Fiona Rossette-Crake, **Digital Oratory as Discursive Practice: From the Podium to the Screen**, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022, 323 pp., $99.00 (eBook).

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How is the contemporary media ecosystem—including TED talks, 3MT presentations, and TikTok videos—transforming oratory? The answer to this question depends on the approach one adopts to the subject matter. In the United States, answers typically come from two sources: public speaking pedagogy, committed to equipping speakers with the necessary skills to craft speeches that respond to the demands and affordances of digital technologies, or from rhetoricians who seek to understand and critique particular performances of oratory in the digital environment.

Fiona Rossette-Crake adopts an alternative approach that regards oratory as a discursive practice, as the context-bound social activity of speech giving. **Digital Oratory as Discursive Practice: From the Podium to the Screen** is a comprehensive study of communicative choices contemporary orators make in particular contexts, the technologies prompting them to make those choices, and the cultural and economic ideologies that render those choices meaningful. Rossette-Crake prefers the term "oratory" to "public speaking" and "public address" because it "creates an explicit link between past and present practice, as well as between past and present scholarship" (p. 42). She, however, does not aim to provide a complete historical overview of the evolution of various forms of oratory, but rather to capture the most recent transformations of the traditional view of public speaking: a speaker addressing a copresent audience from behind a lectern. Neither is the book a how-to guide to public speaking; it is a detailed and extensively researched account of the "moving parts" and variables of oratory in the early 21st century.

For the author, oratory refers to a particular range of public expression with the following "communication setup" (p. 92): spoken, monologic, serious, thesis-driven discourse, presented by an embodied speaker to relatively large audiences, and embedded in institutional contexts—including digital platforms—that provide the speaker privileged access to the conversational floor. Such discourse follows the norms and expectations of the institutional context, is carefully planned and staged as opposed to spontaneous, and is thus relatively formal relative to everyday conversation.

As a discourse analyst working in the tradition of the social sciences, Rossette-Crake is fascinated by oratory as a discursive accomplishment. Discourse analysts in the Western world, the author agrees with Dominique Maingueneau (2017), typically pursue explanations of how people participate in everyday conversations, or how they compose coherent texts that conform to the norms of particular genres. Given the predilections of the field, oratory is a somewhat unusual choice of data for discourse analysis. Nonetheless,
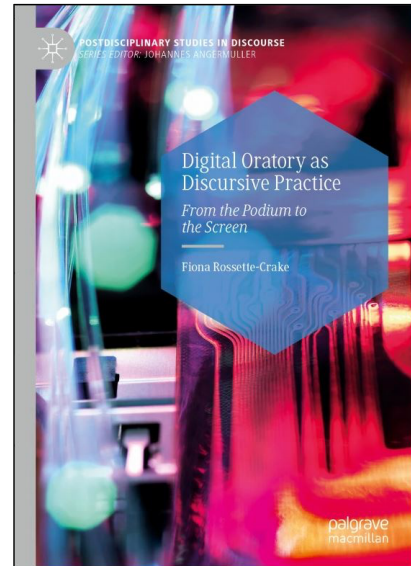
Rossette-Crake refuses to shoehorn oratory into the categories of conversational or textual practices. Rather, she treats oratory as sharing features with both, namely the spoken and embodied character of conversation, and the formality and planning of writing.

The perennial challenge for any orator is to span boundaries between themselves and their audience or, increasingly, audiences, and establish a relationship in which the common functions of oratory (persuasion, condemnation/defense, celebration) can be fulfilled. Oratory is asymmetrical discourse in that it features a speaker who, due to complex institutional arrangements, is given the conversational "right" to hold the floor for an extended period of time, and an audience who yields that right to the speaker. Having the "right" to the floor, however, does not guarantee that the audience will support and appreciate the speaker's performance. Drawing on Goffman's (1981) work on various forms of talk, Rossette-Crake describes the speaker as having to "pay" for the audience's attention with making their words, bodies, and material environment fully available to audience scrutiny. Speakers are, thus, under enormous pressure to work against the various kind of separations oratory as a communication practice places between them and their audiences. Depending on the genre and medium of oratory the speaker chooses, these separations may include discursive asymmetry itself (the one versus the many), but also spatial separation (the lectern and podium separating speaker and audience; geographically dispersed audiences), technological separation (the screens of televisions, computers, and phones), temporal separation (live audiences as opposed to audiences streaming recordings), and differential control over content (audience members' ability to edit recordings of speeches and to broadly disseminate snippets).

*Digital Oratory as Discursive Practice* catalogues the ways in which contemporary orators communicate to traverse these separations across four categories of oratory. Practitioners of podium or lectern oratory lean into the asymmetry separating them from their audience. Employing what Rossette-Crake calls rhetorical staging, they position themselves as superspeakers capable of creating speaking situations in which "a member of the audience feels part of something bigger simply by the fact that s/he is one of a number of members of the audience" (p. 245). They unite audiences into communities with a common purpose. Practitioners of New Oratory (including TED talks, 3MT presentations, and investor pitches) tend more toward Dialogic Staging, which symbolically reduces social distance between speakers and addressees. The archetypal new orator, Steve Jobs, removes the lectern, uses informal language, foregrounds his speaking self, and approximates the lexical density and pace of everyday conversation. Fully digitalized oratory like President Zelensky's online addresses moves oratory entirely to the screen, visually centers the "talking head," carefully configures the setting and embodiment to render the speaker more personable, and embeds videos in online environments that make it easier for composite, multilingual audiences to access and interpret them. Finally, social media oratory exemplified by Charli D'Amelio on TikTok and (Crazy) Sally on Instagram invest the most heavily into dialogic staging and seek to accomplish authenticity and intimacy by using various forms of "backstaging" (bringing oratory into private environments such as their bedrooms), emphasizing the here and now by drawing heavily on deictic references and addressing their nonpresent audience members directly, and using a narrative style of argumentation. These discursive techniques, Rossette-Crake reminds us, are not unique to the four categories of oratory; the difference between the categories derives from how they prioritize various types of available discursive and technological resources.

Throughout the book, the author situates contemporary changes to oratory in broader sociocultural and economic contexts. She notes, for example, the role COVID-19 played in the rise of fully digitalized oratory. She also argues that the changes she documents are precipitated and rendered reasonable by Anglo-American communication culture (Cameron, 2000) and the economic logic of neoliberalism that attaches value to individual branding, performances of authenticity, and entertainment.

Although the structure of *Digital Oratory as Discursive Practice* is logical and easy to follow, the lack of a concluding chapter that develops and ties together some of the theoretical threads woven through the book is somewhat surprising. A particularly promising thread is the shifting relationship between speech and textuality. Beyond showing that oratory itself is a curious mix of writing and speech, Rosette-Crake signals that social media blur the boundary further by making room for written audience engagement. On social media platforms, writing imitates speech by matching its speed, and instantaneous written speech leaves a reproducible trace. The author floats the possibility of theorizing new manifestations of the speech/writing nexus as a "third orality" (p. 68)—a play on Ong's (1982) second orality—but does not develop this concept further. In various chapters, the reader encounters other theoretical threads that respond to the following questions: In what sense do digital interfaces act as structures enabling and constraining oratory, and in what sense are those structures "institutional" (see chapters 3 and 11)? How do, as the author argues in chapter 4, communication culture and neoliberal ideology precipitate oratory's return to the classical canons of rhetoric, and with what consequences? Through what discursive and other related processes do Anglo-American norms of oratory accomplish cultural mobility and dominance (see chapters 1 and 6)? And, what degree of authenticity and interpersonal connection can orators accomplish given the discursive and technological means at their disposal (see chapters 3 and 7)? A concluding chapter would have rounded out this remarkable book, along with a comprehensive list of references.

The book is an indispensable guide for all communication scholars interested in how oratory is done, as opposed to how it should be done. Rossette-Crake shows that as the sociotechnical context of oratory changes, the ways we engage in oratory must also change. That transformation, she argues, runs deep and opens up a range of new communicative possibilities. However, it also leaves the fundamental discursive challenges of speech making in their place, such as successfully positioning oratory between speech and textuality, fostering identification with diverse audiences, and understanding the possibilities and limitations of using speech to motivate audiences to action.

## References

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