debates on national issues, which have all “generally adhered to the debate tradition.”

The central and most obvious feature of Auer's rather lengthy review of various instances of debate in democracy is its relentless focus on history and tradition as seen over generations. And this exact focus is also emphasized by Auer when he posits his set of favored evaluative criteria (*ibid.*, p. 146, my emphasis):

[L]et us isolate the specific elements of debate as it has *developed in the American tradition*. There are five, commonly agreed upon by writers on debate. A debate is (1) a confrontation, (2) in equal and adequate time, (3) of matched contestants, (4) on a stated proposition, (5) to gain an audience decision. Each of these elements is essential if we are to have true debate. *Insistence upon their recognition is more than mere pedantry, for each one has contributed to the vitality of the debate tradition.*

This passage, I suggest, contains the crucial clue to understanding Auer's approach to function ascription. As we have seen above, Auer's main concern throughout his essay is to show how the debate tradition as contributed in various ways to the development of democratic society. And one rationale behind his rather detailed exposition of the tradition becomes apparent when considered from the perspective of the etiological theory of function. According to this theory, the function of a trait is intimately connected to the effect it has on its surrounding organism. If a trait has contributed causally to the fitness of its surrounding organism as considered against the selection pressures exhibited by the environment of this organism, then we may conclude that the effect accounting for this contribution is the function of the trait. I propose that Auer's reasoning is equivalent. His five criteria are traits of debate making its continued survival possible, like the four valves separating the chambers of a heart. In a line of reasoning analogous to this—even employing biological language—Auer proclaims that each of his five criteria, i.e. each of the five traits, has “contributed to the vitality of the debate tradition.”

Conclusion

In one sense, Auer's description of the function of debate is very similar to Christian Kock's, but I have argued that their approach to function ascription differs. Whereas Kock derives the function of public debate from the perspective of user needs, Auer carefully weaves together a story of the way in which debate has played a central role, generation after generation, for democracy. The five criteria posited by Auer are traits of debate that have secured the survival through generations of debate as a social institution.

The main claim of this chapter, then, is that the Auer's evaluative reasoning may be reconstructed as an instance of the etiological approach to function ascription. The etiological approach to function ascription is most typically associated with the biological domain, and Auer's language exhibits signs of being inspired by this domain. By continually stressing how debate has reproduced itself generation after generation for 2400 years, and by noting how the criteria are essential because they are traits that secure the vitality of democracy in generation after generation, Auer's approach to function ascription may be said to be etiological. For Auer, debate is to democracy what hearts or lungs are to a living body. Without debate and the concomitant effects that have made it possible for democracy to reproduce through the times, the survival of democracy would be at risk.

CHAPTER 9

Function from optimality considerations: Steven Patterson

The rational reconstructions of various approaches to function ascription have until this point concerned rhetorical critics. But the notion of function also plays an important role in the evaluative dimension of the neighboring field of argumentation theory, and reconstructing a case from this field may relevantly extend our understanding of the diversity of function ascriptions.

Argumentation theorists in general are not shy about making function claims. As pointed out earlier, informal logician Ralph Johnson (2000, p. 149) explains that he sees the “preeminent” function of argumentation as “persuading someone (I call this person the Other) of the truth of something (I call this the Thesis) by reasoning, by producing a set of reasons whose function is to lead that person rationally to accept the claim in question.” In the influential pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation, a different function is intimated: “Argumentation is basically aimed at resolving a difference of opinion [...]” (van Eemeren, 2010, p. 2). And much of the work of the prolific Canadian argumentation theorist Douglas Walton builds upon a pluralistic approach in which the function of argumentation varies, at least to a degree, with the different kinds of dialogue in which argumentation is embedded (see e.g. Walton, 1998). More examples could be adduced, but the above will suffice to remind ourselves that functions feature prominently in argumentation theory.

The prominence of (unsupported) function claims in argumentation theory has been critically addressed by Jean Goodwin in her article “Argument has no function” (2007). Here, Goodwin problematizes a range of ideas connected to the use of function

for normative theorizing, including the strategy of making use of an assumed, but unsupported, function of argumentation as a starting point for deriving evaluative criteria. In my opinion, Goodwin's criticisms have still not been discussed adequately in the field of argumentation theory, but philosopher Steven W. Patterson (2011) has made a genuine attempt to address at least some of the critical points from Goodwin's article. In contrast to Goodwin, Patterson explicitly endorses the view that argumentation does have a function, and in order to substantiate his claim, he proposes a way for us to understand what that function is and how argumentation gets this function.

The basics of Patterson's position

Before considering Patterson's proposal, it will be instructive to briefly note what Patterson claims is the function of argumentation. His term for this function is "rational doxastic coordination" (Patterson, 2011, p. 15). Rational doxastic coordination is, Patterson explains, a species of a broader genus of communication which he calls "doxastic coordination". Doxastic coordination, in brief, is "the bringing into equilibrium or harmony of the opinions or beliefs of multiple persons, without respect to the means employed." (ibid.) Doxastic coordination thus understood is important for humans, according to Patterson, because when "people are closer in their opinions, or at least feel that they are, it is easier for them to sustain cooperative attitudes toward one another in a wide variety of settings" (ibid.) ranging from hunting and gathering, building shelters, conducting warfare and, we may presume, any other activity for which cooperation and coordination is needed. Now, there are many ways to produce doxastic coordination, e.g. by telling stories to each other, by making contracts, by the use of threats and promises and so on. But the particular coordination produced by argumentation (when it fulfils its function) is *rational* doxastic coordination, and for Patterson this is the function of argumentation. The question we are trying to answer here, of course, is how he substantiates this claim. And the answer I will propose is this: Patterson primarily employs what I call the optimality approach to function ascription—although, as we will see, Patterson in fact also appeals to etiology, so ultimately his approach must be characterized as somewhat of a hybrid.

The optimality approach to function ascription

The optimality approach to function ascription builds fundamentally on considerations of how well a given object would be capable of performing some task. Perhaps the most widely known contemporary proponent of this approach to function ascription is philosopher Daniel Dennett, whose writings on subjects such as mind, consciousness and evolution have been extensively discussed amongst philosophers. Dennett's position on the concept of function, however, is difficult to pin down with accurate precision, but a sustained book-length attempt has been made by Dutch philosopher Melissa van Amerongen (2008), and I will draw on her work here.

According to Amerongen, a fundamental aspect of Dennett's concept of function is that it is non-intentional in the sense that it regards appeals to the intentions of artificial users or designers in order to derive functions as "hopeless and spurious" (2008, p. 13) Instead, Dennett's approach is based on considerations of optimality, which Amerongen illustrates in the following way (*ibid.*):

The distinction between intentionalism and optimality can be illustrated rather simply by means of an example. Consider a knife. What does make this steel object with a sharp edge a knife, instead of just a steel object with a sharp edge? Is it a knife because it was created with that purpose in mind (intentionalism)? Or, rather, is it a knife because it just cuts very well (optimality)? Dennett chooses the second answer: the function of a thing, be it biological or technical, is always what it is best able to do.

Amerongen warns that her interpretation of Dennett's approach to function ascription is just that—an interpretation—for as she explains, Dennett's position on the issue is "a moving target" (*ibid.*, p. 92). But her interpretation builds on specific passages of Dennett's work, which together seem to point to the conclusion that the function of a thing is what it is best able to do.

To see this, consider first how Dennett dismisses the idea that the intentions of a designer ("inventor") may be used to derive the function of an object (Dennett, 1990, p. 186):

[T]he inventor is not the final arbiter of what an artifact is, or is for; the users decide that. The inventor is just another user, only circumstantially and defeasibly privileged in his knowledge of the functions and uses of his device. If others can find better uses for it, his intentions, clearheaded or muddled, are of mere historical interest.

At first glance, this passage seems to place Dennett squarely among those who would subscribe to the user approach to function ascription. But according to Amerongen, this would be a hasty conclusion. For Dennett goes on to state that neither the intentions of designers nor those of users suffice to ascribe functions to artifacts: “[W]hat something is really for now [i.e. its function] is no more authoritatively fixed by the current user’s ‘intentions’ than by any other intentions” (Dennett, 1990, p. 194).

Dennett’s rejection of intentions as the basis of function ascription is premised on his view that our sense that intentions play a role in the interpretation of artifacts is merely the output of our function ascription, not an input to it. In other words, it is only after we see knife with a function that we infer that someone must have designed it. To bolster this point, Dennett quotes Wimsatt and Beardsley (1946), the authors of the seminal paper on “The Intentional Fallacy” (Dennett, 1990, p. 177):

Judging a poem is like judging a pudding or a machine. One demands that it works. It is only because an artifact works that we infer the intention of an artificer.

Dennett’s rejection of intentions as the basis for function ascription and his alternative solution become clearer in his discussions of various archeological findings. In the case of archeological findings, present day humans do not have access to the intentions of designers or users. Given the fact that this does not stop us from making function ascriptions, Dennett maintains that in general referring to intentions of designers and users in order to ascribe functions is illegitimate.

One example of such a finding is the ancient Greek “Antikythera mechanism” discovered in 1902 in a shipwreck off the coast of the Greek island Antikythera. As Dennett explains (1990, pp. 183-184), this object consists of many interlocking complex bronze gears, and the object’s function is not immediately obvious seen from our current perspective. What could it be for? The current consensus among archeologists is that the mechanism must have been an orrery or planetarium, i.e. it must have had the function of calculating the motion of the planets. Crucially, the reason for ascribing this function to the object is that it has the capacity to do so accurately—this is what the object would be optimal for. As Dennett states, “[t]he important feature in these arguments is the reliance on optimality considerations; it counts against the hypothesis that something is a cherry-pitter, for instance, if it would have been a demonstrably inferior cherry-pitter.”

According to Amerongen, the case of the Antikythera mechanism is indicative of Dennett's approach to function ascription. Although she laments that "[u]nfortunately, Dennett is not very clear about it," she also finds that in order to ascribe a function to an artifact, Dennett would advise us to look "for some 'best' or 'optimal' role the artifact could have." (2008, p. 108). And this leads her to the conclusion that Dennett subscribes to a "thesis of optimality" according to which "the function of an item is—or should be understood as—what it is best able to do (or be), given its physical constitution and its context, and not what the designer(s) or user(s) intend it to do (or be)." (Amerongen, 2008, p. 90).

Plato's functionalism

In contrast with the etiological approach to function ascription, the optimality approach does not seem nearly as popular in the current literature on functions. However, the intuition behind the optimality approach in fact has ancient roots (although neither Dennett nor Amerongen make this connection), and of the four approaches to function ascription discussed in this dissertation, it is safe to say that the optimality approach has the most illustrious progenitor—namely Plato.

As we saw in Chapter 4, Plato is among the long line of thinkers who subscribe to the Functional Goodness Intuition. But Plato not only relies on the notion of function to derive evaluative criteria intuitively; he also devises an approach to function ascription that relies on optimality considerations.

As noted by the authoritative interpreter of Plato's works, Gerasimos Santas (1985; 2010, pp. 63-67), Plato's *Republic* contains two theories of good. One of these Santas calls the 'metaphysical theory of the Form of the Good' (this is the theory Plato illustrated with his Cave simile), and the other theory of good is the 'Functional Theory of Good'. We find the crux of Plato's exposition of this latter theory towards the end of the first book of the *Republic* (352e–354c), where Plato has Socrates explain to Thrasymachus how things get their function (*ergon*):

"Tell me then—would you say that a horse has a specific work or function?" "I would." "Would you be willing to define the work of a horse or of anything else to be that which one can do only with it or best with it?" "I don't understand," he replied." "Well, take it this way: is there anything else with which you can see except the eyes?" "Certainly not." "Again, could you hear with anything but ears?" "By no means." "Would you not rightly say that these are the functions of these

(organs)?” “By all means.” “Once more, you could use a dirk to trim vine branches and a knife and many other instruments.” “Certainly.” “But nothing so well, I take it, as a pruning-knife fashioned for this purpose.” “This is true.” “Must we not then assume this to be the work or function of that?” “We must.”

And this piece of dialogue let’s Socrates conclude: “You will now, then, I fancy, better apprehend the meaning of my question when I asked whether that is not the work (function, *ergon*) of a thing which it only or it better than anything else can perform.”⁶⁵

For Plato, as for Dennett, ascribing a function to an artifact involves consideration what one can do ‘best’ with that artifact, either in the sense that no other artifact or item could perform the task so well, or in the sense that the artifact or item could not perform any other task better. On this view, function ascription involves optimality considerations. I now turn to explicating, i.e. reconstructing, how Patterson uses this optimality approach to ascribe a function to argumentation.

Reconstruction of Patterson’s approach to function ascription

Perhaps in contrast with the majority of argumentation theorists who rely on the notion of function for their normative theorizing, Patterson acknowledges that functions do not simply present themselves unproblematically to our understanding. But this does not deter him from seeing potential value in the notion of function (Patterson, 2011, p. 7):

It is difficult to discern a primary or central function for argumentation, but from this fact we should not draw the conclusion that the attempt to do so is in vain, or misguided.

This stance immediately makes Patterson’s article interesting from the point of view of this dissertation: Since Patterson wants to defend the claim that argumentation has a function, and since he does not rely on his readers being able to simply intuit this function, he must make an attempt to show—through reasoning—in what sense argumentation can be said to have a function, and what this function might be.

Patterson still relies on intuitions to make his case, though. Specifically, Patterson appeals to our intuitions about “straight-forwardly” functional objects to make the case that argumentation does have a function. The background of the following quotation is Patterson’s rebuttal of the idea intimated by Goodwin that if argumentation is routinely

⁶⁵ I rely here on the translation from Shorey: (Plato, 1937).

deployed for many different purposes (i.e. with many different intentions), it must as a consequence be impossible to ascribe to it a single proper function (Patterson, 2011, p. 6):

Consider, by analogy, happening upon someone in the midst of working on his car, using a crescent wrench to beat into place a recalcitrant piece of sheet metal that has become bent out of place in the course of his work on the engine. This man uses the wrench as a hammer, but we would not say upon seeing this that wrenches have no function. The fact that one can use a heavy crescent wrench in the same fashion as a hammer in a pinch does not diminish the case for thinking that the function of a crescent wrench is the tightening of loose fasteners of a particular type. If we did draw the conclusion that the wrench had no function as such because it could be used as a hammer in a pinch, we would be mistakenly identifying the practical effect of the particular instrument in that instance with the proper function of that type of instrument. That the instrument has such a proper function is clear. There is something that it does, that it is designed to do, and that other instruments do not do as well as it does. That the instrument can be used in another way does not in any way diminish the case for thinking of it as being primarily designed to do a particular job.

From our perspective, it is interesting to note that Patterson seems on first glance to be using two different approaches to function ascription in the above quotation. One approach relies on the notion of a designer, and this is a type of function ascription that we have encountered in the case of Wicelns. The second approach, however, is clearly the optimality approach, as illustrated through Dennett and Plato, according to which the function of an object is determined by considering what it is optimal for.

From the above quotation we may also infer that Patterson rejects the legitimacy of the user approach to function ascription treated earlier according to which the intentions—or needs—of a user will ground the ascription of function. Again, in order to defend this rejection, he appeals to presumably shared intuitions from the case of the mechanic (Patterson, 2011, p. 7):

To return to the example of the mechanic, our mechanic's motivations for using the wrench could be highly variable. He may have chosen the wrench because it was heavier, or longer or sturdier, than anything else he had ready to hand for the job of beating back into place the inconveniently bent piece of body work. He might have chosen it because he thought it to be lucky, or because he thought his hammer to be unlucky, or simply because he was too lazy to go back into his garage to get the proper tool for the job. Here again, however, notice that the possible motives our man may have for using the wrench in the way that he does say nothing about what the purpose or function of wrenches is. Similarly, the effects of his using the wrench

as a hammer should not deter us from speaking of the function of wrenches—even if he is successful in his “aberrant” usage of the tool, or if his usage is systematic in some way (e.g., if he always does this, or if it's quite a common thing to do).

In other words, what the wrench is being used for—even what the mechanic might in a sense need the wrench for—is for Patterson not a consideration that should play a role in determining the function of wrenches. So for Patterson, it will not do to appeal to the needs or intentions of a user to ground a function ascription.

In another place (p. 10), Patterson phrases his approach to function ascription in the following way: “Argumentation has a telos that it serves better than alternative modes of linguistic social interaction. This telos is its function.” What we see from this quotation is a clear example of optimality considerations. According to this line of reasoning, whatever argumentation does better, i.e. more optimally, than other modes of linguistic social interaction (communication) is its function.

But while Patterson most obviously seems to appeal to optimality considerations in order to ground function, his article also contains passages that seem to indicate an etiological approach to function ascription. For, as Patterson points out, argumentation is a human practice that has existed for a long time, and it would therefore at least on first glance seem to be able to consistently produce some kind of effect that enables the continued survival of the practice of argumentation through generations (Patterson, 2011, p. 14):

Argumentation then, it seems clear, has persisted side-by-side with apparent functional alternatives for some time without waning as a practice. Not only has argumentation held its own, it has developed into more and more sophisticated variations over time, many of which are represented in the different disciplinary and theoretical orientations that comprise the contemporary study of argumentation itself. Knowing as we do that when human beings retain a practice over a long period of time that there is usually an explanation that appeals to its ability to produce a certain socially desirable good or state of affairs, it seems that all this indicates that there is a good prima facie case that argumentation provides something to human beings that other forms of communication do not, or at least that other forms of communication do not provide as well.

This passage reveals, in my estimation, the hybrid nature of Patterson’s approach to function ascription. The etiological element is clearly present in Patterson’s reasoning about the function of argumentation—he is trying to limit the scope of possible function ascriptions by appealing to some effect that has caused the phenomenon to reproduce over time.

But he simultaneously and repeatedly emphasizes that from among these candidate effects we should be looking for a specific effect that argumentation is somehow optimal for producing. This effect, for Patterson, is rational doxastic coordination (ibid., p. 15):

”The general good to which all these views conduce I shall call rational doxastic coordination. I maintain that it is the function of argumentation to produce this good.”

Conclusion

In sum, Patterson’s article reveals a hybrid approach to function ascription employing both etiology and optimality considerations. On balance, however, the optimality considerations seem to feature most prominently, and so my contention here is that Patterson employs an optimality approach to function ascription—an approach that can be shown to have roots as far back as Plato.

Further, we should note that Patterson does not proceed to derive specific evaluative criteria based on his conception of the function of argumentation, but we may assume that they would follow the same logic as Plato himself outlines (see Chapter 4). This means that the evaluative criteria would be closely connected to the virtues and vices of argumentation that would promote or hinder rational doxastic coordination. These virtues and vices are not part of Patterson’s argument (as Patterson notes, “considerations of time and the reader’s patience forbid the extensive digression it would take to even begin such a discussion in this paper”), but this need not delay us here. Our main interest was in seeing exemplified a fourth approach to function ascription, and in Patterson’s work we find just this.

CHAPTER 10

Conclusion

The evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism is a broad and unwieldy topic. Given the modest amount of attention that has been paid to the foundational issues of this aspect of rhetorical criticism, any treatment of it is bound to raise as many questions as it hopefully answers. As noted by James Jasinski, rhetorical critics are still struggling to understand rhetorical quality. Hopefully, this dissertation has contributed to a better understanding of this thorny field of inquiry.

There are four points on the agenda in this chapter. I will briefly recount the findings of the various chapters, discuss some outstanding questions related to these findings, point to some avenues that future research about the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism could fruitfully explore, and finally offer some concluding remarks.

Did practicing rhetorical critics actually evaluate?

The historical part of the dissertation focused on tracing the contours of the decline of the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism. I argued, based on textual evidence, that the decline of the evaluative dimension postulated by scholars such as Jasinski, Olson, and Zarefsky could indeed be substantiated. Importantly, however, I also argued that there are passages in the literature suggesting that practicing rhetorical critics have not always focused on evaluating the rhetoric they have studied. This opens up an important avenue of historical-empirical investigation: If we bracket publications consisting mainly of meta-critical discussions of the aims of rhetorical criticism (which I focused on) and study instead actual examples of rhetorical criticism, to what extent will we find that practicing critics since Wichelns have actually evaluated rhetoric? Has evaluation been their primary concern, or has it been slighted or “timorously tacked on to the summary,” as

Baskerville lamented? Investigating this question would provide a different perspective on the development of the evaluative dimension than the one pursued in this dissertation. Given the importance repeatedly attributed to the evaluative dimension (especially from Wichelns' seminal article in 1925 to the Wingspread Conference in 1971), investigating this question could lead to interesting insights about whether and to what extent the idea that rhetorical criticism ought to evaluate has actually been translated into practice.

A more detailed explanation of the decline

Such insights would, in my opinion, be valuable in their own right due to their potential to throw light on the trajectory of the reorientation of rhetorical criticism constituted by the decline of the evaluative dimension. But they might also be valuable for a different reason related to the *explanation* of the decline. Based on the developments in disciplines related to rhetorical criticism (mainly political theory and informal logic/argumentation theory), I have proposed an explanation for the decline based on the 1960s' counterculture, the decade's revolt against established figures of authority and the simultaneous increase in demand for scholarly rigor. According to this explanation, the evaluative conception of rhetorical criticism declined in part since it represented a paradigm of criticism identified with a previous generation, but also in part because it did not have the kind of rigorous basis needed to maintain the status as a respectable academic endeavor. It must of course be conceded that this explanation remains tentative, although the explanation seems to me to have more explanatory power than the narrative of professionalization offered by Nothstine, Blair, and Copeland (1994). If, however, a detailed historical-empirical analysis of the evaluative dimension was to be carried out along the lines just proposed, such an analysis could contribute to testing and refining possible explanations for the decline. As I argued in Chapter 3, knowledge of this kind is useful for anyone who agrees that the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism deserves more attention, since such knowledge could point to theoretical and practical obstacles that would need to be overcome in order for evaluative criticism to flourish. In this dissertation I have focused on two such problems: the problem of the origin of evaluative criteria and the problem of the appropriateness of those criteria. These are problems that various rhetorical critics have identified as central and yet thorny, but many other such problems may of course be discovered, analyzed, and potentially solved on the basis of further historical-empirical inquiry.

Functional Goodness

Apart from identifying the problems of criterial origin and appropriateness, the theoretical and methodological part introduced the Functional Goodness Intuition. According to this intuition, shared by a range of thinkers across disciplines from antiquity to the present, the quality of objects depends in large part on their capacity to fulfil their function. But while I argued that the Functional Goodness Intuition does offer a preliminary solution to the problems of origin and appropriateness, it also contains its own difficulties. For even though intuitions about the function of an object are sometimes uncontroversial and therefore intersubjectively shared (and thus *prima facie* without need of further justification), this is certainly not always the case. This leads to the *problem of function ascription*, which I proposed could be addressed through case studies based on rational reconstructions of actual evaluative reasoning.

Rational reconstructions

The aim of the case studies presented in the dissertation was to reconstruct the implicit know-how of evaluative critics (operative intuitions, assumption, principles) in order to translate this knowledge into a form of ‘know-that.’ On the basis of the Functional Goodness Intuition, I argued that four different approaches to function ascription, each capturing intuitions from the literature on functions, were operative in the evaluative reasoning of the four critics Herbert A. Wichelns, Christian Kock, J. Jeffery Auer, and Steven Patterson.

The reconstructions contribute to a better understanding the evaluative dimension by illustrating the explanatory force of the Functional Goodness Intuition as a common foundation for establishing evaluative criteria in rhetorical criticism, and also by showing how this common foundation may be actualized or realized in at least four different ways. By explicating possible foundations of evaluative criteria in this way by revealing similarities and differences across evaluative critics, these findings contribute *in toto* to vindicating the possibility of evaluative rhetorical criticism based on more than subjective inclinations or criteria inherited from ostensible experts of evaluation such as Aristotle or others. The case studies, however, also contribute in other, more subtle, ways.

For example, the analyses reveal, in their totality, an interesting structure of evaluative reasoning consisting in the possibility of separating or disconnecting the Functional Goodness Intuition and the act of function ascription. The four different case

studies presented in Chapters 6-9 rely on a formal concept of goodness connected to the concept of function regardless of the precise content or substance of this concept. This is rather abstract, but consider these political analogies: Two parties in a political debate might agree that ‘freedom’ is centrally important in a liberal society and that it should be prioritized over every other issue. But this agreement is often merely formal; it can cover some very real substantive disagreements about what exactly constitutes ‘freedom.’⁶⁶ Or, take the idea that ‘justice consists in giving each his/her due.’ Two people might agree on this principle without thereby necessarily agreeing how this principle is to be interpreted and implemented in specific cases.⁶⁷ In other words, it is perfectly normal for two parties to agree on the formal level while disagreeing on the substantive level.⁶⁸ I suggest that the case studies *in toto* reveal that this formal/substantive ambiguity is also present in the structure of evaluative reasoning analyzed in Chapter 6-9: Critics may agree that goodness is intimately related to the concept of function while subscribing to different conceptions of function.

Should we be surprised to see this pluralism of conceptions of function among critics? I would answer this question in the negative. The four conceptions of function that I claim to be operative in Chapters 6-9 are not my inventions. They are commonly found intuitions, and their diversity reflect the current situation in the literature on functions. Even though some conceptions of function are more widely accepted than others, there remains a fundamental disagreement among prominent function theorists regarding the proper understanding of function. It is true that impressive attempts have been made both inside and outside the core literature on functions to show that certain conceptions of function are superior to others, or that certain overarching conceptions of function can incorporate and explain the diverse intuitions about functions that, on the surface, make

⁶⁶ Isaiah Berlin’s (1969) famous notions of positive vs. negative liberty come to mind as an example of this; George Lakoff’s (2006) (somewhat) polemical division of freedom into a progressive and a conservative conception is another case.

⁶⁷ Incidentally, the realization of the formal nature of the concept of justice was what set off Chaïm Perelman on his course of reconstructing discursive techniques aimed at increasing adherence of those to whom the techniques are presented (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). In his *The Idea of Justice and the Problem of Argument* (Perelman, 1963, p. 16), he says: “We can, then, define formal or abstract justice as a principle of action in accordance with which beings of one and the same essential category must be treated in the same way. Be it noted at once that the definition we have just offered is of a purely formal idea, leaving untouched and entire all the differences that arise in respect of concrete justice.”

⁶⁸ Thayer (1964, p. 309) distinguishes in a similar fashion between ‘vacuous’ and ‘filled-in’ use of functional language in Plato’s Republic.

a unified conception impossible (see, e.g., Harder, 1996, pp. 88-104; Harder & Kock, 2016). These discussions have arguably been ongoing for at least the past 80 years since Carl Gustav Hempel published his article on “The Logic of Functional Analysis” (1959), and disagreements about function ascription have existed for much longer, since even Plato and Aristotle seemed to disagree on how to ascribe functions to objects.⁶⁹

And the reason why this pluralism is not surprising is that function theorists, generally speaking, are interested in explicating the pre-theoretical intuitions about function that can be found among ordinary language users. And so, if a multitude of conceptions of function can be found among these users (just like a multitude of conceptions of freedom can be found among citizens), despite the best and most creative efforts of function theorists hoping to one day arrive at a unified theory of function with a formal and precise definition, such a feat would conflict with empirical reality which at the moment just is pluralistic regarding function conceptions, just like empirical reality is pluralistic regarding conceptions of freedom, justice, fraternity, equality, and so on.

Nevertheless, we may assume that each of the theorists analyzed in this dissertation would maintain that *their* specific conception of function and the accompanying approach to function ascription is somehow more appropriate than other rival conceptions and approaches. Wichelns, for instance, is not satisfied with a kind of *modus vivendi* with literary critics regarding function ascription. He maintains that his criteria are more appropriate than theirs when it comes to oratorical artifacts (he even maintains that literary criteria are inappropriate for oratorical artifacts), and this position would seem to ultimately rest on the premise that his approach to function ascription is more appropriate than theirs. Similarly, Christian Kock does not merely claim that his proposed function of deliberation and debate is one possible function among a list of acceptable functions; rather, he would seem to claim that his proposed function is more appropriate than other rival functions. And again, Patterson presents his function of argumentation as a more appropriate proposal than other rival proposals. These positions amount to what we might call “strong appropriateness claims”, i.e., claims that entail that one possible function is more appropriate than another possible function. A valuable future research project could consider the extent to which reasons or principles are used in such cases to justify strong appropriateness claims.

⁶⁹ As we saw in Chapter 9, Plato subscribes to an optimality approach, whereas Aristotle, at least in his discussion of the *ergon* of man, invokes considerations of uniqueness rather than optimality.

A concern about rational reconstruction

Finally, in discussing the analytical part of the dissertation, I want to address a concern about rational reconstruction and my attempt to translate know-how into a more precise know-that. The concern is driven by the idea that rhetorical criticism should always be guided by a kind of unfettered critical sensibility in the critic, who when confronting the object of criticism, should not let pre-existing methods or theories control the process of critical discovery (see e.g., Black, 1980). The ultimate example of such a ‘controlled critical discovery’ would be the familiar idea of ‘cookie-cutter criticism.’

To some readers it may seem that this dissertation is on some level an attempt to reduce (part of) the evaluative dimension to a formula when any formula will of necessity do injustice to the multifarious modes, strategies, and perspectives that evaluation can and should be open to. It may seem that the various competences of a good critic—being able to invent appropriate terms, construct novel arguments, forge convincing interpretations, and generally judge matters not susceptible to algorithmic rules—cannot be developed or promoted (and may even be harmfully circumscribed) by attempts to explicate these competences.

This kind of concern directed specifically at projects of rational reconstruction has, in fact, been described by the eminent philosopher of science Abraham Kaplan in his classic work *The Conduct of Inquiry* (1964/1998). Kaplan does not use the terms know-how and know-that, but he does make a similar distinction between ‘logic-in-use’ and ‘reconstructed logic’ (ibid., pp. 8-11):

Scientists and philosophers use a logic—they have a cognitive style which is more or less logical—and some of them also formulate it explicitly. I call the former the logic-in-use, and the latter the reconstructed logic. [...] [L]ogic-in-use may precede and be superior to its own reconstruction. This reminder is true not only of the logic-in-use in everyday life but of the logic-in-use in science as well. Newton and his followers made excellent use of the calculus in physics, despite the astute criticisms of its foundations made by Bishop Berkeley, criticisms which were not satisfactorily met till the reconstruction by Weierstrass some two hundred years later. Conversely, a reconstruction may become, or at any rate influence, the logic-in-use. [...] The great danger of confusing logic-in-use with a particular reconstructed logic, an especially a highly idealized one, is that thereby the autonomy of science is subtly subverted. The normative force of the logic has the effect, not necessarily of improving the logic-in-use, but only of bringing it into closer conformity with the imposed reconstruction. [...] When the reconstruction is mathematically elegant, precise, and powerful [...] its attractions are nearly irresistible. But the crucial

question concerns, not the intrinsic virtues of the reconstructed logic taken in itself, but rather its usefulness in illuminating the logic-in-use.

The quotation from Kaplan illustrates the concern about the general project of reconstruction that some readers might have. But while the concern is understandable (perhaps especially because much neo-Aristotelian rhetorical criticism, for a while at least, was undoubtedly too formulaic), I do not think its significance should be overstated. In fact, the project of reconstruction undertaken in the analytical part of this dissertation may be seen as an attempt to bring even more pluralism into critical practice. A motivating premise behind this dissertation has been the observation that rhetorical critics too often refrain from evaluation and too often limit themselves to the remaining dimensions of rhetorical criticism. And while I do not wish to claim that these other dimensions are not important, relevant, etc., I *do* wish to propose that evaluative criticism contains unique potentials that go beyond those of descriptive-explanatory criticism.

At the same time, though, I agree with Kaplan that logic-in-use may frequently be superior to reconstructed logic. And it is therefore important to always regard reconstructions as tentative or, in Habermas' words, hypothetical. In the last analysis, critics possess an autonomy and an understanding of the world-at-large that they must never allow to be subverted or restricted by even the most convincing model or rational reconstruction. The critic may use ready-made rational reconstructions to guide their own criticism, just like a speaker intending to apologize may glean inspiration from, say, Ware and Linkugel (1973)'s reconstruction of apologia. But in the end, a given reconstruction will almost always be less-than-exhaustive of the relevant principles underlying a particular practice—be that evaluation, apologia or logical thinking, and so the competent subject will need to make choices without any guidance.

Further case studies that may extend our understanding of function

Even though concrete reconstructions have their limitations, it is important to recognize that reconstructions can be improved upon and extended. This is part of their hypothetical status alluded to by Habermas. And one way to increase our understanding of the evaluative dimension is simply to continue along the lines laid out in this dissertation, i.e., to study actual cases of evaluative reasoning from rhetorical critics. One way to catalogue a collection of such cases would be to undertake the historical-empirical investigation proposed above. If, upon conducting such an investigation, it turned out that practicing

rhetorical critics *have* paid serious attention to the evaluative dimension, then such an investigation should provide a much more exhaustive and systematic list of suggestions for further case studies that I can offer here. Nevertheless, here are five case studies that would contribute to our understanding of the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism.

One such case study would be a reconstruction of Edwin Black's analysis and evaluation of the Coatesville Address (Black, 1965/1978). What makes Black's evaluation of the Coatesville Address interesting from the point of view of this dissertation is that Black's evaluation is clearly positive—even laudatory—despite the speech being delivered in front of an audience comprised of less than a handful of people. If the Functional Goodness Intuition is operative in Black's evaluative reasoning, what then could be the function that this speech fulfilled? What could Black's approach to function ascription be? At first glance, it would seem that Black does not employ a designer approach to function ascription (this was effectively the kind of evaluative reasoning that Black scorned the Neo-Aristotelian critics for employing). Nor does he seem to be employing a user approach to function ascription, since the audience is almost non-existing. There are, as we have seen, other approaches to function ascription that Black might have employed in his evaluation. Regardless, reconstructing Black's evaluation of the Coatesville Address would, in my estimation, amount to an improvement or augmentation of the approaches to function ascription presented in this dissertation. It would expand our understanding of function ascription or it might provide an example of a kind of evaluative reasoning *not* susceptible to analysis through the Functional Goodness Intuition.

A second interesting case study would be a rational reconstruction of the two competing evaluations of Nixon's 1969 "Vietnamization Speech" by Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Forbes Hill respectively (K. K. Campbell, Hill, Thompson, & Black, 1972). Since Campbell and Hill reach radically different evaluative conclusions (Campbell's verdict is clearly negative whereas Hill's is clearly positive), the two critics would seem to be employing different approaches to function ascription (if, that is, we hypothesize that they are both basing their evaluations on the Functional Goodness Intuition). What could those approaches be? Answering this question would expand our understanding of the problem of function ascription.

A third highly relevant case study for reconstructing evaluative reasoning would focus on ideological criticism (e.g., McGee, 1980; Wander, 1983). To what extent can ideological criticism be said to rely on the Functional Goodness Intuition, and to what

extent can evaluative criteria employed by ideological critics be appropriately understood as originating from a perceived function of rhetoric? There are several reasons why such a case study would be interesting. First, in current rhetorical criticism, ideological criticism is arguably among the mainstream approaches. As such, a study of ideological criticism would certainly be a welcome addition to the four case studies conducted in Chapters 6-9. Second, ideological criticism presents a challenge to the Functional Goodness Intuition and the problem of function ascription in the following sense: All four case studies share the common characteristic that they ascribe a positive function to the artifact in question; in other words they point to an effect or capacity that the artifact ought to have. But ideological criticism seems to work in the opposite direction. It seems to point to an effect or capacity (typically something along the lines of maintaining the status quo) that an artifact ought *not* to have. Whether and how this kind of “negative” function ascription can be analyzed from the perspective of functions remains to be seen.

A fourth case study would consist in an analysis of Lloyd F. Bitzer’s classic essay on “The Rhetorical Situation” (1968) from the perspective of function ascription. In the essay, Bitzer repeatedly talks about functions, but it is not entirely clear to me that his conception of function is compatible with the four conceptions presented in Chapter 6-9. For instance, Bitzer tells us that he regards discourse as rhetorical “insofar as it functions (or seeks to function) as a fitting response to a situation which needs and invites it.” In using the term “seek,” Bitzer is using the kind of intentional language that on first approximation would place him in the same category as Wichelns, but in using the term “need,” Bitzer is signaling an understanding of function closer to that of Christian Kock. But, ultimately, neither of these two approaches to function ascription appear acceptable to Bitzer, as he intimates when he writes of those who eulogized John F. Kennedy:

One cannot say that the situation is the function of the speaker's intention, for in this case the speakers' intentions were determined by the Situation. One cannot say that the rhetorical transaction is simply a response of the speaker to the demands or expectations of an audience, for the expectations of the audience were themselves keyed to a tragic historic fact.

So Bitzer’s approach to function does not seem compatible with an approach to function ascription that begins from considerations of the designer’s intention, nor one that begins from considerations of user needs. Instead, the function of a rhetorical artifact, for Bitzer, is clearly related to his concept of situation. But how far will the concept of situation take

us in ascribing functions to a rhetorical artifact? Investigating this question would perhaps lead to yet another approach to function ascription.

The fifth and final type of case study to be mentioned here would undertake an analysis of the relationship between genre and function. Generic criticism as this is understood in the field of rhetorical criticism historically connects with evaluation. But the connection between genre and function ascription does not seem to have received a thorough analysis as of yet.

Concluding remarks

Further discussion points and additional indications of future research could be adduced. The evaluative dimension is a vast topic, even when delimited to the problems of origin and appropriateness of evaluative criteria. But the above will be sufficient, I think, to make clear some of the most central findings of this dissertation. But one more thing should be noted: An important motivating factor behind this dissertation is my hope that the evaluative dimension will one day transform its decline into an ascent. This does not mean, however, that I am advocating a return to a situation (regrettably not entirely fictitious) where evaluative critics consisted primarily of white, middle-aged men who saw it as their duty to report to the world their personal opinions about some unsuspecting rhetorical artifact. And this is all the more true to the extent that such a situation would lead to primarily negative evaluations following the comical, but realistic, critical model of “leaving no turn unstoned.” (to reuse an apt phrase allegedly from George Bernhard Shaw). In short, I am not hoping for a return to a situation where rhetorical criticism is understood as basically little more than the public expression of private taste.

What I *am* hoping will happen is an increase of the exercise of reasoned judgment informed by rigorous evaluative argument. What I *am* advocating is for rhetorical critics to increasingly practice, study, and theorize the very kinds of discourse that they often find most interesting as objects for rhetorical criticism; namely the evaluative, value-laden, action-oriented discourse. I concede that I have not provided an enactment of such evaluative rhetorical criticism here. But I hope to have shown the possibility of undertaking this kind of criticism by showing ways in which evaluative criteria—the most fundamental components of evaluative criticism—may be established and their appropriateness justified.

I opened this dissertation with a quotation by Wayne C. Booth: “No critical judgments can be more complicated than trying to distinguish good rhetoric from bad.” (2004, p. 39). At this point, it seems fitting to return to a related point made by Booth. In his essay “Why Ethical Criticism Fell on Hard Times” (1988) Booth describes an imaginary and somewhat embarrassing conversation with “one of the great critics of the past”, Samuel Johnson. As Booth and Johnson sit down to discuss the state of current critical culture, Johnson is immediately impressed by the seemingly endless outpouring of literary criticism. “Surely”, Samuel Johnson exclaims excitedly, “this must be a marvelous civilization, if it can produce each year thousands of books and journals devoted to scholarship and criticism centered on the finest flowers of human history.” And since Booth understands that Johnson’s main critical interest was always “the systematic effort to appraise the worth of literary works, the achievement of their periods, the quality of their works,” he is not surprised when Johnson asks hopefully to see examples of this kind of criticism. Booth, feeling a bit on the defensive, quickly hands Johnson some of the publications that claim to do serious reviewing: *The Times [London] Literary Supplement*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Atlantic*, *The American Scholar*, *The New Yorker*, and so on. After speed-reading about a dozen reviews, Johnson looks increasingly troubled and turns to Booth (*ibid.*, p. 278):

“Sir, you have not understood. Here, indeed, I find a plenitude of improvised judgments. Praise and blame flow freely in these journals, as freely as they did in the coffee houses of my time. On these two pages of this journal that you call TLS, for example, I find many confident snap judgments. But the *criteria*, sir, the criteria strike me as not among those that either a thinking man or a learned man would dare to express or choose to defend. And in any case, they are *not* defended, merely asserted.”

Booth, now even more on the defensive, produces a selection of acclaimed critical journals. After browsing them, only to find still more improvised judgments, Johnson tries again:

“Perhaps you can tell me where I might find a discussion of the principles underlying such judgments? [...] I here again find a great pile of judgments, mostly ill-disguised as history, description, or interpretation. But where are the *arguments*?”

Samuel Johnson’s challenge pertains to the evaluative criticism of literature. But it applies, I think, equally to rhetorical criticism. The challenge is a request for an academic

discussion of principles underlying judgments of quality. Providing such a discussion has been the agenda of the present dissertation: Where do evaluative criteria of rhetorical critics come from, and how can their appropriateness be justified?

To mangle a phrase by Stanley Fish (1980, p. 356), there was a time when evaluation was the only game in town for rhetorical critics; when anything worthy of the label ‘rhetorical criticism’ had to include an evaluative dimension. To be sure, practicing critics may not always have followed this doctrine, and those who did perhaps sometimes produced improvised judgments based on little more than subjective preferences hardly capable of meeting reasonable demands of academic rigor. But the evaluative ambition of rhetorical criticism was always present.

The situation now seems quite different. The evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism seems to be on the decline, even while other disciplines recognize the value and importance of cultivating an understanding and appreciation of normative scholarship.

Normative scholarship is difficult. Evaluation involves considerations of values and quality, and these remain notoriously slippery concepts. Nonetheless, on another level, quality is often uncontroversial and obvious. We all simply recognize it when we are exposed to it, almost viscerally, like cold and heat. Quality is familiar to all of us; we feel it when we encounter it. The problem is that we do not feel the same way about the same object. And this is when feeling becomes insufficient and understanding becomes necessary. But really *understanding* quality with our minds is a problem caught between subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Perhaps reconstructing our capacity for evaluation is ultimately an impossible task, since some irreducibly subjective element will always remain. Such a reconstruction is an attempt to translate a seemingly largely visceral phenomenon into something intellectual, and perhaps there is no method of translation that will be without remainder. But that, I think, is no reason not to make the attempt. Our ability to understand and explain quality is one of important tasks on the grand human agenda.

And there is evidence that it is at least possible to travel some of the way towards this goal. For when we disagree with others about the value of some object, and securing the adherence of these others seems to us sufficiently important, we may try to persuade them about the quality of the object in question. We have argumentative resources to attempt this feat regardless of whether it involves the quality of a movie, poem, speech, opera, the character of a person, a political proposal, or a course of action. And we do so

almost on a daily basis. We evaluate. We attempt to make ourselves or others see and understand the quality or its absence in things that seem to us worthy of evaluative judgment.

But how do we argue for quality? How do we attempt to persuade someone whose intuitions about quality seem to differ from ours? What are the argumentative resources that we employ in order to make others see or even feel things our way? What, in these cases, are the available means of persuasion? This dissertation provides a beginning of an answer to these questions. To be sure, much more could be said. Therefore, this dissertation is also a call for a renewed attention to the evaluative dimension of rhetorical criticism. This dimension is intimately connected with the historical roots and the societal importance of rhetoric. As such it deserves a better fate than that of a story of decline.

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