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Rhetorical Staging: Embodiment and Incorporation in Two Speeches by Barack Obama

Résumé

Les chercheurs s'intéressent aux discours politiques non seulement sur les plans de la rhétorique et de l'argumentation mais également pour la dimension interpersonnelle, pour la relation qui se joue entre orateur et auditoire. Dans cet article, j'examine dans une perspective linguistique les interconnexions entre la politique et le corps, notamment les deux aspects suivants : (i) les phénomènes sensoriels/physiques qui mettent en avant le corps de l'orateur et permettent de rassembler orateur et auditoire ; (ii) les rôles des participants. Ces deux paramètres informent la Scène rhétorique, un dispositif énonciatif fondé sur la mise en spectacle – qui va de pair avec *l'incarnation* du discours par le locuteur – ainsi qu'un réseau de participants où le rôle du locuteur se décale, s'élève, pour s'adresser à des destinataires qui dépassent l'auditoire direct – ce dernier étant ainsi *incorporé* dans une communauté englobante. Ce double processus est étudié dans deux discours prononcés par Barack Obama : un discours de campagne, lors du *Jefferson-Jackson Dinner* en 2007, et un discours épideictique, l'éloge funèbre prononcé à Charleston en 2015. Dans le contexte du discours politique, l'incarnation et l'incorporation permettent de légitimer le discours et, de fait, l'homme politique dans son rôle de leader.

Abstract

While much scholarship in the field of political discourse deals with rhetoric and argumentation, a new focus in recent years has been placed on the specific interpersonal dynamics brought into play. In this article, I explore the interconnections between politics and bodies from a linguistic perspective in terms of: (i) physical phenomena which highlight the role of the speaker's body, are contingent on the moment of delivery of the speech, and physically bring speaker and audience together; (ii) participant framework. These two aspects coincide with the two components that found Rhetorical Staging, a specific enunciative setup based on a staging of the discourse – and therefore the speaker's *embodiment* of the discourse – and a participant framework whereby the speaker adopts an elevated position in order to address an audience that extends beyond the direct public – who are *incorporated* into this far-reaching community. This two-part, interrelated process is discussed in relation to two speeches delivered by Barack Obama, electoral (the 2007 Jefferson-Jackson Dinner speech) and epideictic (e.g. eulogy delivered in Charleston, June 2015). In the case of political oratory, both embodiment and incorporation prove particularly powerful in legitimating the speech as a political event, and therefore the speaker in his role as leader.

Mots-clés

discours politique – mise en spectacle – prosodie – surlocuteur – surdestinataire

Key words

political discourse – prosody – superaddressee – superspeaker – staging of the signifier

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Rhetorical Staging: Embodiment and Incorporation in Two Speeches by Barack Obama

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“Our party has chosen a man to lead us who embodies the best this country has to offer. And that man is John Kerry.”

Barack Obama, Democratic National Convention July 27, 2004

Introduction¹

A specificity of political oratory is the significance of the question of the body. Studies based on body language and prosody belonging to multimodal theory immediately come to mind². However, the question of the body can also be addressed from another, overarching level – one that, as will be claimed here, conditions for example such phenomena. Two aspects will be distinguished here. First, the following very general and seemingly self-evident observation deserves to be made about public address in comparison with other types of communication: due to the *immediacy* underpinning the oral mode, the bodies of the participants (orator and audience) are present, each is in full view of the other. The speaker’s body is placed in the spotlight, in “the front line” as it were, and is one body, one face, upon which all gazes are directed. Members of the audience “have the right to hold the whole of the speaker’s body in the focus of staring-at attention”³, and there is a “sense of preferential access” to his/her person⁴. Secondly, a main objective of the orator is to reinforce the feeling that the people in the audience belong to the same political body. Ideally, this body extends beyond the speaker and the live audience, with the latter being made to feel part of a far-reaching community that includes members that are not physically present. These two aspects are very much interrelated and are brought together within the concept of Rhetorical Staging. This concept, developed by Dominique Maingueneau (“la Scène rhétorique”⁵) to highlight the specificity of certain discourses that do not conform to (prototypical) interactional contexts, provides a means of pinpointing the social and pragmatic function of some instances of contemporary political discourse, and hence offers a counterpoint to other theoretical approaches (e.g. critical discourse analysis or interactionalist approaches). Indeed, Rhetorical Staging constitutes an enunciative setup

¹ This paper was first presented at the conference “Corps en Politique”, at Université Paris-Est Créteil, 7-9 September 2016, and hence focuses on the issue of the body in the field of political oratory.

² See in particular: Geneviève Calbris, *L'expression gestuelle de la pensée d'un homme politique*, Paris, CNRS Éditions, 2003; Isabella Poggi, Francesca D'Errico, Laura Vincze, Alessandro Vinciarelli (eds.), *Multimodal Communication in Political Speech: Shaping Minds and Social Action*, Heidelberg, Springer Verlag, 2013. In addition, the question of politicians’ body language dominates in the mass media: for example, a Google search of the entry “body language of politicians” conducted on 15/08/2017 generated 1,720,000 results.

³ Erving Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981, p. 165.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

⁵ Dominique Maingueneau, “Apostrophe et Scène rhétorique”, *Figures en discours*, eds. Amir Biglari and Geneviève Salvan, Louvain-la-Neuve, Academia-l’Harmattan, 2016, p. 19-34.

which plays on the sensory dimension, an *embodiment* of the discourse by the speaker in the here-and-now of the delivery – which moreover determines multimodal phenomena, particularly prosody. At the same time, Rhetorical Staging orchestrates an *incorporation* of the participants in a far-reaching community. These two components are closely linked by virtue of the fact that they contrast sharply with the dynamics underpinning prototypical dialogic interaction, as represented by one-to-one conversation.

This two-fold process will be demonstrated in extracts from two speeches by Barack Obama, delivered eight years apart⁶. On November 10, 2007, during the campaign for his first election as President, Obama spoke at the Jefferson-Jackson fundraising dinner in Des Moines, Iowa, a tradition during the Democratic primaries⁷. The dinner imposes a set format, whereby candidates speak one after the other, without pulpit or prompter. This not only forces the candidates to speak entirely from memory⁸, but also places greater impetus on the speaker's full body, as there is no pulpit to hide behind or rest upon – a rarity of political speeches, where the body of the speaker is typically reduced to his/her head, a synecdoche that is amplified during stadium-type meetings by the projection of giant “disembodied” heads on screens. Eight years later, on June 26, 2015, President Obama delivered a eulogy in Charleston, South Carolina, at the funeral of Reverend Clementa Pinckney, who was shot with eight members of his congregation in his church during a prayer service. The speech received a lot of attention in the media because, in his peroration, Obama broke out into song, singing several verses of “Amazing Grace”⁹.

Visuals 1 & 2: Barack Obama speaking at the Jefferson-Jackson dinner, November 10, 2007



⁶ Each speech can be viewed on C-Span at the following addresses: <https://www.c-span.org/video/?202117-1/iowa-jefferson-jackson-dinner> (as of 07:28:49); <https://www.c-span.org/video/?326769-1/funeral-service-sc-state-senator-clementa-pinckney> (as of 03:04:10).

⁷ After this speech, there was a notable turnaround in the polls in favor of Obama in his race against Hillary Clinton, and commentators have since identified the performance as one of his most decisive.

⁸ This is the only speech in Obama's political career to have been committed entirely to memory, according to Jon Favreau, Director of Speechwriting for Barack Obama from 2005 to 2013, speaking at the Kennedy School of Government Institute of Politics, Harvard University, 2013.

⁹ This most famous of English-language hymns, first published in 1779, was written by the English clergyman and repented supporter of slavery John Newton.



Visual 3: Barack Obama singing at the end of his eulogy in Charleston, June 26, 2015



The two speeches are quite different in that they reflect different contexts (i.e. a political campaign versus mourning), objectives, settings (or scenography), and address different audiences. The 2007 campaign speech is that of an outsider, aiming to generate empathy and sympathy to win over the audience, while the 2015 eulogy is a speech of commemoration, designed to consolidate pre-existent empathy and sympathy. In terms of setting, neither are intimate, both are delivered in big venues (an indoor stadium, a university hall), although the campaign speech has the more monumental trappings of a political meeting (e.g. the image of the speaker relayed on giant screens). In addition, the isolated figure of the orator, set apart from the merry-making at the dinner tables, contrasts with the orator speaking in front of the coffin of the deceased, flagged by members of the Church. Finally, the live, direct audience is not the same for each speech: the dinner is attended by members of the Democratic Party, the funeral mainly by members of the African American community belonging to the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, to which Reverend Pinckney belonged. Importantly, however, the two speeches beg comparison because in each, the orator speaks as it were “through” the direct audience to address a wider audience that extends to the country at large. Each brings about an *incorporation*. This aspect has already been examined in previous publications¹⁰, but has not yet been investigated in direct relation to the sensory dimension and the emphasis placed on the body, an essential component that calls for a specific enquiry. As will be observed, the sensory dimension is brought into acute focus by the unusual scenographies of both speeches, which contrast with the typical scenography associated with a political speech, the majority of Obama’s speeches included (i.e. politician standing behind a pulpit,

¹⁰ See Fiona Rossette, *Prendre la parole en anglais*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2017; “Discursive Divides and Rhetorical Staging, or the Transcending Function of Oratory”, *Journal of Pragmatics* 108, 2017, p. 48-59.

reading his/her speech). In what follows, I will first present Rhetorical Staging, before examining the way embodiment and incorporation are achieved in each speech under study.

Rhetorical Staging

According to Reisigl:

Speeches are often misunderstood as monological linguistic events. [...] A functional pragmatic view immediately reveals that spoken political speeches are complex realisations of conventionalised linguistic action patterns with a clear interaction structure even though [...] they are not endowed with turn taking¹¹.

Indeed, much scholarly interest in public speech places importance on inherently interactional/dialogic phenomena¹². Such a focus is further justified by the move in recent years towards the “conversationalisation” of public discourse¹³, that is, the adoption in the *a priori* monological mode of public speaking (one speaker speaking to a group of addressees who do not intervene verbally) of linguistic items characteristic of the turn-taking of conversation.

In contrast, Rhetorical Staging fosters a specific set of dynamics within the oral medium that does not attempt to reproduce the turn-taking of prototypical oral speech, and instead ushers in quite a distinct interpersonal setup.¹⁴ Rhetorical Staging brings to the fore the solemnity associated with oratory, harking back to the tradition of classical rhetoric. It is based on two defining features – which both represent a far cry from prototypical speech:

- (i) a staging of the discourse, of the signifier, which brings into sharp focus the sensory dimension in the here-and-now of the delivery, with the sense that the speaker truly embodies his/her discourse;
- (ii) an extended participant framework that goes beyond speaker and immediate addressee, bringing about their incorporation within a far-reaching community.

Indeed, unlike the modern tendency to foster proximity in public address – whereby the speaker elects “to present himself as just another member of the gathering that is present, someone no different from you or me”¹⁵ –, Rhetorical Staging does not simulate but rather transcends ordinary interaction¹⁶. The speaking style is elaborate, self-conscious and aesthetically pleasing, and corresponds to a sublimated form of interaction. This is achieved

¹¹ Martin Reisigl, “Rhetoric of Political Speeches”, *Analyzing the Public Sphere: Handbook of Applied Linguistics*, vol. IV, eds. Ruth Wodak and Veronika Koller, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2008, p. 254.

¹² For example, Maxwell Atkinson, “Public Speaking and Audience Responses”, *Structures of Social Action*, eds. Atkinson, Maxwell and John Heritage, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 370-409; Alessandro Capone, “Barack Obama’s South Carolina Speech”, *Journal of Pragmatics* 42, 2010, p. 2964-2977; Camille Debras and Emilie L’Hôte, “Framing, Metaphor and Dialogue: A Multimodal Approach to Party Conference Speeches”, *Metaphor and the Social World* 5/2, 2015, p. 184-204.

¹³ Norman Fairclough, “Conversationalisation of Public Discourse and the Authority of the Consumer”, *The Authority of the consumer*, eds. Russell Keat, Nigel Whitely and Nicholas Abercrombie, London, Routledge, 1994, p. 253-268.

¹⁴ F. Rossette, “Discursive Divides”, *cit.*

¹⁵ E. Goffman, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

¹⁶ Here, the verb *transcend* is used in the customary sense of “be or go beyond the range or limits of” (according to the Oxford Dictionary), rather than in the sense of a disembodiment of the speaker – which would be at odds with the hypothesis developed here, that embodiment is essential to the process.

via a staging of the discourse, reminiscent of the formality and artistry of classical rhetoric, which generally requires crafting pre-performance via the written medium (commitment to paper, or the script) and is traced to a high density of rhetorical figures, such as anaphora, antithesis, alliteration etc. Such figures exploit the rhythmic qualities of the language and come into their own at the moment of the performance.

Political oratory is characterised by declamatory delivery style, based on a relatively slow speed and regular pausing¹⁷. Such a template is amplified by the staging of the signifier that is constituent of Rhetorical Staging, with the above-mentioned figures functioning as prosodic “cues” that provide the backbone for variation in speed and vocal intensity during the performance. Such vocal variation (of which the singing in the Charleston eulogy represents an extreme case), emanating *from the speaker’s body* and reinforced by gesture, attracts attention to the materiality of the wording – to “the flesh of the voice beneath the meaning of the words”¹⁸ – and enhances the sensory experience of the performance.

The speaker therefore comes across as truly mastering his/her voice, and hence his/her text, and appears truly engaged and present in the oratory moment. He/she coincides with it, carries it off. In other words, the speaker *embodies* his/her discourse. *Embodiment* of the discourse is intricately linked to the notion of ethos, which originally, according to the Aristotelian conception, hinges upon the way the speaker appears (for Aristotle, it is crucial “that the orator’s character should look right”¹⁹), in order to gain credibility and secure the confidence of the audience. The notion has taken on new importance in discourse analysis theory, where it is defined, for example, as “a manner of saying that underlines a way of being”²⁰ or as “the self-image projected by the orator aiming to act through his/her words”²¹.

The sublimated form of interaction inherent to Rhetorical Staging also results from its extended participant structure. The role of the speaker – and also that of the addressee – are shifted to another level. The speaker takes as it were the higher ground in order to construe the wider community. In this way, Rhetorical Staging exploits the intrinsically *asymmetrical* relation inherent to oratory that brings together *one* speaker and *multiple* addressees – the public, “the crowd”. The position of the orator is one of an alterity, a *divide*: physically, he/she is set apart from the audience, a division that is materialised by the podium²².

¹⁷ Danielle Duez, “Le pouvoir du silence et le silence du pouvoir. Comment interpréter le discours politique?”, *MediaMorphoses* 8, 2003, p. 77-82.

¹⁸ Marlène Coulomb-Gully, “Rhétorique télévisuelle et esthétisation politique: le corps (en) politique”, *Argumentation et discours politique. Antiquité grecque et latine, Révolution française, Monde contemporain*, eds. Simone Bonnafous, Pierre Chiron, Dominique Ducard and Carlos Levy, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2003, p. 124. This study, based on the audiovisual media, also underlines the spotlight placed on the materiality of the delivery, on the speaker’s voice, where voice is typically “not mediated by the intellect”: “Television is vocally-centered rather than verbally-centered. Beyond, or below, the meaning of what is being said, we perceive the materiality of the voice, the flesh of the voice beneath the meaning of the words. And nothing is as closely linked to the body as the voice”. All translations from the French are mine.

¹⁹ *The Rhetoric*, Book II, chapter 1.

²⁰ Dominique Maingueneau, “Ethos, scénographie, incorporation”, *Images de soi dans le discours, La construction de l’ethos*, ed. Ruth Amossy, Lausanne, Delachaux et Niestlé, 1999, p. 75-101.

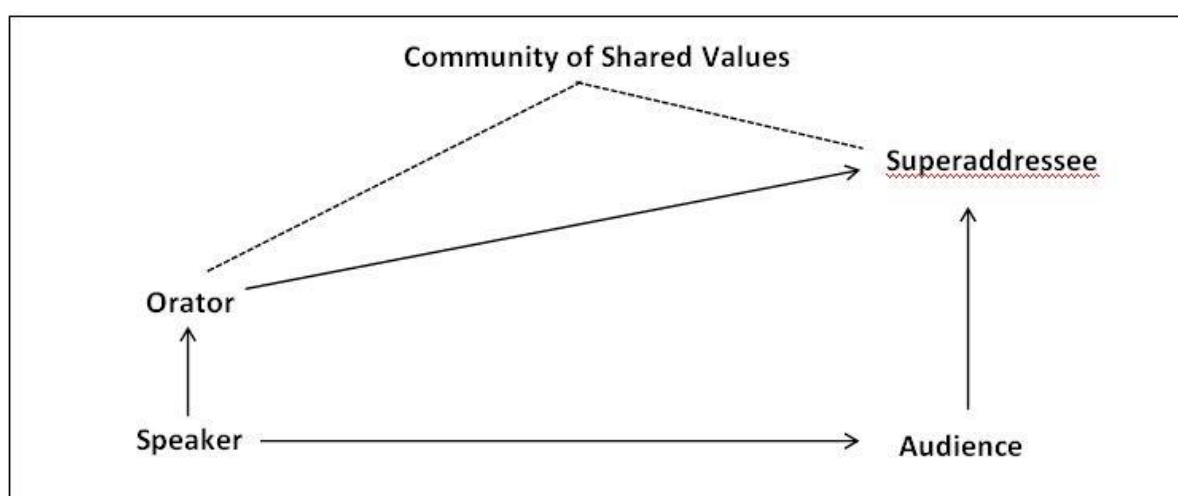
²¹ Ruth Amossy, *L’argumentation dans le discours*, Armand Colin, 2014, p. 83.

²² This divide is ambivalent. It proves an asset, and is necessary to the speaker, providing him/her with the power and authority to speak before the masses. However, at the same time, it is a potential

In Rhetorical Staging, the speaker becomes a “superspeaker” who addresses a “superaddressee”, a process that can generally be traced to specific linguistic items (e.g. terms of address, the apostrophe, tense and aspectual choices, deictic reference...). The latter term is adapted from Bakhtin – “he who *transcends* the verbal interaction”²³ – with the difference that in Rhetorical Staging, the superaddressee includes the immediate audience. The orator addresses not only the live audience, but also one that is not physically present, and both are *incorporated* into a higher entity, a community united by shared values that are generally made explicit in the discourse.

The speaker is also incorporated into this community. His/her status undergoes an upward thrust. Inhabited as it were by a higher voice, he/she becomes the spokesperson of a greater, noble cause. He/she *rises to* the status of a true orator, a term which in fact suffices to denote the role of a “superspeaker”. This process of incorporation engendered by this participant framework is represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Incorporation by Rhetorical Staging



Embodiment and incorporation in the Jefferson-Jackson dinner speech

The speech delivered by Barack Obama at the Jefferson-Jackson dinner provides a prime example of Rhetorical Staging. It contrasts with what is expected at the dinner, illustrated for example by Hillary Clinton’s speech at the same event (Rossette 2016). Her speech simulates interaction, based on many instances of linguistic markers that inform conversation (e.g. direct interrogatives, discourse markers such as *you know, well, now*, paratactic clause linkage via *and*), culminating in a passage where the audience actually participates vocally by chanting a slogan in response to a series of direct questions. Instead, Obama takes “the higher ground”. His performance contains surprisingly few markers belonging to conversational mode; rather, it enacts a staging of the signifier, via a high density of figures of speech, namely repetition, syntactic parallelism and accumulation – to which can be added nominal utterances. The textual progression of Obama’s speech is founded on a number of series of anaphora (repetition in initial position of consecutive utterances): “We were promised...” (three instances); “that is why...” (two series: three

gulf with which the speaker must somehow come to terms, in order to connect with the audience (F. Rossette, “Discursive Divides”, *cit.*).

²³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Esthétique de la création verbale*, Paris, Gallimard, 1984, p. 337 (my emphasis).

instances + five instances); “I will...” (seven instances); “I don’t want to...” (eight instances); “that’s why I’m running...” (two instances), “that’s why I’m asking...” (three instances). Accumulation, or the heaping up of words of the same category that Greek rhetoricians named *synathroismos* is also exploited, particularly the pairings of nominal phrases: “the same fear-mongering and swift-boating” – sometimes integrated into an overarching ternary unit (e.g. “nuclear weapons and terrorism, climate change and poverty, genocide and disease”).

Another structure that serves to stage the signifier is the nominal utterance which lacks a (non-embedded) finite verbal. In the following sequence, it forms the basis of a series of anaphora (“A party that...”):

And I run for the Presidency of the United States of America because that’s the party America needs us to be right now. A party that offers not just a difference in policies, but a difference in leadership. A party that doesn’t just focus on how to win but why we should. A party that doesn’t just offer change as a slogan, but real, meaningful change – change that America can believe in.

These utterances lacking a non-embedded finite verb mark a relatively recent development in public speaking style in English: they are absent in speeches by orators such as Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, but appear for example in many of Obama’s speeches, as well as in contexts outside political discourse (e.g. Ted talks, Steve Jobs’ keynotes)²⁴. Such nominals are rare in prototypical spoken language, and also in written English. They contribute to a staging of the signifier by conferring a high degree of information focus, which is generally enhanced by pausing and a change in rhythm.

The nominal utterances in the excerpt above also echo the syntactic parallelism of an antithetical structure, whereby a negative clause is followed by a positive clause sometimes introduced by “but” (“A party that doesn’t just... but...”). These are characteristic of public address (e.g. John F. Kennedy’s “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country”²⁵) and are exploited by Obama elsewhere in the speech (e.g. “I don’t want to pit Red America against Blue America, I want to be the President of the United States of America”; “We can make this election not about fear, but about the future. And that won’t just be a Democratic victory, that will be an American victory”). Syntactic parallelism, together with repetition, accumulation and nominal utterances, provide the linguistic template for the rhythmic variation introduced during the oral performance, allowing the speaker-turned-orator to truly embody his speech in the here-and-now of the oratorical moment. This effect is heightened by the fact that the speech is delivered, according to the format imposed by the Jefferson-Jackson dinner, entirely from memory: the orator appears more “at one” with the speech because it is not relayed via the physical presence of a written script.

A peak in terms of the staging of the signifier and the orator’s embodiment of his discourse punctuates a key passage of the speech, located in the build up to Obama’s peroration – precisely where Obama engages explicitly with an extended participant framework to bring about the incorporation of the community²⁶:

As President, / I will end / the war in Iraq. We will have our troops home in sixteen months. I will close Guantanamo, I will restore habeas corpus, I will finish the fight against Al Qaeda and

²⁴ F. Rossette, *Prendre la parole*, *op. cit.*

²⁵ Inaugural address, January 20, 1961.

²⁶ Slashes indicate pauses, double slashes a marked, prolonged pause.

I will lead the world / to combat the common threats of the twenty-first century: nuclear weapons and terrorism, / climate change and poverty, / genocide and disease.

And I will send, I will send once more a message / to those yearning faces beyond our shores that says: “You matter to us. / Your future // is our future. And our moment is now”. America, our moment / is now. // Our moment / is now. // [Applause: 11 sec.]

The excerpt begins with “As President, I will”, which launches the series of anaphora “I/we will...”. Repetition also features in the form of the refrain “our moment is now”, stated three times. Syntactic parallelism combines with accumulation in the pairings of nominal utterances (“nuclear weapons and terrorism, climate change and poverty, genocide and disease”). Obama enhances these figures by exploiting the full sensory vocal repertoire, not just at the extreme end of the scale (e.g. “yelling”), but also to “tone down” his speech: his voice speeds up and gets louder during the series of anaphora “I will...”, and then he immediately lowers his voice and multiplies his pauses, simulating a more reflective, profound tone when he addresses the message beyond American shores from “You matter to us” to “Our moment / is now”.

A prolonged pause between the second and final repetition of the line “our moment is now” serves to stage this final utterance²⁷. An intense period of applause is engendered, lasting eleven seconds. The audience physically connects up with the speaker and is swept up in the sensory experience of the performance – which contributes to the incorporation that operates at this very moment of the speech.

Indeed, Obama addresses a message “beyond our shores”. The segment of direct speech enlarges the field of potential addressees of the discourse and marks a first step towards an extended participant framework. At the end of the direct speech, Obama does not simply return to his live audience: instead, thanks to the apostrophe “America”, he extends his address to the entire country – the superaddressee here. Importantly, the direct audience is not made to feel that they are being pushed to the side-lines: they meet the utterance introduced by “America” with instant cheers. The immediate audience constitutes a necessary mediator in order to reach the wider community. At the same time, they are incorporated into this extensive body, “uplifted” as it were.

Moreover, if “America” instantiates the superaddressee here, it also informs the wider community: “America” is not limited spatially or temporally, and potentially extends to all generations of Americans, both the living and the dead. There is a sense of history in the making, of the dead looking down on the living, without forgetting the generations to come. The speaker-turned-orator takes up the American legacy, is incorporated, together with his addressees, into the community that constitutes the nation, defined by the values that are made explicit in the discourse. Elsewhere in the speech, Obama makes reference to “a common purpose, a *higher* purpose” (my emphasis), and cites the names of previous emblematic American presidents. The latter are Democrats, presented as the best party to serve the country at large (“the entire nation”), and are summoned to witness this oratorical/political moment:

This party, the party of Jefferson and Jackson, of Roosevelt and Kennedy, has always made the biggest difference in the lives of American people when we lead not by polls, but by principle, not by calculation, but by conviction, when we summoned the entire nation to a common purpose, a higher purpose. And I run for the presidency of the United States of America, because that is the party that America needs us to be right now.

²⁷ Space prevents me here from presenting a detailed analysis of prosody. For a study of the role of prosody in the staging of the signifier constituent of Rhetorical Staging, see Camille Debras and Fiona Rossette, “‘Now Is the Time’: The Interaction of Prosody and Syntax in Martin Luther King’s Speech ‘I have a Dream’”, in press.

Embodiment and incorporation in the Charleston eulogy

Just like the Jefferson-Jackson Dinner speech, the Charleston eulogy exemplifies the embodiment and the incorporation that underpin Rhetorical Staging, which culminates in the breaking out into song. Incorporation resulting from the extended participant structure can be identified from the outset. Indeed, there is a constituent link between Rhetorical Staging and the eulogy, a prototype of epideictic oratory, which commemorates the dead and celebrates and consolidates the values that define the community. The speaker therefore intrinsically takes the higher ground, to serve as mediator between the living and the dead. At the same time, the setup of Rhetorical Staging combines components of African American religious ritual that are adopted here by Obama (as typified in the breaking out into song) where preaching particularly focuses on embodiment and performance²⁸.

Obama speaks through the direct audience, members of the AME Church, to reach the nation at large. The scope of potential addressees expands through the speech, extending beyond the intimate circle of the family of the deceased, who are the first to be explicitly named: “To Jennifer, his beloved wife; to Eliana and Malana, his beautiful, wonderful daughters; to the Mother Emanuel family and the people of Charleston, the people of South Carolina”. Further into the speech, the President refers to members of the AME community as “our brothers and sisters”, hence including himself within this community: “Clem was often asked why he chose to be a pastor and a public servant. But the person who asked probably didn’t know the history of the AME church. As our brothers and sisters in the AME church know, we don't make those distinctions”. An interesting switch occurs when Obama not only represents himself as spokesperson for the AME Church – and the African American community –, but also as spokesperson for the nation at large:

To the families of the fallen, *the nation* shares in your grief. *Our pain* cuts that much deeper because it happened in a church. The church is and always has been *the center of African-American life*, a place to call *our own* in a too often hostile world, a sanctuary from so many hardships. (my emphasis)

Here, the juxtaposition of the first two utterances brings together “the nation” and “our pain”, two entities that can therefore be interpreted as coinciding (Obama continues to use the first-person plural possessive “our” when introducing the symbol of the church here). By presenting himself as spokesperson at both levels, he rises to the status of political leader and orator, and at the same time incorporates his direct audience, members of the AME Church, into the over-arching community of the American people – the superaddressee here.

Incorporation of the direct audience is corroborated by the song. Whether we choose to partake in it or not, the song penetrates our very being, our body. And the audience does indeed join in, following the ritual of the African American preaching tradition that brings together preacher and congregation to commune via chanting and song²⁹. Obama begins by singing a *cappella*, but quickly the members of the Church rise to their feet, then join in singing, followed by the organist, and then the rest of the audience:

²⁸ Fred Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, St Louis, Chalice Press, 2001; O. Wesley Allen, *The Renewed Homiletic*, Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2010.

²⁹ Bruce Rosenberg, *The Art of the American Folk Preacher*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1971.

[Singing] Amazing [audience laughter] grace, [members of the church on stage rise to their feet] how sweet the sound, [audience sings] that saved [organist joins in] a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now I'm found; was blind but now I see. [applause]

Insertion of music within the oratory template moreover creates a focus on the speaker's voice and body: he truly embodies his speech, coinciding with it in the here-and-now of the delivery. In addition, the orator's body plays a key role in the passage from speech to song. At the beginning of the peroration, reproduced below, a more determined look comes over Obama's face, and two precise movements of his clenched left hand punctuate the syntactic parallelism of the first two utterances. During the thirteen-second pause that precedes the shift to the singing, Obama does not make direct eye contact with his audience. First, he looks to his right, over the heads of his audience, for a prolonged moment, before looking down at his pulpit, as if isolating himself, re-centring, in a necessary private moment before the moment of communion in the song to follow. Again, the pause proves necessary, just like the repetition (the refrain "Amazing grace. Amazing grace"). Together, they operate the shift from monologic, declamatory mode to song. Repetition contributes to the high density of figures of speech (reproduced in bold) that create the necessary intensity for the peroration:

If we can find that grace, / anything is possible. / If we can tap that grace, / everything can change. /

[lowers voice] **Amazing grace.** // [pause: 4 sec.] **Amazing grace.** [pause: 13 sec.]

[Singing] Amazing [audience laughter] grace, [audience stands] how sweet the sound, [audience joins in] that saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now I'm found; was blind but now I see. [applause]

[yelling] Clementa Pinckney **found that grace.** / Cynthia Hurd **found that grace.** [audience: yeah!] / Susie Jackson **found that grace.** [audience: yeah!] / Ethel Lance **found that grace.** [audience: yeah!] / DePayne Middleton-Doctor **found that grace.** [audience: yeah!] / Tywanza Sanders **found that grace.** [audience: yeah!] / Daniel L. Simmons, Sr. **found that grace.** [audience: yeah!] / Sharonda Coleman-Singleton **found that grace.** [audience: yeah!] / Myra Thompson **found that grace.** [audience: yeah!] /

Through the example of their lives, / they've now passed it on to us. / **May** we find ourselves worthy of that **precious / and extraordinary** gift, / as long as our lives endure. / **May** grace now lead them home. / **May** God continue to shed His grace / on the United / States of America.

The passage contains repetition in its various forms: refrain ("Amazing grace. Amazing grace."), end repetition ("Clementa Pinckney found that grace. Cynthia Hurd found that grace...") and anaphora ("May we find ourselves worthy... May... May..."). To these can be added the syntactic parallelism ("If we can...If we can...") combining with antithesis ("anything" / "everything") of the first utterance, and accumulation via pairing ("that precious and extraordinary gift").

Prosodic variation produces a contrast in vocal intensity (loud versus soft) and speed (fast versus slow versus silence)³⁰. Of particular note is the marked pause just before the end of the final utterance, located in the middle of a syntactic unit, the nominal phrase in "May God continue to shed His grace on *the United / States of America*", which serves to emphasise *and enact* the unification signified by the adjective "United". A particularly marked example of staging combining rhetorical and prosodic means occurs just after the

³⁰ Obama also exploits vowel lengthening ("may we find ourselves..."; "as long as our lives endure"), another tool that stages the signifier in the context of public address and that reflects a hybrid mode, somewhere between speaking and singing.

singing, when the names of the deceased are enumerated. The series of litany-like utterances is informed by end repetition, with each name followed by the predicate “found that grace” (“Clementa Pinckney found that grace. Cynthia Hurd found that grace [...]”). This is staged vocally thanks to a contrast between fast, loud delivery and the pause that punctuates the end of each utterance. As in the Jefferson-Jackson Dinner speech, the pause by the orator plays an essential role in establishing the connection with the audience: the orator’s silence frees the oratorical space, acts as a cue, and shifts the impetus onto the audience. At the end of each utterance, the audience yells “yeah!”, accompanied by several notes from the organist – again, a practice deriving from the African American preaching tradition. In a rallying around of the names of the deceased, ultimate signifiers to be staged in an ultimate homage, this passage crystallises the incorporation of orator and audience, who are brought together in the same sensory experience, and find their place within the same body.

Conclusion

Both the Jefferson-Jackson campaign speech and the eulogy pronounced in Charleston provide striking examples of Rhetorical Staging, which sublimates the oral medium in the context of public address. Both speeches constitute highly charged, quasi-performative oratorical moments, which intricately weave together the processes of embodiment and incorporation. The former serves the latter. It can even be posited that it is Obama’s person and his specific speaking style that allow him to embody his discourse (especially via body language and prosody) and carry it off – a sublimated speaking style that does not come to mind when we think of some other contemporary American politicians, such as Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump.

Embodiment of the discourse rests upon the staging of the signifier, which brings into play the full sensory repertoire – extending, in the latter example, to singing. By truly embodying his/her discourse, the speaker-turned-orator is able to instantiate a far-reaching community that incorporates both him/herself and members of the direct audience.

From a spatial point of view, two movements can be distinguished, one that is concentric and another that is upward-reaching. It is via a concentric movement that the speaker comes to embody his/her discourse: there is a reduction of meaning on the denotative plane, and a re-centring on the body of the speaker. At the same time, by enacting a higher status, the speaker-turned orator produces a discourse that construes a body, a community that, in the context of a political speech, potentially extends to the nation at large.

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