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# Rhetoric's Sensorium

Debra Hawhee

*This essay reflects on the last 100 years of sensation in the journal to figure out where and when scholars in the field have concerned themselves with sensuous activity, how that activity is seen to interact with language, knowledge, and speech. The past can serve to some extent as a “rough guide,” showing gaps and leaps as well as modeling specific approaches.*

*Keywords: Sensorium; Sensation; Feeling; Emotion; Affect*

The chart that serves as this article's epigraph (Figure 1) appeared in this journal eighty years ago. It is a remarkable artifact of the discipline. For starters, it appears to anticipate the rhetorical triangle, zoomed in, though, on one side: the “speaker–audience relationship.” The article in which the chart appears, co-authored by L. S. Judson and D. E. Rodden, follows the suggestion made in 1915 by the newly formed Research Committee of the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking that researchers ought to investigate, among other things, “what processes are most valuable in the preparation and delivery of addresses in order to secure certain definite results in the audience.”<sup>1</sup> In order to think about the speaker–audience relationship, Judson and Rodden meld sources ranging from William James to contemporary physiologists to Cicero, all of whom turn up sensation.

And then there is what fills the sphere shared by speaker and audience: hearing (sound), sight (light), and “other senses,” catalogued in the article as “external senses.” These include: “touch (temperature and pressure), e.g., comfortable or uncomfortable chairs; *taste*, e.g., cigars or candy; *smell*, subtle perfumes or attention to ventilation”; and the “internal senses”: “*pain; muscle, tendon, joint sense; equilibratory senses; hunger; thirst; sexual sense; fatigue*; and indefinite but

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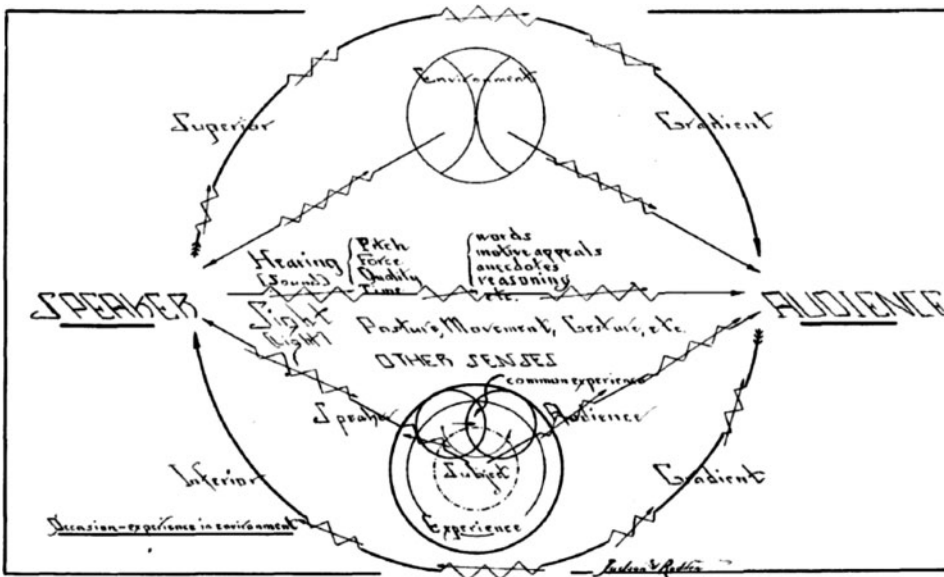


Figure 1 Speaker–audience relationship.<sup>2</sup>

demonstrable *visceral organ senses*.<sup>3</sup> In other words, a host of bodily processes are enlisted in a speaker–audience exchange, most of them sensuous.

To render what happens between speaker and audience, Judson and Rodden explicitly use the language of electricity—stimulant, reactor, and *voltage*: “We have used the jagged lines and arrows (the electrical symbol for a variable resistance) between the *stimulator* and *reactor* to represent the resistance which must be overcome in order to obtain the desired action.”<sup>4</sup> They go on to discuss the energy (voltage) necessary to stimulate the audience, but they caution against using an amount of energy “so great as to destroy the circuit.”<sup>5</sup> The notion of energy comes up repeatedly with discussions of sensation in the context of rhetoric. As does the idea of experience, which the authors note ought to be “infinitely larger” than the diagram allows.<sup>6</sup> The authors fit in “experience” with the indirect use of the “minor senses”—or the use of words to tap past experiences:

Does the listener remember the smell of new-mown hay at daybreak? Can he recapture the fragrance of the lilac hedge past which he trudged when as a youngster he attended grade school? Recall to the memory of the hearer the chilling, penetrating, icy blasts of some past winter.<sup>7</sup>

Judson and Rodden then figure the senses as “ferries” that “we may use to carry our stimuli.”<sup>8</sup> This chart, in other words, attempts to encapsulate that which eludes encapsulation: the vast range of experiences, the infinite variety of ways that listeners might be “keyed up.”

Judson and Rodden’s is one of many essays appearing in the pages of this journal that attempt to situate the discipline as concerned with more than—and often something entirely other than—reason, rationality, or the symbolic work of language.

That effort of course includes the recent rise in work on materiality, bodies, affect, media, objects, machines, nonhuman animals; the list ought to go on. It would be a mistake to assume that this set of concerns are only of this moment, of the now. Indeed, the past 100 years of this journal (and the discipline of rhetorical studies with communication leanings) exhibit a concern with sensation, or with what one might, if one were to follow Marshall McLuhan, call the sensorium.

The Janus-faced spirit of this centennial issue yields my twofold aim: (1) to inspect the work of sensation and the senses over the past ten decades; and (2) to offer additional thoughts on where such work might go in the coming ones. The observations that follow pick through results of basic literature searches of this journal's archives using a combination of Taylor & Francis's search mechanism and Google Scholar. The searches capture only two terms—"sensation" and "senses"—chosen in hopes of netting published work that considers sensation and the senses *as such*.<sup>9</sup> The results provide a glimpse (if imperfect) of the last 100 years of sensation (Figure 2). Briefly, the first decades of the journal exhibit fairly consistent concern with sensation as a mode of learning and as a part of speaking, two of the major concerns of the nascent field as reflected in the journal's first two titles, *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* and *Quarterly Journal of Speech Education*. Indeed, a closer look at the first two issues of the journal will show just how important sensation was for the research agenda laid out there. Before going back a century, though, I first want to explain the concept of the sensorium.

### The Feeling of the Sensorium

As a concept, the "sensorium" has a history of uses in both art and science. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one of the earliest documented uses may be found in the writings of the seventeenth-century poet, philosopher, and theologian Henry More, who observed that "there is first a tactuall conjunction as it were of the representative rayes of every thing, with our sensorium before we know the things themselves."<sup>10</sup> More's "tactuall conjunction"—this tactile joining with stuff in the

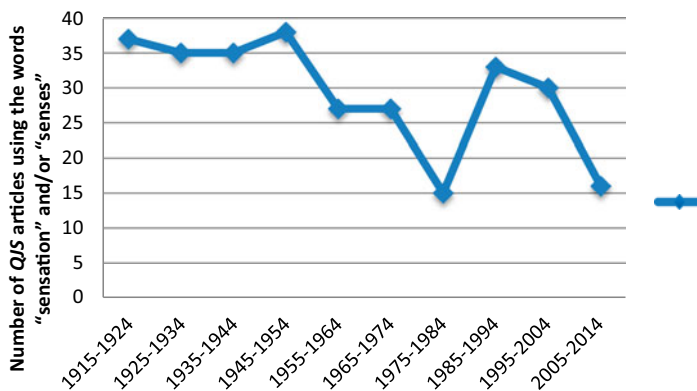


Figure 2 Ten decades of sensation.

world—places the sensorium prior to knowledge, as something of a pre-sifter of sensible emissions (“rayes of every thing”). Writing two centuries after More, Charles Darwin used the term “sensorium” as a gateway to bodily action in his *Expression of the Emotions of Man and Animal*: “When the sensorium is strongly excited, the muscles of the body are generally thrown into violent action.”<sup>11</sup> So the sensorium, that excitable point of conjoining, is the corporeal limn that guides sensory perception. It is the participial stem of the Latin *sentire*, a physical verb that means to *discern by the senses; to feel, hear, see, etc.; to perceive, be sensible of*.<sup>12</sup> Sensorium therefore names a locus of feeling, and yet that locus is not confined to presumed bodily boundaries, especially when technology is considered. McLuhan’s expansive notion of the sensorium designates the interconnected senses, and at times—as Joshua Gunn notes—also includes sensation ecologies, especially technological ones.<sup>13</sup> More recently, cultural theorist Lauren Berlant has pinned various descriptors to it, e.g., “apprehending sensorium,” “historical sensorium,” “mass sensorium,” demonstrating at the very least the term’s flexibility.<sup>14</sup>

Over the past 100 years, the word “sensorium” has appeared in eight QJS essays, half of them in the new millennium.<sup>15</sup> This is a small drop in the bucket of words published in this journal, to be sure, but very recent work appearing here and elsewhere has begun to reveal the term’s potential. For starters, the idea of the sensorium refuses to separate the senses, to cordon them off into a “subfield” (e.g., visual studies or sound studies). The term rarely appears in the plural, it just seems to expand from individual to collective, like breath. Joseph Dumit, in one of my favorite definitions, characterizes the sensorium as “the sensing package that constitutes our participation in the world.”<sup>16</sup> The idea of a sensing package, a bundle of constitutive, participatory tendrils, may help press past commonplace conditional observations—e.g., *that* rhetorical activity is embodied—and could offer a way to think about connective, participatory dimensions of sensing. This I think is where sensation can go. But where has it been?

## The Early Years: Sensation and Research Approaches

### *Impression/Expression (Feeling, Speaking)*

Issues one and two of the first volume of *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* show how sensation came pre-installed as a relevant area of inquiry for scholars and practitioners in the emerging discipline. That discipline necessarily drew from allied ones, as James A. Winans wrote in “The Need for Research”: “our field touches many another, especially psychology, education, and English.”<sup>17</sup> The inaugural issue featured a nine-page “report of progress made in formulating ideals and plans for research work in public speaking.”<sup>18</sup> This report, composed by the newly assembled Research Committee of the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking, chaired by J. S. Gaylord of Normal School in Winona, Minnesota, characterizes the nascent field as having practical origins and aspirations for science research. A concern for sensation, as will become clear by the second issue, figures

into the field's early commitments to both education and science. The research committee explicitly works to set an organized research agenda, and it does so by outlining the knowledge domains necessary for students aspiring to study public speaking as an academic subject, explaining each with a host of questions. The first domain, "the structure and function of experience," includes questions ranging from "Of what does a valuable educative experience consist?" to "What part do perceptions, images, ideas, thoughts, feelings, and purposes have in determining men's experiences?" and "What relations exist between the work of the vital organs (heart, lungs, glands, etc.) and the different kinds of experiences?"<sup>19</sup> The second domain, "the processes involved in studying and learning," offers twelve subheads, with points one through six assuming a progression:

- (1) Impressions through one or more of the senses.
- (2) General, more or less vague central processes.
- (3) Corresponding bodily processes and movements of expression.
- (4) More complex impressions resulting from 1 and 3.
- (5) More vivid and definite central processes (images, ideas, etc.).
- (6) More animated and complete movements of expression.

Point 7 moves back through the previous points: "A more systematic group of impressions resulting from 1, 3, 4, and 6," and point 8 names "more fully organized central processes (thoughts, plans purposes, etc.)." Not until point 9 does the committee name "communication with other persons." Communication appears to bring with it a category of the social, which the committee threads back through the previous points:

- (10) Socialized impressions resulting from 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 9.
- (11) Socialized and idealized central processes (purposes and ideals).

This research agenda effectively names the variety of sensory experiences that would appear in the early pages of the journal, and it also dictates a certain recursivity, the way the research moves to "higher-order" processes while still returning to basic sense impressions named in point 1. It acknowledges, however tacitly, the constitutive role of sensation in early speech research: the senses were thought to guide thoughts and feelings as much as they guide the expression of those thoughts and feelings.

*"Stirring Thought": Charles Henry Woolbert and the Psychology of Sensation*

If the research committee explicitly set the field's research agenda in the first issue of the *Quarterly Journal*, the second issue did so implicitly, especially vis-à-vis sensation. Of the thirty-seven articles using the terms sensation or senses that appeared in the journal's first decade, five were written by Woolbert. His first mention of sensation links sound sensation to the field of psychology (the field in which he would receive a Harvard Ph.D. in 1918). "Speaking in terms of psychology," writes Woolbert, "what actually reaches the consciousness of the hearer is *sensation of sound*." He elaborates:

the sounds carry meanings to the hearer; these meanings are meanings of ideas, images, concepts, but of ideas, images, and concepts that already exist in the mind of the listener. "Carrying thought" might much better be changed, from one point of view, to *stirring* thought; sounds cannot carry any meaning not already present in the mind of the hearer. The meanings that sounds carry can be cumulated, piled up, broken up, dissolved, added, subtracted, multiplied, divided into infinite permutations and combinations. In this way new images are made, new ideas established, new concepts set up, and new judgments formed.<sup>20</sup>

With this reflection on the relationship between sound sensation and meaning, Woolbert effectively sets sensations, more than words, as the focus of speech science. The sheer materiality of sensation travels into meaning itself: stirred air stirs meaning. By the end of the passage, meaning takes on a material life of its own, and its capacity to pile, break, dissolve, and yield the new depends always, at every turn, on sensation.

### *The Speech Healers—Or Smiley Blanton's Watch*

Appearing twenty pages after Woolbert's contribution to the second issue was an article by Smiley Blanton, M.D., of the University of Wisconsin, entitled simply "The Voice and the Emotions." This piece is worth noting for the care with which it maps sensation as much as for its quick slide into matters of pathology. After observing early in the essay that "It is not necessary to define what a sensation is," Blanton goes on not only to do just that but to explain how sensation relates to feeling, perception, emotion, mood, and ultimately, voice.<sup>21</sup> The definition of sensation he offers is drawn from Edward B. Titchener, a well-known psychologist and Winans's colleague at Cornell University: "an elementary mental process which is constituted of at least four attributes: quality, intensity, clearness, and duration."<sup>22</sup> From there, Blanton describes feeling (or affection) as "the reaction of the organism to every sensation." In short, and in Blanton's words, "feeling is diffuse."<sup>23</sup>

On his way to explaining perception, Blanton pauses to dwell on sensing as an extremely complex operation, and in doing so, he offers the journal's first articulation of speech's sensorium (quoted phrases and sentences are drawn from Titchener):

Suppose we hold a watch in our hand. We feel its weight; its roughness or smoothness; we hear ticking; see its shape, size, color, the different parts. All these sensations enter into the mind at once, and the mind binds all these sensations together and attaches to it a meaning and the word "watch." ... All of the sensations making up the perception "watch" are so bound together that we can hardly separate them by analysis. We think of them, not separately, but as the object "watch." "Sensations are welded together, therefore, under the influence or at the bidding of our physical surroundings. A perception always means something: stands for some object" or situation.<sup>24</sup>

The binding together of sensations therefore simultaneously produces meaning and perception. Blanton's care to refer back to the "surroundings," the object, and the situation is notable: the sensorium can never be unmoored from its location; its moment matters a great deal. Under Smiley Blanton's watch, the discipline moved in a distinct direction.



The direction Blanton went is of course to pathology, to treating speech “defects.” But first he offers Titchener’s distinction between emotion and feeling/affection, a distinction worth considering given the contemporary fondness for—to the point of insistence on—a particular distinction between emotion and affect. For Titchener, and hence for Blanton, emotion designates “a number of fused simple feelings excited by a group of perceptions or ideas.”<sup>25</sup> These perceptions and ideas “constitute the intellect, the reaction the emotion.”<sup>26</sup> According to Blanton, action is the way someone meets a situation. Such operations are extremely complex, and they are often unpleasant.

Unpleasantness, in fact, guides Blanton’s account of how speech defects happen. The second half of his article focuses specifically on effects unpleasant emotions have on the body’s vocal resonators. As an example, Blanton writes, “Hard, tense muscles cause the tone to become harsh and unpleasing. Such tones occur through the influence of anger.”<sup>27</sup> At the root of many speech defects, then, Blanton finds “abnormal emotion,” and so his solution is simple: “control the emotions.” To do so, Blanton recommends “a mind drill ... which will be conducive to the presence of the pleasant emotions.”<sup>28</sup> Blanton’s article, therefore, shows the early foundations of the discipline developing around the idea of redirecting sensation from “abnormal” to “normal,” both physically and emotionally (or at least on its way to forming emotions).

#### *Aesthēsis and The Oratorical Imagination*

One more article from issue two bears mentioning, and it happens to be the one appearing on the intervening pages between Woolbert’s and Blanton’s contributions. Whereas Woolbert and Blanton consider the philosophical and scientific bases of the emerging discipline respectively, this article, entitled simply “Imagination in Oratory,” and written by Binney Gunnison, grounds the discipline in art. Here is the first sentence: “In all art the psychic activity of man manifests itself through some outward, physical form or medium to the sense of those who receive its message.”<sup>29</sup> Linking the art of the orator to that of the pianist, violinist, or painter, Gunnison nevertheless laments the utter absence of such spontaneity in the wooden countenance of the orator, whose “emotion is artificially worked up or thrust upon us, and his appeal is mechanical and ineffective.”<sup>30</sup> The solution, according to Gunnison, is to cultivate the imagination with literature. Even more interestingly, Gunnison goes on to argue that education is a process of destroying imagination, and its ability to “to see images, hear sounds, feel substances, taste foods, and smell odors,” replacing the imagination with the blunt edges of reason.<sup>31</sup>

This idea of imagination’s capacity to activate the senses dates back to the ancient Greeks and their notion of *phantasia*.<sup>32</sup> And for Gunnison, the imagination is “remedy” for a host of “bad tendencies” on the part of the orator.<sup>33</sup> Here is what he proposes:

The orator has little use for an imaginative world three inches in diameter. His world must be twenty feet in diameter and must include every atom of his own

body and all the people whom he wishes to address. He must see clearly every idea he expresses—and he must see it before he expresses it—and he must express it because he sees it and is looking at it.<sup>34</sup>

This sort of imaginative expansion, the full embrace of *phantasia*, allows the orator to get outside of what Gunnison calls “the expression of his own mind and feeling” and to reckon that with “the temper and attitude of his audience.”<sup>35</sup> Gunnison’s view of oratory refigures the art as a bringing together of sensations, thoughts, feelings, attitudes. His vision of imaginative oratory focuses on the speaker/audience meeting point and posits imagination as crucial for facilitating such a meeting point.

In complement to the Research Committee’s recursive theory of sensation in issue one, issue two, specifically, projects three major approaches to sensation taken in subsequent volumes of *The Quarterly Journal*: philosophy of language; speech pathology; aesthetics. As my opening discussion of Judson and Rodden’s chart suggests, in the background of much of this research was the speaker–audience “circuit,” and the relationship between sensation and experience. These early interventions also relate sensation to other components of speaking (bodies, emotions, meaning, imagination). In the space remaining, I wish to elaborate the directions these approaches took and how they swayed, bent, and at times entwined as the journal shifted from a focus on speaking and pedagogy to theory and criticism. In lieu of a copious survey, I will offer over an overview of sensation in the journal’s fourth decade, chosen as much for its mid-century position as its range of treatments of sensation. From there I will detail the sharp decline of treatments in sensation in the eighth decade, and then discuss its return.

### Mid-Century: A Variety of Sensory Experiences<sup>36</sup>

As I have suggested, examining the early history of the discipline through the roles of sensation reveals the field’s multiple commitments to education, to public speaking, to speech science, and to the aesthetic elements of performance. A glance at volumes 31–40, published from 1945 to 1954, shows that those commitments persisted even as rhetorical criticism and theory began to take a more central role in the journal. The journal’s fourth decade shows sensation and the senses receiving at least a mention in articles about speech defects;<sup>37</sup> phonetics and voice science,<sup>38</sup> including treatments of dialect;<sup>39</sup> aesthetic treatments of speaking,<sup>40</sup> including stage theory,<sup>41</sup> theories of comedy,<sup>42</sup> and the resilient topic of interpretive reading, one article on which asserts plainly that “the senses exist to be exercised.”<sup>43</sup> During this decade, sensation began to make an appearance, too, in criticism.<sup>44</sup> Under the editorship of Marie Hochmuth, the journal saw a surge of articles by and about Kenneth Burke, including his tripartite discussion of dramatism in the context of the origins of language, which offers a highly sensuous treatment of language.<sup>45</sup> And yet despite the fact that Kenneth Burke, Communication’s rhetorical oracle, came to the discipline concerned with sensation, as I argue elsewhere, he was not taken up in that vein.<sup>46</sup> Burke fit equally well with epistemic rhetoric, the rise of which corresponded with the discipline’s separation from the senses.

### Epistemic Rhetoric

With the rise of epistemic rhetoric in the 1960s came a conception of rhetoric as a way of knowing, and rhetorical theorists began to elevate rhetoric above sensation as a—if not the—way of knowing.<sup>47</sup> Writing in the mid-1980s, Walter M. Carleton puts it plainly:

Development of the notion of rhetoric-as-epistemic in the 1970s (following Robert L. Scott's initial articulation of it in 1967) focused on the sense in which communication, as opposed to some other instrumentality (sensation, for example), might properly be said to give rise to human knowledge.<sup>48</sup>

Barry Brummett's intersubjective theory of rhetoric emphasizes the interpretive act layered over top of sensation: "sense data by themselves are not experience. Experience is sensation plus *meaning*. Sensation alone is *meaningless*."<sup>49</sup> In a vein similar to Brummett's, Thomas Frenzt, writing in 1985, offers epistemologist Ernst Cassirer's observation that "neither things in themselves nor sensations in themselves explain the fundamental relation that confronts us in temporal consciousness."<sup>50</sup> In short, epistemic rhetoric and certain versions of postmodern rhetoric (e.g., Brummett's early articulation of intersubjective rhetoric) shunted sensation to the side.

### The Eternal Return of Aesthetics

Epistemic rhetoric is an important context for the resurgence of a category of philosophical aesthetics. John Poulakos and Steve Whitson begin their 1993 account—what would become a series of accounts—of Nietzschean aesthetic rhetoric by explicitly considering Robert Scott's then-recent recanting of epistemic rhetoric. In the emphatic words of Poulakos and Whitson, "Nietzsche provides a discursive lifeboat for all who have abandoned the ship of epistemics."<sup>51</sup> Put simply, Nietzschean perspectivism continually rubs the noses of humans in the limitations of their consciousness, especially pointing to the "error of presuming to know vis-à-vis sensory data."<sup>52</sup> Their essay goes on to contrast with epistemic rhetoric an aesthetic rhetoric derived from Nietzsche. As the collaborators put it in a later piece closing out a section entitled "A sensorial theory of rhetoric": "An aesthetic rhetoric counts on, attends to, and takes into account the body and its senses; an epistemic rhetoric tries to bypass them but cannot."<sup>53</sup> The capacity of words to activate the senses is an assumption that threads through most if not all of the aesthetically oriented treatments of sensation in the journal's early decades, and it links in with the ability of words to infiltrate the imagination.<sup>54</sup> With an emphasis on "charm and impact," on vocal resonance, and on the "physiology of the ears, the larynx, and the lungs,"<sup>55</sup> Poulakos and Whitson present a thoroughly sensuous theory of rhetoric, one that calls into question the categories of "knowledge" and representation without denying the possibility of transformation through communicative contact.

### Sensorium Criticum: Cinema and Radio

In the journal's last quarter-century or so, the most robust critical enactments of something like an aesthetic rhetoric may be found in media-based criticism of television, radio, and—notably—cinema. Martin J. Medhurst's 1982 treatment of the film *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* is a Nietzschean account of art inasmuch as it locates in the film a critique of epistemology. Medhurst's account of the film, accordingly, attends with great care to the ways this film in particular engages multiple senses simultaneously. And on Medhurst's reading, the film's director, Alain Resnais, exploits the human sensorium to paradoxically challenge the "conclusions" made by the sensorium:

Through the repetition of these images which invites the participation of the entire sensorium, Resnais constructs an intellectual montage the central message of which is "the impossibility of documenting," in any adequate way, one's own experience, one's own quest to know, one's own interpretation of reality. In Resnais' world, facts divorced from feeling yield only deformity.<sup>56</sup>

In 1994, Sonja K. Foss and Karen A. Foss present a multi-sensory version of rhetorical style that refuses the problems introduced by a strictly visual perspective.<sup>57</sup> Foss and Foss cull from the beloved radio host Garrison Keillor a multi-sensory approach to communication, one that for them, refuses to privilege vision and therefore, in keeping with then-current feminist critiques of vision, Foss and Foss argue, constitutes "a feminine speaking style."<sup>58</sup> This piece has been taken up in scholarship treating a range of popular culture phenomena, and interesting is how their version of "feminine style" depends on Keillor's enlisting of multiple senses, which, Foss and Foss argue, collapses distance and creates a nearness:

Because the senses other than sight cannot be reduced to the mere collection of information but involve a **more direct experience of the environment**, Keillor ... centers understanding instead in the subjective, individual experiences of his listeners and in their **participatory involvement in the world through an array of senses**—not just sight.<sup>59</sup>

The phrases in bold here are, to be sure, not the ones that would have received much notice when Foss and Foss's article originally appeared in the early 1990s. But their observations about sensuous contact, "direct experience," and "participatory involvement" posit a version of rhetoric's sensorium, and a feminist one at that. Medhurst and Foss and Foss prompt a return to Dumit's notion of the sensorium as "the sensing package that constitutes our participation in the world," and in these instances we can see a tendency to generalize the sensorium or even to locate it in the words themselves.

As noted above, the sensorium can expand individual sets of sensations to what Brian L. Ott and Diane Marie Keeling, drawing on Kenneth Burke, call "common sensations."<sup>60</sup> Indeed, together with Joshua Gunn, who also frequently writes about cinema and sound studies, Brian Ott and Keeling and Ott and Gordana Lazić are using cinema to reaffirm the importance of the sensorium.<sup>61</sup> Cinema lends itself to such reflection; as Ott puts it in one recent essay, "because of its hybridized mode of

expression involving music, sound, speech, and moving images, cinema is among the most figural and thus sensual of the arts.”<sup>62</sup> Cinema, too, offers the nearer parallel to digital worlds (indeed it is now, of course, itself a digital medium). The move of digital lives toward the social—especially in light of interactive platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram—resonates with Medhurst’s 1982 observation about the need to save appearances. That shift calls for a more robust theory of the sensorium, but that theory needs to be created deliberately and cautiously, and it ought to resist presuming sameness across senses, even as it examines the pulses of existence that run through our media and—by extension—through us.

### Feeling Rhetoric

And so at the century-mark the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* may find itself once again—or still—concerned with sensation, with the sensorium. The journal’s concern has shifted from public speaking and education, pathology and psychology, to rhetorical theory and criticism, though often if not always with eyes on categories of public life and politics. And yet it seems to me to leave the sensorium lodged in work on film or music would be to give it the short shrift.

In order for sensation to become more broadly relevant, though, here are some questions that could stand to be addressed. First, is there a useful distinction between sensation and affect? The contemporary fondness for the latter term—inspired by Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, and Brian Massumi among others—has in many ways overshadowed the former, or (at best) led to their apposition.<sup>63</sup> Second, how does sensation figure into rhetorical processes? It’s possible that the research committee of 1915, with their recursive model of sensation, might be a place to begin again. At the very least, we could stand to take a lead from their attempts to theorize sensation. Third, one of the biggest challenges of rhetoric’s sensorium would seem to be this: how to write about sensation without positing an individual as opposed to a collective, or of thinking in terms of communal sensation, without presuming sameness? If rhetorical theorists were to take seriously the participatory dimension of the sensorium, we might find more specific ways to think about political feeling that does not simply stall with the emotion/affect distinction. Work by theorists Lauren Berlant and Anne Cvetkovich provides a productive direction,<sup>64</sup> especially if read alongside moments when sensation sidles up to public participation in the pages of this journal.

In their 2002 article on the iconic Iwo Jima photograph, Robert Hariman and John Lucaites offer David Hume’s observation “that we feel more through the public exposure to others’ emotions than through an interior circuit of sensation.”<sup>65</sup> Feeling is a flexible term that can go the direction of sensation—recall the sensorium’s roots in feeling—and/or emotion. Rather than rehearsing the accepted division between emotion and affect as known and inchoate respectively, perhaps we should exploit the intensity of feeling, or at least dwell there for a while. Anne Cvetkovich models this approach, favoring

*Feeling* in part because it is intentionally imprecise, retaining the ambiguity between feelings as embodied sensations and feelings as psychic or cognitive experiences. It also has a vernacular quality that lends itself to exploring feelings as something we come to know through experience and popular usage and that indicates, perhaps only intuitively but nonetheless significantly, a conception of mind and body as integrated.<sup>66</sup>

A 2001 review essay by Brent Malin urges scholars of communication to approach emotions as a “complicated and shifting terrain of bodily and public discourses that situate, reproduce, and disrupt our communicative and cultural activities.”<sup>67</sup> While I would resist the reframing of emotion as discourse (only), I think it’s fruitful to pursue this idea of public feeling. To do so, Malin pursues the work of sociologists; an even earlier article by Michael Hyde and Craig Smith on the relationship between emotion and being-with-others returns to Aristotle’s *pathē*; Lauren Berlant and her “Feel Tank Chicago” collective took the route of demonstration.<sup>68</sup> Political theorist Davide Panagia finds sensation a useful category with which to consider “a principal dilemma of any multicultural democratic society,” which is “to have to address how the pluralization of values within any one polity interrupts the ordered divisions that hold those polities together.”<sup>69</sup> Rhetorical theorist Jenny Rice explicitly brings forward the idea of public feeling when she grounds public subjectivity in feeling.<sup>70</sup> A recent book by Thomas Rickert builds a Heideggerian case for rhetoric as an ambient thing, at once constitutive and material. His conception of rhetoric highlights the need for attunement, an act of attention that involves sensation centrally but not exclusively.<sup>71</sup> In these approaches, rhetoric cannot help but be formulated as a kind of energy, not unlike (though not fully like) the electrical currents running through the diagram with which this essay began.<sup>72</sup>

For theorists and critics alike, finding the places where rhetoric and sensation converge is less challenging than knowing what to do from there. For the critic, the challenge is to, as Carole Blair puts it, “‘translate’ from the senses to print.”<sup>73</sup> Perhaps the best we can do as critics or as theorists is to toggle back and forth between sensation and criticism or theory, to replicate the recursivity put into play by the 1915 Research Committee, but with a difference. Sensation needn’t become encased in language to be known—the epistemic approach to rhetoric has run its course; rhetoric is not, or not only, a means of knowing and needn’t be so attached to meaning. Other attachments matter for rhetoric—political, bodily, technological, and sensory, and these intermix and move recursively. As scholars pursue sensation as a useful category for theorizing rhetoric, they are likely to reach for or develop theories or methods, e.g., ethnography, memoir, or transdisciplinary explorations of feeling that will avoid the pitfalls of generalization even as they consider more deeply the constitutive roles of sensation in participatory, rhetorical acts.

## Notes

- [1] Judson and Rodden, “Fundamentals of the Speaker–Audience Relationship,” 351; The Research Committee, “Research in Public Speaking,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 1, no. 1 (1915): 24–32.

- [2] L. S. Judson and D. E. Rodden, "The Fundamentals of the Speaker Audience Relationship," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 20, no. 3 (1934): 353.
- [3] Judson and Rodden, "Fundamentals," 356. Italics in original.
- [4] Judson and Rodden, "Fundamentals," 358.
- [5] Judson and Rodden, "Fundamentals," 358.
- [6] Judson and Rodden, "Fundamentals," 360.
- [7] Judson and Rodden, "Fundamentals," 357.
- [8] Judson and Rodden, "Fundamentals," 357.
- [9] These terms are not interchangeable, of course. After compiling the "hits," I eliminated those uses of "sensation" that deal with celebrity ("e.g., the book became a sensation") and "senses" that turn on meaning (e.g., "in both senses of the term."). This literature-search approach is meant to be neither exhaustive, nor conclusive, but merely suggestive.
- [10] "Sensorium, n." *OED Online*. November 2014. Oxford University Press (accessed November 25, 2014).
- [11] "Sensorium," *OED*.
- [12] Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1980), 1672.
- [13] Joshua Gunn, "Speech is Dead; Long Live Speech," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94, no. 3 (2008): 345.
- [14] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
- [15] Carole Blair, rev. of *Digital Sensations: Space, Identity, and Embodiment in Virtual Reality*, *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 87, no. 4 (2001): 447; Michael P. Graves, "Functions of Key Metaphors in Early Quaker Sermons, 1671–1700," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 69, no. 4 (1983): 376; Bruce E. Gronbeck, Rev. of *Mediation and the Communication Matrix*, *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 91, no. 2 (2005): 227; Joshua Gunn, "Speech is Dead," 345–46 and 349; W. Lance Haynes, "Of That Which We Cannot Write: Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Media," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 74, no. 1 (1988): 92; Ronald L. Holloway, rev. of *The Presence of the Word*, *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 53, no. 3 (1967): 316; Martin J. Medhurst, "Hiroshima, Mon Amour: From Iconography to Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 68, no. 4 (1982): 347; Brian L. Ott and Gordana Lazić, "The Pedagogy and Politics of Art in Postmodernity: Cognitive Mapping and *The Bothersome Man*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 99, no. 3 (2013): 263.
- [16] Joseph Dumit, "Neuroexistentialism," in *Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art*, ed. Caroline A. Jones (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 182.
- [17] J. A. Winans, "The Need for Research," *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* 1, no. 1 (1915): 20.
- [18] The Research Committee, "Research in Public Speaking," 24.
- [19] The Research Committee, "Research in Public Speaking," 25.
- [20] Charles H. Woolbert, "Theories of Expression: Some Criticisms," *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* 1, no. 2 (1915): 128.
- [21] Smiley Blanton, "The Voice and the Emotions," *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* 1, no. 2 (1915): 154.
- [22] Blanton, "The Voice and the Emotions," 154.
- [23] Blanton, "The Voice and the Emotions," 155.
- [24] Blanton, "The Voice and the Emotions," 155. Titchener exerted powerful influence on his colleagues at Cornell. See Giles Wilkenson Gray, "Some Teachers and the Transition to Twentieth-Century Speech Education," *History of Speech Education in America: Background Studies*, ed. Karl R. Wallace (New York, NY: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1954), 433–37, Titchener (along with William James) was a primary source for the early work of Winans.
- [25] Blanton, "The Voice and the Emotions," 156.
- [26] Blanton, "The Voice and the Emotions," 157.

- [27] Blanton, "The Voice and the Emotions," 167.
- [28] Blanton, "The Voice and the Emotions," 170–71.
- [29] Binney Gunnison, "Imagination in Oratory," *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* 1, no. 2 (1915): 144.
- [30] Gunnison, "Imagination in Oratory," 144.
- [31] Gunnison, "Imagination in Oratory," 146: "Our educational life in the past has tended to destroy these powers of the imagination until the average graduate from college has no imagination. He thinks that it is absurd to see things—that it is quite sufficient to reason about them."
- [32] For more detail about *phantasia* and its relationship to rhetoric, see Debra Hawhee, "Looking Into the Eyes of Aristotle: Toward a Theory of Rhetorical Vision," *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* 14, no. 2 (2011): 139–65; Michele Kennerly, "Getting Carried Away: How Rhetorical Transport Gets Judgment Going," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (2010): 269–91; and Ned O'Gorman, "Aristotle's *Phantasia* in the *Rhetoric*: Lexis, Appearance, and the Epideictic Function of Discourse," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 38, no. 1 (2005): 16–40.
- [33] Gunnison, "Imagination in Oratory," 151–52.
- [34] Gunnison, "Imagination in Oratory," 152.
- [35] Gunnison, "Imagination in Oratory," 151.
- [36] David Howes uses this phrase, obviously invoking James's famous title. David Howes, *A Variety of Sensory Experiences: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).
- [37] Harold Westlake, "Understanding the Child With a Cleft Palate," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 39, no. 2 (1953): 165–72.
- [38] John S. Kenyon, "Need of a Uniform Phonetic Alphabet," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 37, no. 3 (1951): 311–20; Lester L. Hale, "Dr. James Rush—Psychologist and Voice Scientist," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 35, no. 4 (1949): 449–55; Lee S. Hultzén, "Phonetic Transcription as Communication," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 34, no. 2 (1948): 194–201.
- [39] Edward Ward Camack, "The Yankee 'R,'" *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 37, no. 3 (1951): 320; Angela Thirkell, "The Orthography of Dialect," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 37, no. 3 (1951): 320.
- [40] Julius M. Nolte, "The Specifications of American Culture," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 37, no. 2 (1951): 153–57; Robert D. Clark, "These Truths We Hold Self-Evident," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 34, no. 4 (1948): 445–50.
- [41] H. Darks Albright, "Appia Fifty Years After: I," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 35, no. 2 (1949): 182–89.
- [42] Marvin T. Herrick, "The Theory of the Laughable in the Sixteenth Century," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 35, no. 1 (1949): 1–16.
- [43] Carl E. Burklund, "Melody in Verse," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 39.1 (1953): 57. See also Wallace A. Bacon, "Scholarship and the Interpreter," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 39, no. 2 (1953): 187–92.
- [44] E. J. West, "Saint Joan: A Modern Classic Reconsidered," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 40, no. 3 (1954): 249–60.
- [45] Kenneth Burke, "Postscripts on the Negative," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 39, no. 2 (1953): 209–16; Kenneth Burke, "A Dramatistic View of the Origins of Language," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 38, no. 3 (1952): 251–64; Kenneth Burke, "A Dramatistic View of the Origins of Language: Part Two," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 38, no. 4 (1952): 446–60; Kenneth Burke, "A Dramatistic View of the Origins of Language: Part III," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 39, no. 1 (1953): 79–92; Marie Hochmuth, "Kenneth Burke and the New Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 38, no. 2 (1952): 133–44.



- [46] Debra Hawhee, *Moving Bodies: Kenneth Burke at the Edges of Language* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009): 106–24.
- [47] The writings on epistemic rhetoric are vast, and word constraints prevent me from citing the key texts beyond what I discuss below. For a keen and fascinating analysis that cuts to the heart of some of the issues raised in this piece, see Richard A. Cherwitz and Thomas J. Darwin, “Why the ‘Epistemic’ In Epistemic Rhetoric? The Paradox of Rhetoric As Performance,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (1995): 189–205.
- [48] Walter M. Carleton, “On Rhetorical Knowing,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77, no. 1 (1985): 228.
- [49] Barry Brummett, “Some Implications of ‘Process’ or ‘Intersubjectivity’: Postmodern Rhetoric,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 9, no. 1 (1976): 28.
- [50] Thomas Frenz, “Rhetorical Conversation, Time, and Moral Action,” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 71, no. 1 (1985): 1–18.
- [51] Steve Whitson and John Poulakos, “Nietzsche and the Aesthetics of Rhetoric,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 79, no. 2 (1993): 132.
- [52] Whitson and Poulakos, “Nietzsche,” 133–34.
- [53] John Poulakos and Steve Whitson, “Rhetoric Denuded and Redressed: Figs and Figures,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81, no. 3 (1995): 382.
- [54] For a genealogy of the idea of imagination in communication studies, see Joshua Gunn, “Refiguring Fantasy: Imagination and Its Decline in U.S. Rhetorical Studies,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89, no. 1 (2003): 41–59.
- [55] Whitson and Poulakos, “Nietzsche,” 141.
- [56] Medhurst, “Hiroshima,” 353.
- [57] Sonja K. Foss and Karen A. Foss, “The Construction of Feminine Spectatorship in Garrison Keillor’s Radio Monologues,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 80, no. 4 (1994): 410–36.
- [58] Foss and Foss, “The Construction,” 412.
- [59] Foss and Foss, “The Construction,” 413; emphasis added.
- [60] Brian L. Ott and Diane Marie Keeling, “Cinema and Choric Connection: Lost in Translation as Sensual Experience,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97, no. 4 (2011): 378.
- [61] Joshua Gunn, “Maranatha,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98, no. 4 (2012): 359–85.
- [62] Brian L. Ott, “The Visceral Politics of *V for Vendetta*: On Political Affect in Cinema,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 27, no. 1 (2010): 42.
- [63] See, e.g., Ott and Keeling, “Cinema and Choric,” 366; and Ott and Lazić, “The Pedagogy,” 263. Ott and Keeling quote Rogers who formulates sensation as the way affects speak to the body (384, fn 92), while Ott and Lazić offer Beverley Best’s observation that “because ‘sensation is social, or *historical*’ then ‘affect is a social and collective event,’” 280 fn 46, a distinction I have a hard time grasping.
- [64] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Anne Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).
- [65] Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, “Performing Civic Identity: The Iconic Photograph of the Flag Raising on Iwo Jima,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88, no. 4 (2002): 367.
- [66] Cvetkovich, *Depression*, 4–5.
- [67] Brent Malin, “Communication with Feeling: Emotion, Publicness, and Embodiment,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 87, no. 2 (2001): 217.
- [68] “Feel Tank Chicago,” *Wikipedia*, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feel\\_Tank\\_Chicago](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feel_Tank_Chicago).
- [69] Davide Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009): 4.
- [70] Jenny Rice, *Distant Publics: Development Rhetorics and the Subject of Crisis* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012): 58–59.

- [71] Thomas Rickert, *Ambient Rhetoric: The Attunements of Rhetorical Being* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press), 2013.
- [72] For an important piece on rhetorical energy, see George Kennedy, "A Hoot in the Dark: The Evolution of General Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 25, no. 1 (1992): 1–21.
- [73] Carole Blair, "Reflections on Criticism and Bodies: Parables from Public Places," *Western Journal of Communication* 65, no. 3 (2001): 275.