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The Correlation between Style and Argument in Newspaper Columns

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10.1 Introduction

A column doesn’t have any characteristics, because a column doesn’t exist. A series of columns does. And even then, it’s difficult to define specific characteristics. For the time being only this one: they all should have the same length.

This is how Willem Bekius, in his manual for journalists, starts off the chapter on columns. As the Dutch author goes on, nothing very specific is added. “A column holds opinion and entertainment”, he claims, and, for a checklist, three very concise items of advice are presented: the day-after-test, the right amount of words, and the unity of style (Bekius 2003, p. 143). Bekius ironically suggests that there isn’t much to be said about columns.

Of course, other manuals do give a better introduction and more useful instructions. They mention the well-known formal features, like the fixed regularity of author, amount of words or place in the paper. They try to pin down the functions a column can have: opinion, entertainment, aesthetic pleasure. All of them stress the style element: a compact style is the rule. In general, columns are listed in the category of persuasive articles, but invariably the style element is stressed as well. Asbreuk and De Moor admit: “columns are complicated genres where style and argument are intrinsically interwoven” (Asbreuk and De Moor 2007, p. 415). Apparently, columns should be well written in the first place; they function as exercises in style. As for the form, there are almost no limits. Columns come in the form of anecdotes, comments, letters, dialogues, interviews, essays, poems, aphorisms, book reviews, caricatures, portraits, news stories, art criticism, satire, nonsense.

Some authors speak condemningly about columns, like William Metz, who enthusiastically lists and explores a range of “genres”, like crime report-
ing, interviewing, fire reporting, sexism, sports and so on, but doesn’t spend much time on (editorial) columns. The only thing we can read about them goes as follows:

But editorials are recognised as expressing a particular point of view. As such, they are not given the credence that is accorded to news accounts that are written to inform, not to sway. Many students of the press doubt that the editorial page has much clout anymore. (Metz 1985, p. 11)

In his 1922 textbook on journalistic writing, Grant Milnor Hyde does discuss columns. He claims that the chief purpose of the (editorial) column is to interpret the news, and he adds an interesting note about the historical context of column writing:

In general, during wars and other periods of national stress, the editorial has wide influence; then it is likely to be argumentative. In periods of calm and quiet industry, its importance subsides, and it becomes a thoughtful expository interpretation of events. However much it may rise and fall, it is likely to continue to be an essential part of every newspaper. (Hyde 1922, p. 269)

Also the Dutch authors Kussendrager and Van der Lugt (1992) are not very clear about the genre: they sum up four features, “short, well written, surprising perspective, polemic”, and they continue with a discussion of funny and shocking cases where “the limit of freedom of expression” is at stake. They end with the claim that our western column writing is a less exciting matter than in less tolerant societies: another historical note (ibid. pp. 294-295). In the 2007 version of their manual, we find a new chapter on columns, but now it’s indulging into a wide but not very clear range of examples, aims, possible themes, opinions, etc. The literary techniques that columnists can use come down to: hyperbole, fallacies [], absurd reasoning [], lies [], and archaisms (Kussendrager 2007, pp. 338-342).

In many manuals, column writing simply is not mentioned (e.g., Fox 1977, Epstein 1967) or only sporadically mentioned. Donkers and Willems just name the column, put it in the class of opinion articles (Donkers et al. 1999, p. 313) and connect it to the registers of amusement and/or shock (Donkers and Willems 2005, p. 70). Obviously, it is not easy to categorize columns or pin them down to something. They can handle any theme, in any form, and ful-
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As columns are very closely linked to a specific author, one could ask whether this ethos element plays a major role in the understanding of the phenomenon. For one thing, columns are places where the public space moves very close to the personal, and the personal involvement of the author is part of this. Columnists apparently want to write down their daily observations and critique in an attractive and moving way. But it is difficult to point out what their aim is. They might be motivated by pigheaded obstructionist contrariness, morality, individualism, exhibitionism, idealism, liberalism or cynicism. To some, columnists are annoying egos, giving superficial comment on anything imaginable, chasing the ephemera of the day, changing their opinions and moods every once in a while, as well as the targets of their praise or attacks. To others, they are really involved in the core business of democracy, keeping up the spirit of enlightenment, challenging the powers and modes of the day (Gijselhart 1986). Or are they rather the fools, saying what everybody thinks, occasionally getting blamed for their impudence, but at the same time symbolically contributing to the greater power and glory of their masters?

The personal aspect of columns also holds for us, their readers. Maybe we are looking for news, knowledge, inspiration, wisdom, ideas, approval, controversy; but we might also be looking for emotion, beauty, shock, laughter, entertainment; and some of us might even be driven by a touch of malicious pleasure or voyeurism. And who else is reading with us? Not only our bosses and colleagues, our neighbours, friends and families, but also socially and politically engaged people, like judges or politicians.

The great variety of forms and functions that columns can display could indeed make one ironically decide that they really “don’t exist”, that it is impossible to define their features and their function. Their scope might be too wide, their functions too diffuse, their appreciation too personal. On the other hand, they are a popular phenomenon, even in this digital age, and one could ask what it is that makes them particular. Is it just the simple ritual regularity of a fixed time and space, together with the ethos of the author that makes up for the otherwise indecision of the phenomenon?

Columns used to be the place where opinions could be uttered under the shelter of style devices like irony, metaphor, satire, hyperbole and so on. Nowadays, in our western world, the press is supposedly free to utter any
opinion, and columns are not the outspoken places for opinion anymore. But then what are their new functions? Readers find an article on the same place, at the same time, of the same length, by the same author. Newspaper editors know how important it is to create and encourage daily habits and rituals for their readers. Yet, my suggestion is that this is not the only reason why column writing has survived in time. I want to explore this phenomenon from another angle. I argue that the main function has changed from a free space for opinion into a free space for style.

In this chapter, I will track down the intense correlation between style and argument in the history of columns (section 10.2). Second, I will look at old and new theories about rhetorical figures and their argumentative function (sections 10.3 and 10.4). Finally, I will bring together these lines in a proposal about the actual function of columns.

10.2 Columns and reasoning
The early history of the column shows how, from the start, they were spaces where literature and opinion, or style and argument, somehow were closely intertwined. Political comment, and artful and witty satire: they are inherent to our modern democracy; they played a basic role in the growth and evolution of our actual democratic society (see also Gijselhart 1986). They were printed and published in the form of pamphlets, brochures, books, weeklies, etc. They stood apart from 17th-century and 18th-century newspapers because those were strictly restricted to the publication of plain news, to facts and messages both local and international. Sentimental and sensational facts were to be found in separate sections, along with advertizements; but no opinion or critique whatsoever.

The reason for this very strict attitude is obvious: censorship. Every now and then, an occasional uprising simply wasn’t mentioned in the paper, as if it hadn’t happened at all. All over Europe, rulers were very sensitive to criticism, or libel, and they all tried out their own methods for minimizing or silencing critique, by different regulations and restrictions and other systems of suppression and prohibition. Newspapers had to work under special licenses, and apply for monopolies and privileges. In France, for example, the Gazette de France (licensed in 1631) was to speak in favour of the absolute monarchy. And Elizabeth I simply prohibited news pamphlets in England, except those published by … Elizabeth I. In general, analysis, comment or reasoning, as it was called, was forbidden.
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The public space for reasoning was to be found elsewhere. The more rigid the laws and prohibitions of censorship became, the more creative writers and commentators grew. For comment did flourish, indeed. Great 18th-century writers like Voltaire, Diderot, La Fontaine, Swift, Defoe, Fielding, Addison and Steele found ways of bypassing censors and governors. In this age of satire, critique was abundantly alive in papers and periodicals, in books and pamphlets. When reasoning was presented anonymously or under pseudonym, or in literary forms where it could sail safely under the flag of fiction, the rulers couldn’t do very much.

This doesn’t mean that writers did not disappear in jail or were banned once in a while – with or without any form of trial. Voltaire, one of the many darling gens de lettres in the Parisian salons travelled all over Europe, often looking for shelter and protection. Many rich and famous people protected him, while others were after him. Daniel Defoe, the founding father of English journalism, spent some time in jail; but then, he did have this bad habit of asking money for the opinion articles he wrote for very different parties. Rulers tried to silence the subversive voices by many means, like the enactment of libel laws in England as well as more undercover tricks. Yet, they found that it’s not easy at all to trial anonymous or pseudonymous writers or to pin down the real meaning of their ambiguous allegories or satires, especially if the court decides to go along with the benefit of the doubt in the case of the so-called innuendos.

In the 19th century, newspapers gradually attained more freedom and independence. They reserved more space for serious political comment and analysis. In 1800, in France under Napoleonic press censorship, the Parisian theatre critic Julien Louis Geoffroy created a space for his short, witty, lively, sharp and entertaining comments on everyday social and cultural life. He found room for his literary opinions and observations in the feuilleton, the paper’s advertizing appendix. Due to their popularity, his columns moved to the pages of the actual paper, and even made it to the bottom (the rez-de-chaussée/the ground floor) of the first page, separated from the real news by a thick black line. All over Europe, famous writers followed this example with great enthusiasm: Sainte Beuve, Victor Hugo, Heinrich Heine, Theodor Fontane, Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Tsjchov.

At first, the feuilletons were an innocent a-political playground for witty literary pieces with criticism on books and theatre, society gossip and nonsense stories; in short on a variety of themes, the big nothing - as it was oc-
casionally called by some grudging critic. But gradually, and along with the many uprisings between 1830 and 1848, the themes grew more serious, the critique sharper, the tone more grim. After all, the children of the enlightenment wanted to work towards the political and cultural awareness and education of the public. Newspaper editors remained cautious, however, and tried to find a balance between the safety of correct news reporting and the popularity of their all too witty *enfants terribles*.

In columns, opinion could find its way, thanks to the grey zone between form and idea, between language and meaning, between style and argument. This indecision was vital for the phenomenon. This is all the more fascinating, when we realize that it took well into the 20th century before Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1958) took a position on the matter of style and argument. Their discussion on the argumentative value of style figures might shed some light on the phenomenon of columns.

### 10.3 Argument and rhetorical figures

In their famous study ‘The new rhetoric’ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1958) restored the link between style and argument and claimed that the study of rhetoric should not be reduced to stylistics or the superficial ornamental language of literature on the one hand, or to mere speech and argument exercises on the other. Rhetoric concerns the basic human activity of reasoning and logos is put back into its centre. Formal logic is no longer the exclusive domain for the development of human reasoning, since logic leaves out the domain of language. The quest for reasonable arguments and for acceptable compromises and solutions, within the plurality of opinions and interests that forms the basis of the democratic debate, that’s what rhetoric is about.

According to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, the link between style and argument has been neglected or misunderstood all too often. From antiquity onwards, rhetoricians were too busy setting up elaborate classification systems for all kinds and modes of expressions that one way or another stood out from the *normal* language use. Once the argumentative role of rhetorical figures is disregarded, their study is reduced to a useless pastime, they claim, narrowing down into a search for strange names for affected turns of speech, put down in a classification system of rhetorical figures with no other function than the ornamental. Rhetorical figures can give an argument presence, they claim; this is what links rhetoric as art of persuasion and rhetoric as tech-
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nique of literary expression. And indeed, how could, e.g., a hypotyposis, which is a lively demonstration of a certain situation, not be part of an argumentative move, as it brings about a new presence in our minds? (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, p. 167) To Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, it is important to ask how and in what respect the use of particular rhetorical figures is explained by the requirements of argumentation.

Rhetorical figures need two necessary characteristics in order to be a figure, they claim, the first being a discernable structure, or a form; and the second a use that is different from the normal manner of expression, and in this way attracts attention. This means that, in the right circumstances, any structure could be considered a figure. On the other hand, not any uncommon structure can be called a figure. But in what respect exactly should a use be regarded as unusual? Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca suggest that this is the case when a distinction between form and substance is perceived, because the expression is recognized as not natural, not real, as a pretence.

The reader’s perception of this distinction is basic, and this is the point where Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca let in the argumentative significance of rhetorical figures. A figure is argumentative when this distinction between form and substance is dissolved through the effect produced by the speech. This means that a change should be brought about: “Forms which seem at first to be used in an unusual manner may come to appear normal if their use is justified by the speech taken as a whole”, they claim. A figure is argumentative if it brings about a change of perspective, and its use seems normal in relation to this new situation. So, only if the speech does not bring about the possibility of adherence to the argumentative form, the figure will be perceived as a mere figure of style: nice, original, poetic, but no part of the argument (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, p. 169).

It is important to notice that Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca stress the dynamic aspect and the change of perspective that rhetorical figures can bring about. This is why rhetorical figures should never be studied in isolation or separately, as if they were convertible elements, since this is precisely how they lose their argumentative value, which makes it impossible to conceive of “a step from the common to the uncommon, and a return to another order of commonness, that created by the argument at the moment of its completion”. When rhetorical figures are put in a vertical, paradigmatic and static contrast to some so-called normal or neutral expression, they are studied separately from the argument construction in a text (ibid. p. 171).
In the second half of the 20th century, the *rhetorical turn* took place, and many scholars (re)discovered rhetoric as a basis not only for speech production, but also for text analysis, evaluation and discourse theories in general. The persuasive aspect of rhetorical figures has been recognised by many rhetoricians, like, e.g., Olivier Reboul, who, unlike Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, is especially concerned about both the aesthetic and persuasive aspect of rhetorical figures. Reboul doesn’t completely agree with Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s suggestion that rhetorical figures are condensed arguments. To him, this theory is too intellectualistic, as it forgets the pleasure rhetorical figures generally generate, either emotional or entertaining, but always in the range of pathos (Reboul 1999, p. 122).

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca make a distinction between effective argumentative rhetorical figures and mere ornamental, literary rhetorical figures, leaving literature a very marginal position. Reboul does not follow them here, claiming that the main function of rhetoric is the creation of *literary prose* and the study of *functional aesthetics* (Reboul 1999, pp. 72-73). How could figuration be explained in terms of “écart”/“deviation”, Reboul wonders, since it is impossible to determine the norm, or to indicate normality in a text. One shouldn’t appear at a wedding party in a bathing suit, he explains, but neither should one appear on the beach in a tuxedo. The norm is a relative phenomenon. Reboul dismisses the popular idea of some *zero degree*, the possibility to track down a rhetorical figure to its proper sense. A figure does add sense to what is said; so if you do away with the figure, you lose sense as well, he claims. A figure can’t be reduced to a useless or superficial language game with convertible elements. Moreover, in what way could this idea of “deviation” explain the persuasiveness of an expression? Not when the hearers distinctly appreciate it as a deviation, because precisely in that situation an expression is not persuasive. A figure should be richer, more expressive, even more exact and right than the so-called plain or *zero degree* or neutral way of saying. Paradoxically, this way, the figure could be called the norm, because it is the best way of putting something (ibid. pp. 74-77).

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca restored the link between style and argument, stressing the persuasive aspect and the dynamic power of rhetorical figures. They refuse to treat rhetorical figures as if they were a collection of extra’s one can add to a text. Reboul picks up their ideas on style and argument, but, in an answer to their struggle with the perception of the (un)common, claims that rhetorical figures are most persuasive when they’re not
perceived as such. This basic idea of functionality is what Jeanne Fahnestock (1999) tracks down in the earliest works on rhetoric.

10.4 The constitutive power of rhetorical figures

10.4.1 Rhetorical figures as extra value

Theories of figuration in the first place try to explain and categorize individual rhetorical figures, Fahnestock argues, but when it comes to figuration in general and the notion that rhetorical figures form a departure from normal language, we find a long history of theories.

As a whole, value-added theories of the rhetorical figures have dominated in the rhetorical tradition, Fahnestock explains. The rhetorical figures are considered to be sources of emotion, charm, vividness, force or elegance. The overall problem with value-added theories is that they often impose a distinction between figurative and non-figurative language. This supposed difference between unmarked and marked language has pushed the rhetorical figures to the exclusive field of markers of the literary text, and made us forget about any possible other function (ibid. p. 20).

Indeed, what could the norm for normal language be? And what does it mean to claim that rhetorical figures are not typical? Fahnestock is sceptical about the possibility of providing statistic evidence of typical (literal) versus not typical (figurative) language without taking its context into consideration. Most definitions carry an implicit division of language in them: literal language on the one hand and figurative language on the other hand, as if one can switch back and forth between two levels of reading and understanding. This either/or-state theory isn’t very fruitful. Even ancient biblical hermeneutics, with their simultaneous fourfold senses, did better (ibid.).

As for the added value of emotion, it is impossible to set an exclusive figure/emotion connection, not only because emotion is very much a func-

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1 Fahnestock also refers to the discussion about the Latin *ornamentum* that also means furniture, equipment, which would bring *ornament* closer to the notion of essential gear and *armament* than it is to *adornment*. Both interpretations keep the rhetorical figures on the surface of language, though, as if they could easily be removed.

2 See also the traditional medieval icon for rhetoric as a woman whose dress is decorated with flowers. Language is supposed to be the dress of thought, and the rhetorical figures are the added embroidery (Fahnestock 1999, p. 18).
tion of the larger rhetorical situation of an utterance, but also because it is unlikely that anything at all could be said or heard without involving more or less remarkable emotion. How could an emotional dimension be factored out of an expression leaving a content behind? How could in the apophesis figure, for instance, where the speaker stops in mid-sentence, the emotional and argumentative value be separated? The suggested inexpressibility works both on the emotional and material level.

10.4.2 Rhetorical figures as epitomes

All the work on added values reveals important functions of the rhetorical figures, but none of them is exclusively constitutive of a text’s many meanings. Rather, Fahnestock proposes, figure functions can be considered to exist within a continuum of expressive possibilities. The figures of speech hold a central position in rhetorical theory, she claims. It’s her point to study the constitutive power of rhetorical figures and see how they are epitomized in various lines of argument. All along, writers in the rhetorical tradition have provided important “taxonomies of naturally occurring verbal devices and of lines and methods of argument, and, more important, of the connection between or even identity of these two” (ibid. p. 7).

So, rhetorical figures can also be understood as epitomes of lines of reasoning, as the formal embodiments of certain ideational or persuasive functions.

Associating certain verbal rhetorical figures with general lines of reasoning, called ‘topics’ in the rhetorical tradition, also assumes that it is possible to define these lines or arguments in the first place, a notion that for contemporary readers with no exposure to rhetoric may seem as odd as the rhetorical figures themselves. (ibid. p. 23)

A traditional lexicon for lines of argument disappeared together with the cognate notion of the rhetorical figures as epitomes of those lines. This notion of the generic skills of rhetoric conflicts with our ideas of spontaneity of invention based on complicated cognitive processes, and with the confinement of procedures of method and argument to the specific disciplines or professions. But the popularity of the metaphor to generate analogical reasoning could be a starting point for the assumption that human reasoning can follow many more lines than analogy alone.
Arguments that link form and function of the rhetorical figures can be found all the way back to Aristotle, who in *Rhetoric*, Book III, nowhere claims the rhetorical figures to be emotional, ornamental or epiphenomenal in any other way. On the contrary, he “suggests that certain devices are compelling because they map function onto form or perfectly epitomize certain patterns of thought or argument” (*ibid*. p. 26). In his comments on the function of *asyndeton* and *polysyndeton*, both adding meaning to a text, but also on *metaphor, antithesis* and *energeia* he points out the functionality of those devices, as they are perfect embodiments of the speaker’s intentions.

**10.4.3 The role of history**

The reason for the gradual separation of the two functions is the confusion caused by the sequences of the rhetorical system, she claims, as if the different aspects of speech construction represented chronological steps in composition. Also, certain subject matters grew more and more apart, locked up in traditional methods and systems of teaching. Fahnestock mentions scholarly restorations that took place in the twentieth century: Kenneth Burke, saw to the heart of the ability of the rhetorical figures to express a particular line of argument and simultaneously to induce an audience to participate in that argument simply by virtue of their form. (*ibid*. p. 34)

And of course, also Chaîm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca claimed the argumentative role of rhetorical figures and re-established the link between the rhetorical figures and argumentation by dispersing the rhetorical figures among the techniques of argumentation, thus confirming a view of the rhetorical figures as the epitomes of certain durable lines of argument (*ibid*. p. 36).

By showing the conceptual or heuristic aspects of rhetorical figures, Fahnestock aims at restoring their full rhetorical function. When studied in their specific context and dynamism, style and argument elements prove to be interdependent and inseparable in many ways. The notion that style argues opens up possibilities for careful rhetorical analysis of texts or genres.

**10.5 Columns and style**

Both argument and style are basic features of newspaper columns. New studies on rhetoric reveal how style figures are not just to be seen as surplus fea-
tures one can add to argument. Columns are not only interesting places to
discover how the rhetorical means of persuasion work, how logos, ethos and
pathos are intertwined in the structure of the argument; but they also show
how rhetorical figures cannot be locked up safely in an elaborate classification
system, ready to be fetched down from the shelves to serve as extras that add
aspects like pathos. On the contrary, they take part in the creation and ex-
pression of the argument itself. Consider this specific example, from a Flem-
ish columnist who is retorting someone’s attack on some local poetry project,
claiming it’s far too expensive and as such it is a waste of community money;
money that should better go to old and needy people.

The artist as a parasite:

 […]
Every single time an artist receives a little money, handicapped and retired people
are dragged into the picture. Why is that? In matters of waste, fraud, and inequal-
ity, is it really the artists that should be the first logical target? Are they the big
spenders with their millions hidden abroad? Or are they an easy target for pop-
ulists? The artist as a parasite, enemy of the people. Abolish art, pensions will rise.

 […]
(Tom Naegels, Spijkerschrift/De artiest als parasiet. The Standaard 09/30/2004
[transl. HvB])

An experienced reader at once detects an interesting set of rhetorical figures
in this passage: rhetorical question, comparison, hyperbole, allusion, sarcasm
and antithesis. They all serve in the line of argument that tries to lay bare and
counter the all too easy opposition between public well-being and art, and to
replace it by the new opposition between public well-being and the big
spenders with their millions hidden abroad. In the last sentence, the presenta-
tion of the argument in the antithetical construction is a convincing move,
not in the least made possible by the creation of what Reboul would call aes-
thetic functionality. It would be impossible and destructive to try to break
down this text into separate sets of rhetorical figures, or to try to peel off the
layers of pathos or ethos in order to end up with some basic or neutral or
zero-degree content or argument. Breaking down the text into the different
style figures and studying them apart from one another and from the line of
argument would be a kind of analysis that totally misses the core aspect of
columns: the match between style and argument.
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Is this match typical for columns? Of course not. Style and rhetorical figures are not restricted to literature or columns whatsoever. But columns are the only places in the media where this correlation between the what and the how of an argument is explicitly recognized and encouraged. They are typically well-demarcated places where the mere existence of style is explicitly allowed, where ideas and arguments are not explicitly separated from ethos and pathos, where aesthetic pleasure can be part of the persuasion.

Opinion and analysis have become respectable activities in our western world. Our columnists no longer need a grey zone of double-speak to protect themselves from revenge. For the time being, this kind of indecision seems to have disappeared more or less from our range of vision – although it should be kept alive without any doubt. Clearly, the taboo on reasoning and argument has lost ground. I suggest that the matter of style is another kind of indecision that has come into play.

News media go by the traditional understanding of literary style and style figures as an extra value that can be added to a neutral text. As the suggestion of clear and transparent representation of facts and ideas is crucial in the production of news and opinion, any suggestion of a gap between form and content raises suspicion. The quality newspaper is a place for plain facts and clear opinions; newspaper articles obey to strict rules and style prescriptions, rules that have to safeguard the quality of information and opinion. The suggestion of direct transmission from an event to the reporting of it is crucial; and the elements of choice and language are hidden under the suggestion of total transparency. This so-called neutral reporting of facts that can safeguard the idea of transparency is only possible in a form of writing that is dominated by well defined traditions. In this kind of journalism, any risk of too high a style level is carefully avoided. The element of style and the creative power of language are taboo in traditional journalism.

This might be a contemporary function of columns: they make up for the (necessary) blind spot in journalism; i.e., the fact that transparency (neutrality, normality) is the effect of a very strict and traditional low style of writing. This way, columns are not so much free spaces for political ideas, but rather free spaces away from the very strict style prescriptions and traditions in the rest of the paper. They are places of real human creativity, playful or grim exercises in thinking and writing, and in that way, they’re always places of risk.
10.6 Conclusion
Two final conclusions I want to draw: the first is pedagogical, the second is of a more theoretical kind. As for the pedagogical consequences of my findings, I want to stress the hermeneutic aspect of text analysis. To read and interpret texts as a whole often seems to come down to an old fashioned, scholastic, “passive” way of analysis. Yet, looking for the (in)coherence between context, argument, structure, formulation and presentation of a text is an essential aspect of analysis and this art should not be minimized or neglected.

And here is where the theoretical aspect comes in. The most interesting aspect of this “Rhetoric in society” question to me is the correlation between empirical sciences and hermeneutic praxis. A scientific analysis of texts always aims at abstraction from the actual written or spoken form, in order to look for general rules. The rhetorical praxis is different, since the focus lies on the appreciation and evaluation of the text as a whole. Rhetorical analysis is a specific activity, a kind of praxis. And columns provide an exemplary invitation to this kind of praxis.

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