

Anders Johansen:

Talerens troverdighet. Tekniske og kulturelle betingelser for politisk retorikk

[The speaker's credibility. Technical and cultural conditions for political rhetoric]

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Anders Johansen's *Talerens troverdighet* [The speaker's credibility] is a study of the relationship between rhetorical *actio*, media technology, and the concept of credibility. The study keeps to an essay-like tone, which the author characterises as a 'leisurely walk'. The aim of the study is to show how the ideal of credibility has changed from one of sincerity to one of authenticity; Johansen seeks to describe the two ideals and to explain how the shift from the one to the other has come about. This shift, he claims, took place in the time-span from around 1800 to the middle of the 20th century.

Accordingly, that period is at the focus of attention, although frequent detours are made as far back in time as ancient Greece and as far forward as the present day. The conceptual pair of 'presentation' and 'representation' is pivotal to Johansen's explanation of the development. In conceiving these two concepts as general cultural forms, Johansen is inspired by the American sociologist Richard Sennett. A culture of presentation takes expressions at face value, seeing the meaning of the performance in the performance itself; a culture of re-presentation sees the speaker's performance as a sign of something else, as an expression of the speaker's inner thoughts and feelings. The relationship between these two cultural forms may provide reasons for the changes in ideals of rhetorical style and performance, but the alleged shift from presentation to representation is itself in need of explanation. In order to perform this explanatory task Johansen turns to the media through which rhetorical acts are performed, claiming that the introduction of electronic mass media is decisive to the development. However, Johansen acknowledges the importance of cultural as well as technological factors, and by focusing on the relationship between technology and culture he ensures that the explanation does not become overly deterministic.

In order to substantiate his claims, Johansen engages in a series of detailed studies of specific rhetorical acts. Johansen primarily takes his examples from the Norwegian context, but he also draws on developments in other countries. Most often the non-Norwegian examples are taken from American presidential speaking, but Johansen also analyses the oratory of the French revolution as well as that of 19th-century English coffee houses, and he even includes the performances of Cicero and his contemporaries in the Forum of ancient Rome.

Talerens troverdighet is not organised chronologically, but according to a thematic principle in which different but interdependent reasons for the change from a culture of presentation to one of representation are highlighted and investigated. The first chapter presents the purpose of the book, and this is done through an examination of specific examples. Thereby the reader is immediately presented with the level of concrete detailed analysis that is the major strength, but also a significant limitation of the book. The specific investigations are carried out throughout the book, but in each of the six chapters that follow

the introductory chapter one, a new theme is at the focus of attention. Chapter two zooms in on the relationship between text and context. Chapter three introduces the importance of technology and studies the relationship between form and content, between the medium and the type of performance it encourages. Chapter four analyses the parallel developments in politics and theatre. Chapter five expands upon the importance of technology, showing that although the new ideals may have been present before the advent of the microphone and the camera, they could only be fully realised when these technologies and their corresponding media were invented. Chapter six explores how the change from the culture of presentation to that of representation is related to the shift from a notion of language as a set of conventional signs to one of language as a symptom of the speaker's inner life. Finally, chapter seven investigates the relationship between the new ideal of credibility and the development of modern, democratic societies.

Talerens troverdighet is a very inspiring work that will be of interest to rhetoricians and other scholars who study political rhetoric in general and the concept of credibility in particular. Johansen introduces many interesting ideas, points to exciting new explanations, and his book is a thoroughly joyful read. By focusing on rhetoric as *actio* and the media as technology, *Talerens troverdighet* opens up a relatively new and unexplored interdisciplinary field of study. However, the 'leisurely' mode of progression and the exploratory, partial nature of the study mean that the book itself cannot be seen as an academic contribution in a strict sense. It is to be hoped that Johansen will follow up his pioneer work with such stringent academic research, and that his inspiring book will persuade many others to conduct academic studies in the new field.

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