



# Rhetorical business

*A study of marketing work  
in the spirit of contradiction*

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A study of marketing work  
in the spirit of contradiction

Tomas Nilsson



**LUND**  
UNIVERSITY

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The fieldwork on which this book is based was conducted in periods from 2009 to 2012. During this time I talked to, observed and argued with a number of professionals to learn more about marketing work. Since I have promised them anonymity I am forced to address them by the names I have given them in my study. Thank-you, “Carl”, “Erik”, “Lars”, “Anders”, “Axel”, “Linus”, “Anna”, “Stefan”, “Gunilla” and “Per” for your time and commitment. Although this book only covers fragments of your intriguing work I still hope these are recognizable and may lead to new insights. I owe it to you.

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*Tomas Nilsson*



*Michelle, Melvin och Malcom,  
nu är pappa äntligen klar.  
Förlåt att det tog så lång tid.  
Jag älskar er!*

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# Chapter 1.

## A rhetorical study of marketing work

### 1.1 Introduction

This book applies a rhetorical perspective to the study of marketing work in professional service firms. More precisely, this book is about the everyday argumentation that marketers are involved in when trying to bring in business by promoting consulting services.

The overall research question – *What do marketers do when they do marketing work?* – is explored empirically through conversations with marketers and observations of their daily accomplishments. The analysis of their work is structured by means of the following questions: *Where and when do marketers argue for business purposes? What rhetorical strategies are used? How can the subjects of marketing work be portrayed?*

The aim of this book is to expand our knowledge of marketing as it is practiced, by providing a multifaceted account of marketing work that is sensitive to marketers' own ideas about the work they do.

This book also seeks to establish the relevance of rhetorical theory in marketing research. It should be noted that rhetoric does not refer to a certain

type of talk, present in certain situations only. A rhetorical perspective highlights controversy and the practice of argumentation, that is, conversations “in the spirit of contradiction” in which there can be no final word since every sound argument can be met with an equally sound counterargument. Moreover, this study has benefited from rhetoric in two respects. I have drawn on rhetorical doctrines and concepts (*rhetorica docens*) to accomplish an analysis of marketing work. I have also drawn on rhetorical practice (*rhetorica utens*) when doing fieldwork, as I have argued with the people of interest to include a wide range of controversial aspects of marketers’ work in the empirical material.

Who are the people of interest in this study? For a start, meet “Carl”<sup>1</sup>. He is one of ten professionals I have approached to learn more about the work they do. Carl is employed by TERRA Consulting Sweden, which is a large organization consisting mostly of engineers and scientists who offer consulting services to various industries in Sweden. Ask Carl about his professional role and he will tell you he is a marketing manager. However, keep talking to him about his day-to-day work and you will find he is not connected to a marketing department, nor does he have an academic background in marketing. Follow Carl’s footsteps for a couple of days and he will show you a world of business in which he has the overall mission of making customers buy the services TERRA provides. If he fails to do so he will be criticized, re-assigned, or simply fired. So for good reasons Carl engages in a variety of practices when carrying out his professional duties. He writes action plans, takes part in numerous meetings, instructs staff to make more and better sales calls, initiates promotional activities, evaluates the services TERRA provides, and meets personally with customers when required. In this book, all of these activities are understood as marketing practices. What Carl and the other professionals I have studied do for a living is referred to as *marketing work*, in its widest sense.

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<sup>1</sup> The names of people and organizations are fictive to protect the anonymity of the people that appear in this book.

## 1.2 Why study the work of marketers rhetorically?

### **The significance of marketing work**

Marketing is an extraordinarily diverse and widely discussed phenomenon as shown by the myriad of research papers, textbooks and self-help texts published in the name of marketing (Brown 2005). All such texts could be seen to reflect the immense demand for marketing expertise found in a contemporary society with marketers having become the leading architects of excessive consumption (Willmott 1999), which in turn has led to the global success of marketing research and education (Hackley 2009). We might reasonably expect marketing research to have provided great insights into the *practical* aspects of marketing, so why study marketers and the work they do, as I intend to do?

To argue for the significance of my study I begin in the late 1970s when the marketing of professional services entered the scholarly agenda. Shostack was one of the first to claim that “service marketing” was something profoundly different from “product marketing” because of the intangible nature of services, and service marketing was therefore “in urgent need of concepts and priorities that are relevant to their actual experience and needs” (Shostack 1977:80).

With professional service firms in mind, Kotler and Connor Jr. (1977) argued that the main problem was not the lack of relevant concepts as much as service professionals’ attitudes toward marketing. In the first place, marketing was seen as not relevant for professional service firms, hindering the growth of their business, according to the authors.

Many professional practitioners in these industries deny a role to marketing or, if they do accept it, have a very inadequate idea of its content and how it can be implemented in a firm. (Kotler and Connor Jr. 1977:71)

Kotler and Connor Jr. urged service professionals to change their attitude and learn more about marketing management, presuming they had an interest in satisfying their clients’ needs, which was established as the core of the “marketing concept” by Kotler and Levy (1969), with reference to Levitt (1960).

In the late 1970s there were also critical voices regarding the application of the marketing concept in the context of professional services. Gummesson found marketers too occupied with the development of services and the specialist’s knowledge *per se*, largely neglecting to advance the “ability to pre-

sent solutions so that they are understood and accepted by the client” (Gummesson 1978:95).

Kotler and Connor Jr. focused on “marketing training, incentive development, planning, and control” for business effectiveness (Kotler and Connor Jr. 1977:75). Gummesson claimed to have a wider perspective since he focused on the interpersonal aspects of marketing. Also focusing on the interpersonal aspects of marketing, and in opposition to marketing management thinking, Grönroos (1979) divided marketing into two functions, a “traditional” marketing function, occupied with mass marketing and selling activities, and an “interactive” marketing function, occupied with the marketing consequences of buyer–seller interactions. Grönroos, and Gummesson, argued that marketing was not confined to a particular department of an organization. When taking the marketing effects of everyday interactions into account, people everywhere in an organization are involved in marketing activities. Consequently, the “marketing function spreads to all levels of the organisation” (Gummesson 1979:310).

Having developed an interest in professional services in the late 1970s, Grönroos and Gummesson later conceptualized and extended their ideas to form a Nordic School of service and relationship marketing (cf. Gummesson 1987, Grönroos 1990, 1991, Gummesson 1991a, Grönroos 1997, Gummesson 1997). In recent years we have seen a new expansion of the service perspective, conceptualized as the “service-dominant logic of marketing” (Vargo and Lusch 2004, Lusch and Vargo 2014). Service is now seen as a “dominant logic” that is “applicable not only to markets and marketing, but also to society” and thus “motivates one to view marketing differently” (Lusch and Vargo 2006:xvii).

So what has this to do with a study on marketing work? Notably, service and relationship marketing research emerged in opposition to marketing management research and its one-sided focus on products. Furthermore, it was claimed that service and relationship marketing constituted a “paradigm shift” that provided “a more realistic approach to marketing” for which there is an urgent need (Gummesson 1997:268).

Service marketing scholars have of course not been the only ones to criticize the lack of “realism” in marketing theory. There has been, and is, a strong call for more studies of marketing practice (cf. Ruekert *et al.* 1985, Brodie *et al.* 1997, Lindgreen *et al.* 2004, Brodie *et al.* 2008, Dibb *et al.* 2014), which indeed seems encouraging for my study, particularly since they invite multi-theoretical perspectives and multi-method approaches. Then



again, despite the call for multi-theory perspectives, marketing research should still be driven by a rather narrow ambition to study marketing practice to render marketing research “more relevant” according to the authors above.

A cornerstone characteristic of the CMP [Contemporary Marketing Practices] research program rests in the creative tension between theory and practice. Now over a decade old, CMP research has achieved what might be considered to be a virtual cycle linking academic arguments with business relevance on an international scale. This has been achieved using “practice” as the unifying umbrella, with an emphasis on research-led teaching with practicing managers. (Brodie *et al.* 2008:89)

However, Brownlie *et al.* oppose what they claim to be a too narrow theoretical focus on marketing practice. They maintain that the term relevance is not a “transparent and innocent term qualifying the relation between representations of practice and the reality of contemporary marketing work” (Brownlie *et al.* 2007:396). Moreover, if theory is to be designed to fit practice then it would be difficult for marketing scholarship to benefit from various theoretical traditions.

The popular take on “relevance” ring-fences debates and perpetuates the dangerously myopic view that marketing discourse is somehow safely self-sustaining. A wider repertoire of positions on “relevance” would help open channels of communication and collaboration across disciplinary areas, making possible more interdisciplinary research. (Brownlie *et al.* 2007:405)

An example of interdisciplinary studies of marketing, less theoretically one-sided than research focused on relevance, can be found in research drawing on *practice theory* (Araujo 2007, Kjellberg and Helgesson 2007, Araujo *et al.* 2008), although with comparatively few empirical studies of the activities of market practitioners (Hagberg and Kjellberg 2010).

As explained by Reckwitz, “practice theory does not place the social in mental qualities, nor in discourse, nor in interaction, [but rather in] a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge” (Reckwitz 2002:249).

When practice theory has been employed in marketing research it has typically paid attention to markets, rather than marketing. Markets are understood as “sites of multiple and often conflicting sets of practices”, and what is

studied is “the forms markets take as a result of efforts to shape them” (Araujo *et al.* 2008:6).

“Marketing-as-practice” has been launched as a new orientation of marketing research with a fairly distinct research agenda based on practice theory (Hackley *et al.* 2009, Skålén and Hackley 2011). Lately, practice theory has been adopted in studies of green marketing in retail (Fuentes 2011, 2014, 2015), service encounters (Svingstedt 2012), entrepreneurial marketing (Gross *et al.* 2014), pricing (vom Lehn 2014), market segmentation (Venter *et al.* 2015), sales (Geiger and Kelly 2014) and value creation (Skålén and Edvardsson 2015).

I am indeed sympathetic to research in the spirit of marketing-as-practice. It not only embraces a broad intellectual agenda but also invites research on both conventional and unconventional issues widely related to markets and marketing practice. However, I have no intention of examining how markets in the abstract are shaped. For this reason I find practice theory, as it is outlined by Reckwitz (2002), less relevant for my study, although the following questions, found in the call for marketing-as-practice research, serve as a fruitful starting point for my study.

Who is the marketing practitioner? What is the subjectivity of the marketing practitioner and where do private and public professional marketing identities meet? What do marketers do? What forms does marketing praxis take? What is marketing as interactional social practice? How do marketers do marketing? (Hackley *et al.* 2009:132)

Within the wide domain of marketing practice I take an interest in the work marketers do, while remaining sensitive to the marketers’ own understanding of this work. To produce a multifaceted account of how marketers carry out their work I focus on the *practice of talk*, which is interpreted rhetorically.

Several scholars have called for and contributed insights on marketers’ discursive accomplishments. For example, Svensson (2003, 2006, 2007), Hackley (2000) and Alvesson (1993a, 1994) have investigated the daily activities of advertising agencies by means of discourse analysis; Brownlie (1997) has investigated how marketers deal with researchers; Jaakkola (2011) has investigated service development in professional service firms; Ellis and Rod (2014) and Ellis and Hopkins (2010) have investigated business networks; and Ardley and Quinn (2014) have investigated the development and implementation of market plans. Others have taken an interest in marketers’ language on a more general level – for example, Lenney (2009), who has

investigated marketing managerial work in a business-to-business context. Finally, there are also scholars from the social sciences who have called for and produced novel insight into the daily activities of marketing managers (Prus 1989b, Lien 1997), of salespeople (Oakes 1989, Prus 1989a, Darr 2006) and of business professionals in general (Boden 1994), which are all relevant when justifying a practice-oriented study of marketing work.

Apparently, the early calls for research beyond a managerialist outlook in pursuit of “relevance” (Brownlie *et al.* 1994) and beyond one-dimensional portrayals of marketers (Brownlie and Saren 1997) have been addressed. We have considerable knowledge about the dominant position of marketing management discourse and how problematic it is to account for marketing practice by means of this dominant discourse. We also know that marketing can be understood as a micro-discursive accomplishment, and we know fairly well why and how marketing professionals talk at work. Moreover, we have this knowledge through conceptual treatises, and through qualitative studies based on interviews and, to some extent, observations. Then again, considering the relatively small number of empirical studies that exist, we still need to know more about the world of marketers (Jacobi *et al.* 2015, Venter *et al.* 2015) and the language used by professionals to accomplish marketing (Ardley and Quinn 2014:101), particularly as regards marketing work carried out by professionals outside conventional marketing departments (Hackley *et al.* 2009).

This accounts for the rationale for a study focused on marketing work, but what about the rhetorical perspective?

### **The significance of a rhetorical approach**

I shall begin my discussion of the significance of a rhetorical approach to marketing with a brief comment on the common-sense use of the very word “rhetoric”. There are good reasons for doing so. I have found that rhetoric is most often understood in marketing research as “talk without substance”. This idea of rhetoric is well represented in titles of scientific articles: “rhetoric or reality” and relationship marketing (O’ Malley and Tynan 2000), “rhetoric or reality” and industrial marketing (Koon and Low 1996), “rhetoric or reality” and marketing of higher education (Newman and Jahdi 2009), and “rhetoric or reality” and direct marketing (Sheilds and Reynolds 1996).

There are also authors who explicitly oppose a rhetorical approach to marketing, and give theoretical motives for their aversion to such an ap-

proach. Hunt, for example, argues that a rhetorical approach results in linguistic relativism and subjectivism, which undermines the “objectivity” in marketing theory and research. Hunt concludes that “advocates of linguistic relativism actually embrace an extreme, if not bizarre, nihilism” (Hunt 1993:81). I draw attention to this *anti*-rhetorical stance because it is so prevalent in conventional marketing research, which in turn has implications for the second of my purposes with this book, namely, to establish the relevance of rhetorical theory for marketing research.

This said, let me now begin to argue for the significance of a rhetorical approach by considering existing rhetorically informed marketing research.

Some of the most obvious examples of rhetorically informed marketing research can be found in the area of marketing communication. Rhetoric is here used as an interpretive theory in which the “sender’s intention is understood to be manifest in the argument, the evidence, the order of argumentation, and the style of delivery” (Scott 1994:252). Of particular interest are often style and the use of rhetorical figures in marketing communication and advertising (Hedlund and Johannesson 1993, McQuarrie and Mick 1993, 1996, Huhmann *et al.* 2002, Phillips and McQuarrie 2002, Marsh 2007). Although these are clear cases of rhetorical theory in marketing research, attention is focused primarily on marketing communication in a narrow sense, and not on the everyday verbal practices of marketing professionals.

When investigating value creation in industrial markets, Norén argues that “trust is created through rhetoric in the social exchange between the salesperson and the buyer” (Norén 2007:273). Even if she favours a rhetorical perspective generally, she does not advance rhetoric as a coherent theoretical lens. Rhetoric is often referred to as a “tool” in the hands of the seller (Norén 2007:57). Andersen also adheres to a rather limited understanding of rhetoric when studying relationship development and marketing communication (Andersen 2001). He comes to the conclusion that “rhetorical abilities are linked to performance in relationships”, and advises marketing managers to design their marketing communication strategies “following the principles of *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*”. However, persuasion is not the only communicative challenge that faces a marketing manager, Andersen argues. “Informing, listening and answering” are *other* relevant communicative practices (Andersen 2001:169), implying that rhetoric only applies to a certain domain of marketing work.

One of very few examples in which rhetorical theory has been employed extensively in an empirical study of marketing practice can be found in von

Koskull and Fougère (2011). They examined the practice of service development through a rhetorical lens in order to identify and analyse customer-related arguments in the development process. These are their conclusions regarding the significance of a rhetorical approach:

[T]hinking in terms of rhetoric reveals how customer orientation is expressed and practiced in a service development context, which provides a significant contribution to marketing research. [...] Studying how the customer is rhetorically referred to by project team members in order to drive a service development process forward provides an opportunity to understand how marketing practitioners express their customer orientation through appeals to ethos, pathos and logos, and references to knowledge and resources, in their marketing praxis. There has definitely been a paucity of knowledge about this until now in academic marketing research. (von Koskull and Fougère 2011:216-217)

According to Miles there is growing interest in the rhetorical aspects of marketing discourse – “however, there have been far fewer attempts to place rhetoric at the core of marketing in general” (Miles 2013:2015). Still, two of the few attempts to do so, conceptually speaking, can be found in Laufer and Paradeise (1990) and Tonks (2002), not counting my own first and rudimentary attempt to contribute in this vein (Nilsson 2006). Their project extends most other scholars’ interest in rhetoric and marketing as they suggest a complete re-orientation of marketing.

Tonks (2002) maintains that the role of rhetoric in marketing is usually overlooked. He sees rhetoric as a crucial driver of marketing and hence claims that rhetoric must be considered central in order to make sense of marketing in general and marketing management in particular.

The acquisition of power through marketing rhetoric is considered to be fundamental to marketing practice and marketing rhetoric is therefore an instrumental device for the everyday reality of marketing managers or for anyone who practices marketing. Furthermore, marketing is a subject area which has always appropriated and rhetoric is claimed to be an additional framing device for contemplating marketing management and the range of marketing in its wider sense. (Tonks 2002:816)

Laufer and Paradeise (1990) argue somewhat differently. Rhetoric is not understood mainly as a theory useful to the study of marketing. Instead they turn their attention to the ancient group of rhetoricians and “wise men” called *sophists* who lived in Greece in the fourth century BCE. The sophists are

often assumed to be the first professional advisors on matters of persuasion, and as such important for the whole rhetorical tradition, which will be discussed in chapter 2. Laufer and Paradeise claim the practice of the sophists, *sophism*, is closely associated with marketing.

We believe that the words Sophism and rhetoric designate notions that are sufficiently close to each other for us to advance the following proposition: *marketing is the bureaucratic form of Sophism*. (Laufer and Paradeise 1990:2)

Sophism, as it appears in organized form in contemporary postmodern society, *is* marketing, according to Laufer and Paradeise: “for both, the key discipline is rhetoric, the technique of eloquence, which Gorgias named the queen of science who holds all the rest in her power” (Laufer and Paradeise 1990:7).

It should be noted that Laufer and Paradeise (1990), Tonks (2002) and Nilsson (2006) do not present explicit calls for rhetorically informed research on marketing practice. Even so, these are examples – although brief and somewhat unrefined – of how marketing can be re-oriented theoretically by means of rhetorical thinking, which has relevance for a study that seeks to learn more about marketing work by investigating how marketers argue for business purposes. This in turn relates to a comment made by Eckhouse (1999).

[Scholars] are once again “discovering” the art of rhetoric, and several are attempting to connect the discipline to the world of work and traditional subjects areas within business and economics. Still, the connections between rhetoric in general, classical rhetoric in particular, and the profession of business are relatively unexamined in contemporary treatments of either discipline, despite the historical precedent for their interaction. (Eckhouse 1999:5)

So far I have argued for a rhetorical approach to marketing, marketing work and business. To extend my argument I need to address *how* a rhetorical approach is beneficial, which will be accomplished by means of a minor detour into research on managerial work.

Hartelius and Browning (2008) have investigated rhetorical scholarship in management research, and particularly how management scholars explain the reasons for their rhetorical approach, which, according to the authors, gives a clear idea of the versatility of a rhetorical approach. Rhetoric is “at once a lens for interpreting the world and a concrete strategy for intervening in it”,

Hartelius and Browning (2008:19) explain, with reference to Heracleous and Barrett (2001).

What makes rhetoric a useful orientation for research is its “[f]ocus on study of language in use, and on its situational, temporal, and social context [and] its influence on agents’ interpretations and actions” (Heracleous and Barrett 2001:761). Moreover, rhetoric also casts light on the identity of professionals.

[T]he role of language in understanding individual identity (“This is who I am”) and membership (“This is the group I belong to”) is crucial because different identities are easily at odds. Rhetoric resolves and retains the tension between these forces. To explore this tension, it is important to understand when and how managers become rhetors; that is, it serves scholars of management to approach the manager as strategic, self-reflective communicator and speaker. (Hartelius and Browning 2008:27)

As will be discussed in the next chapter, rhetoric emphasizes the role of creating meaning for others, and for ourselves, through everyday argumentation (Billig 1996, Symon 2000). Consequently, a rhetorical approach does not bring forward an understanding of what is hidden beyond language. When adopting a rhetorical perspective to the study of professionals we engage “in the process whereby realities about workplaces are socially constructed” (Watson 1995a:7), although the professionals themselves seem to be reluctant to admit and discuss the rhetorical dimension of their communication (Nilsson 2010).

Realities are *talked* into existence, and as argued by Bonet *et al.* (2011), there are several ways in which a rhetorical approach can cast light on this talk.

Talks and conversations are usually conceptualized as activities of communication, and communication is frequently considered as a narrow process of sending and receiving information. Rhetoric offers a deeper approach to talks and conversations and presents a conceptual frame for studying the following managerial roles: managers interpret situations and create meanings; from these interpretations and meanings, they create opportunities. Opportunities are not out there waiting to be discovered, but are constructed. (Bonet *et al.* 2011:26-27)

To conclude, rhetorical theory enables researchers to approach phenomena from opposing perspectives. Drawing on this rhetorical perspectivism, Sigrell suggests that rhetoric is best understood as a meta-language, useful to “facili-

tate a reflected standpoint to persuasive communication” (Sigrell 2011:170), which connects to Miles’ idea of a rhetorically reflexive researcher.

Researchers who are reflexively aware of their own rhetorical constructions will also, inevitably, be more critically aware of the constructions informing the dominant disciplinary paradigms with which they work everyday (and vice versa). This can only lead to more nuanced, more perceptive, and therefore more useful management research in the future. (Miles 2014:753)

## 1.3 About the study

### **Perspective, research question and methodology**

In the above sections I argued for a study of marketing work by referring to the calls for further knowledge of what marketers do beyond the assumption that they do what prescriptive marketing theories instruct them to do. I have also reported that rhetorical theory has yet to enter the field of marketing, and then briefly indicated the potential significance of a rhetorical perspective. I shall now proceed to outline the study on which this book is based.

For a start, this is a study of marketing *work*, drawing on the idea that all theories of organizational phenomena are linked in one way or another to the activities people call “work” (Barley and Kunda 2001). According to Oxford English Dictionary (<http://www.oed.com>) “work” means *to do or perform* but also *practise (a deed, course of action, labour, task, business, occupation, process, etc.)*. Most often “work” is associated with the short and informal word “job”, which in turn is defined as “the activity you get paid for” and “the ordinary working experience” (Williams 1988:337). How “ordinary” and “everyday life” should be understood is the subject of deep disagreement in the social sciences, particularly because different conceptualizations are inherently tied to different ideological and political positions (Colebrook 2002). In my study, “everyday”, “daily” and “ordinary” are used interchangeably, although at the same time I do recognize Sandywell’s call for a construction of “everydayness” that is sensitive to “the complex play of de-centered, heterological lifeworlds (and their associated discourses and forms of subjectivity)” (Sandywell 2004:175).

Furthermore, this study assumes that marketing work is accomplished by means of language. More precisely, it builds on the assumption that every



human activity is permeated by argumentation (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1971, Billig 1996).

The rhetorical theory that will be applied in the analysis of marketing work originates with Protagoras, who lived in Greece in the fifth century BCE. Protagoras' doctrine of human experiences challenges the integrity of human knowledge. His doctrine emphasizes that every reasonable argument can be met with an equally reasonable counterargument, which is not only how we argue but also a representation of how we gain knowledge of the world, by contradicting it (Billig 1996). In this perspective "having an argument" does not necessarily indicate conversations marked by hostility and bad temper. On the contrary, loss of temper is typically an indication of argumentation breakdown, which is a reason why conversations end.

Argumentation entails conversations in the "spirit of contradiction" in which there can be no last word because "claim and counter-claim can be made indefinitely" (Billig 1996:123). Hence the subtitle of this book, *A study of marketing work in the spirit of contradiction*. This perspective acknowledges the ambiguous, metaphorical and constitutive aspects of language – language as it is employed to construct the world, not mirror an external reality. This in turn motivates a close investigation of the argumentative process rather than the individual arguments brought forward in a disagreement.

The overall question this book will answer is found among the questions in the specific call for marketing-as-practice research (Hackley *et al.* 2009). The question is:

What do marketers do when they do marketing work?

The rhetorical analysis that seeks to elaborate the research question is divided into three themes. The first theme, *rhetorical situation*, focuses on where and when marketers argue for business purposes. The second theme, *rhetorical strategy*, focuses on the strategies marketers employ when arguing. The third theme, *rhetorical subject*, focuses on the marketers and how they may be understood in the light of the work they do.

As will be thoroughly discussed in chapter 3, the empirical material the analysis is based on has been accomplished through conversations, observations and everyday interaction with ten representatives of knowledge-intensive organizations that provide professional services. Some of them have formal job titles that include the word "marketing" or "sales"; some have roles in which the marketing or sales component is less clearly defined but that still involve various marketing activities, from obligation or from

personal interest. To avoid further categorization the participants in this study are referred to as *marketers* regardless of their job titles while acknowledging the individual differences in how they present themselves in different situations.

The analysis of the empirical material was inspired by ethnographic analysis (cf. Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). I did several close readings of the material guided by various rhetorical concepts, but also searching for rhetorical concepts guided by the close readings. Gradually I was able to construct a number of analytical categories, which are brought together in the three overall themes of *situation* (chapter 4), *strategy* (chapter 5) and *subject* (chapter 6). Thereafter follows a fairly broad interpretation of the findings from the analysis, under the two headings *persuasive marketing talk* (chapter 7) and *marketing work “in-between”* (chapter 8). The book ends with a brief discussion of insights and contribution under the heading *sophistic marketers and their rhetorical business* (chapter 9).

### **Purpose and intended contribution**

Given the huge amount of marketing textbooks produced and promoted over the past fifty years we might expect a multitude of studies on marketing practice, especially since virtually every one of these textbooks portrays marketing as an *applied* discipline (Hackley 2003b, Brown 2005). This is not the case. As many scholars have argued, marketing suffers from a managerialistic, positivistic and customer-centred orientation, focused on prescribing marketing strategies rather than studying marketing practices on their own terms (Brownlie *et al.* 1999, Brown 2001, Hackley 2001, 2003b, Svensson 2003, 2006, 2007, Skålén *et al.* 2008, Ardley 2011). Drawing on Skålén (2010), research on marketing of services is no exception. This in turn leads to problem in a study of what professionals *do* in service organizations, because the normative discourse of service marketing does not do justice to the nuances of everyday service encounters, which calls for new and interdisciplinary service marketing research (Corvellec and Lindquist 2005, Svingstedt 2012, Fuentes 2014, 2015).

Marketing scholars need to pay more attention to the everyday business of marketing, investigating the discursive and social practices of marketing from new theoretical perspectives (Brownlie *et al.* 1994, Brownlie *et al.* 2008, Hackley *et al.* 2009, Skålén and Hackley 2011). Moreover, to avoid the problem of producing one-dimensional accounts of marketing practitioners

and their work, we need to include marketers' subjective outlook in our studies (Brownlie and Saren 1997, Zaltman 1997, Ardley 2005, 2008, Woodall 2012). As argued by Jaakkola and this is of particular relevance for my study – “how managers themselves deal with the alleged idiosyncrasies of the professional service has yet to be explored in the domain of service marketing research” (Jaakkola 2011:222), which leads to the first purpose of this book, namely the following:

I intend to study how professionals involved in marketing of consulting services accomplish their work rhetorically, with the purpose of providing a multifaceted account of marketing work from the marketers' perspective, beyond the framework of normative marketing theory.

In so doing I seek to contribute to interdisciplinary marketing research, in which marketers and their day-to-day use of language is taken seriously (cf. Brownlie and Saren 1997, Lien 1997, Hackley 2003b, Svensson 2003, 2006, 2007, Lowe *et al.* 2008, Jaakkola 2011, Ardley and Quinn 2014).

The second purpose of this book is as follows:

I intend to demonstrate how systematic rhetorical thinking can be employed in research on marketing practice, and what it might accomplish, with the purpose of establishing the significance of a rhetorical approach to marketing.

There are to date only a handful of rhetorically informed studies of marketing practices, despite arguments in favour of such studies (Tonks 2002, von Koskull and Fougère 2011, Miles 2013, 2014), and despite the argument that rhetorical skills and acts are crucial when professionals in knowledge-intensive organizations talk their ambiguous services into existence (Alvesson 1993b, 2001), and despite the interest in rhetoric that exists in human sciences generally, often referred to as the “rhetorical turn” (Simons 1989, 1990). Although this rhetorical turn coexists with a rediscovery and re-evaluation of ancient rhetorical texts, it is something beyond a revival of old rhetorical doctrines. The rhetorical turn has transformed and enlarged rhetoric into a metadiscipline that has been adopted by scholars in fields such as organization studies (Holmgren Caicedo 2005, Corvellec 2011), leadership (Lid Andersson 2009), planning (Throgmorton 1996, Forester 1999), management (Watson 1995b, 2001, Hartelius and Browning 2008, Bonet and Sauquet 2010, Nilsson 2010), strategy (Sillince 2006, Jarzabkowski and Sillince 2007, Mantere and Sillince 2007), and business communication

(Kallendorf and Kallendorf 1985, Eckhouse 1999). Rhetorical theory has also been applied to radically rethink entire disciplines, such as economics (McCloskey 1998) and social psychology (Billig 1996).

Inspired by these examples, my book seeks to bring attention to the rhetorical dimension of marketing, and demonstrate how a rhetorically informed study of marketing work can be conducted, and what it can accomplish. As I pointed out earlier in my discussion of the significance of a rhetorical approach, this is by no means a task without challenges because the common understanding of the word “rhetoric” among marketing scholars is something like “talk without substance”. Although there are several and strong voices in favour of a rhetorical approach to marketing, I would be naïve not to acknowledge the suspicion and resistance that exists to such an approach.

Finally, the third purpose of the study is as follows:

I intend to provide an account of marketing work that is recognizable to people involved in everyday marketing activities, and valuable to them when they try to make sense of the work they carry out.

The intention to communicate with marketing practitioners themselves has influenced the style of this book. I have tried to produce what Van Maanen calls a “confessional tale of the field” (Van Maanen 1988:73-100).

I have worked in the field of marketing for over 20 years, and have had titles such as Communication Consultant, Marketing Manager, and Senior Advisor, so I am thoroughly familiar with the work marketers do for a living, which affects my research whether I want it to or not. Instead of suppressing my professional background, I have made use of it when gaining access to the field of marketing, when interacting with marketers, when doing the analysis, and when making sense of the findings. I believe this has made the practitioner’s own perspective and voice stronger in the text, and, hopefully, more accessible and intriguing for readers outside the academic world.

It should be noted that his book does not close gaps between marketing theory and marketing practice. It does not claim to be relevant for marketing practitioners in the sense that they will be given hands-on advice on how to improve their work. And I have no ambition to portray marketers as either heroes or villains of contemporary society. If anything, this book seeks to contribute to practitioners’ self-reflexive inquiries by answering Brownlie and Sarens’ (1997) call for portrayals of multidimensional marketers, which in turn may result in a better understanding of the work they do, and – why not? – lead to insights into how to do business in a better way.

# Chapter 2.

## In pursuit of rhetorical theory

In the first chapter of this book I discussed why and how a rhetorical analysis of marketing work might contribute to new insights on marketing as it is practiced. I also presented a literature review indicating that rhetorically informed studies are uncommon in marketing. Moreover, when marketing researchers take an interest in rhetoric they employ undertheorized rhetorical concepts, or none at all. The same seems to be the case in the wider field of managerial research. Researchers who claim to study managerial issues rhetorically most often neglect to anchor their analytic concepts in the rhetorical tradition, which weakens the interpretive potential of rhetoric (Hartelius and Browning 2008, Bonet *et al.* 2011). This, and my assumption that the reader of this book is a novice in the field of rhetoric, justify a rather extensive presentation of the ideas and concepts that are employed in chapters 4, 5 and 6 to accomplish the empirically informed rhetorical analysis of marketing work this book is all about.

My aim with this second chapter is to provide an accessible introduction to the rhetorical tradition in which arguing “in the spirit of contradiction” is one of the fundamental premises. As the chapter proceeds I will focus increasingly on the particular theoretical concepts used in the analysis.

The outline of the chapter is as follows. The first part covers the authorities, canons and classical texts found in most introductions to rhetoric. Certain literature references have been omitted to improve readability; instead, I have summarized the conventional story of rhetoric found in Bizzel and Herzberg (2001), Herrick (2005), Corbett and Connors (1999), Conley (1994) and Kennedy (1980), as well as in a number of comprehensive textbooks in Swedish by Scandinavian authors (Hellspong 2004, Johannesson 2006, Kjeldsen 2008, Lindqvist Grinde 2008). This is not to suggest that rhetoric is a uniform academic field dedicated exclusively to antique and fixed principles of public communication – far from it. Then again, to provide an accessible introduction to rhetoric I am obliged to simplify and summarize. For readers who seek less conventional accounts of rhetoric, and the roots of rhetoric in particular, I refer to authors as Jarratt (1998), Vitanza (1987) and Miller (1997).

The historically structured introduction to the rhetorical tradition will be followed by a presentation and elaboration of the analytic themes. These cover, roughly speaking, the argumentative context, the idea of argumentation, and the life-world of *homo rhetoricus*. In the analysis these will be referred to as *rhetorical situation*, *rhetorical strategy* and *rhetorical subject*.

At the end of this chapter the overall scope of rhetoric is revisited to mark the cornerstones of the rhetorical approach favoured in my study.

## 2.1 An introduction to classical rhetoric

What do we know about the origin of rhetoric? If we follow Burke and assume that rhetoric embraces both the *use* of persuasive resources (*rhetorica utens*) and the *study* of them (*rhetorica docens*) (Burke 1969b:36), then of course the origin of rhetorical practice, the *rhetorica utens*, cannot be known. What can be located in history and in a given cultural tradition are the conceptualizations of rhetoric, and the first appearance of an “art of persuasion”. The early forms of this art emerged in the same period as the birth of Athens and other Hellenic city-states in the fifth and fourth century BCE.

The conventional story of rhetoric suggests that the first attempt to provide systematic guidelines to an unskilled speaker was made in Syracuse, on the island of Sicily, and was related to the abrupt introduction of Athenian democracy that took place there around 480 BCE. Corax and his student Tisias are believed to be the first professional teachers in persuasion, provid-

ing services for a high fee to citizens in need of advice and training on how to be persuasive.

If Corax and Tisias really existed, or were actually one person, is an open question. What is undisputed is the emergence of a new group of teachers and intellectuals who followed the practice attributed to Corax and Tisias. These early “traders of knowledge” were known as the *sophists*.

The term “sophist”, coming from the Greek *sophos*, meaning “wise”, denotes a diverse group of itinerant advisors whom came to Athens for business reasons. Their clients were wealthy Athenian farmers, shopkeepers, merchants and other members of the middle class who were in need of persuasive skills when speaking on political, ceremonial and forensic matters. The sophists offered lessons in grammar, speech, politics, ethics or any other subject for which there was a demand.

The sophists appeared in Greece in a time of dramatic change. The transformation of the Greek political system, from aristocracy to democracy, led among many things to a new social mobility. Nobility no longer provided assurance of a dominant position in society when the middle class of Athens was able to speak persuasively on political and forensic matters of the city. Skill in persuasive speaking, rather than heritage, became a crucial factor in personal influence. The sophists’ ability to teach young Athenian men “how to manage their affairs” was very successful, which made the sophists themselves popular and influential, at least among their clients. Some of the sophists were also entertainers whom amused their audiences with extravagant and eloquent displays of language.

What was treated as skill in persuasion, *peithô*, came to be understood as “rhetoric” in the fourth century BCE. The word “rhetoric”, *rhêtorikê*, appears for the first time in Plato’s dialogue *Gorgias*, dated to fourth century BCE. Etymologically, “rhetoric” derives from the Greek expression *rhêtorikê technê*, “the art or technique of a *rhêtor*”, *rhêtor* meaning “public orator”. This marks the start of a new pedagogic tradition that located rhetoric at the centre of the Greek education. Before that, persuasive speaking had been regarded as an inherent and divine talent. The sophists demonstrated how rhetorical skills could be taught, and how these skills could be utilized in every imaginable aspect of private and civic life.

Although the sophists were surprisingly few, their importance for the origin of the rhetorical tradition cannot be overestimated. However, what is less acknowledged is the philosophical dimension of the sophists’ doctrines. Plato repudiated the sophists as verbal hair-splitters, who deceitfully claimed

to teach *arête*, which is the Greek word for “virtue”. Only the philosophers who were dealing with universally true knowledge should teach virtue and personal excellence, according to Plato.

The winner writes the history, so to speak. The Platonic writings, philosophy and world-view became common property in the Western world. The sophists’ ideas of human life and thinking were marginalized.

To understand why the sophists were so controversial let us take a closer look at two of the leading sophists, *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*.

Protagoras of Abdera [c. 490 – c. 400 BCE]

Protagoras arrived in Athens around 450 BCE. His success as a teacher and advisor made him particularly important for the image of the sophists as a collective. Besides, Protagoras had influential connections, such as Pericles who was the leading statesman in Athens at the time, which implies that Protagoras belonged to the elite of Greek society. Since only fragments of Protagoras’ writings have survived, we are largely dependent on Plato’s portrayal of him, bearing in mind Plato’s aversion to the sophists and their doctrines.

At the heart of Protagorean thinking is *debate*. His most renowned maxim, *homo mensura*, is presented in the Socratic dialogue *Theaetetus*.

Socrates: You hold that knowledge is perception?

Theaetetus: Yes.

Socrates: But look here, this is no ordinary account of knowledge you’ve come out with: it’s what Protagoras used to maintain. He said the very same thing, only he put it in a rather different way. For he says, you know, that “Man is the measure of all things: of the things which are, that they are, and of the things which are not, that they are not.” You have read this, of course?

Theaetetus: Yes, often.

(Theaetetus, 151e-152a)

The expression “man is the measure of all things” suggests there is no single and ultimate truth external to man’s perception. “What are” and “what are not” depends on the subjective perspective, thus denying an accessible objective truth outside man.

Protagoras’ rhetorical perspectivism embodies two critical ideas that have permeated the entire rhetorical tradition. First, truth is understood as an *expe-*



rience; consequently, to be successful in persuasion, a man has to be a master of experience. Second, peoples' opinions, *doxa*, are the only significant guide to their actions.

The method Protagoras taught was *antilogic*, which is a method of gaining knowledge and settling disputes by examining arguments on both sides of an issue. The Greek term often used is *dissoi logoi*, "opposing arguments". Protagoras maintained that every reasonable thought, *logos*, could be disputed with an equally reasonable *anti-logos*; which of them to support is a matter of choice. Hence, man is destined to debate. There is no universal appeal that will resolve an argumentation once and for all. There is always yet another aspect, yet another argument, to bring forward when deciding what is true here and now. Truth as an experience is related to *kairos*, which is the Greek word for "time, place and circumstances", or just "timeliness". In other words, truth is always situated in time and space.

Protagoras and other sophists frequently engaged their students in antilogic practices based on *dissoi logoi*. The students were presented with opinions they had to first defend and then attack. In so doing the sophists fostered a critical climate in which anything could be contested and argued. Still, the aim was not primarily the refutation of arguments. Through arguing both sides of an issue the students acquired skills to "make the weaker of two arguments the stronger". Subsequently, as they advanced their understanding of *dissoi logoi*, they also developed their persuasive ability, boosting their competence in both public debating and personal affairs.

Gorgias of Leontini [c. 485 – c. 380 BCE]

Another of the earliest and most prominent sophists was Gorgias. He came to Athens from Leontini, in Sicily, in 427 BCE. Gorgias had an exceptionally successful career in Athens, including such occupations as diplomat, teacher, philosopher, and orator.

Gorgias is most commonly known for his extraordinary oratorical style. His performances were as inspired by Greek poetry as they were by systematic inquiries of argumentation. Gorgias is also credited with a number of controversial ideas regarding the condition of persuasion, ideas that later became part of the rhetorical tradition. As a telling example Gorgias drew parallels between the magic in speech and the magic present in religious poetry, and came to the conclusion that speech is what controls the human mind. The only reality to be found, according to Gorgias, is what lies in the human psyche. Since speech affects the human mind, the art of persuasion is

a “psychagogic art”. Moreover, for speech to be persuasive, both the orator’s and the audience’s minds have to be known, which implies that a form of *a priori* analysis must be undertaken before the construction of a speech. The speech had to be adapted to the specific “psychological circumstances”.

*Kairos* was a central concept of Gorgias’ doctrines and practices. *Kairos* was above all demonstrated as the capacity to speak *impromptu*, taking “time, place and circumstances” into consideration as the speech evolved. With a playful attitude, Gorgias would improvise on basically any matter. He writes explicitly in the final words of the renowned text *Encomium of Helen* that the speech was prepared as a game, for amusement. This form of playfulness is a trademark of several of the sophists. Typically, when teaching *dissoi logoi*, in the spirit of contradiction, Gorgias and other sophists favoured peculiar and captivating examples, with a view to inspiring and entertaining their audiences. Gorgias often used humour and satire in his oratory. According to Gorgias this made his speech more enjoyable, and thus more powerful.

Although the sophists were both popular and influential among the elites of Athens, the Athenian philosophers did not appreciate their playful and perspectivistic approach to truth. The sophists believed all reasonably intelligent persons could and should learn the skill of speaking persuasively. The sophists also argued for the equality of all men. They promoted the idea that slavery should be abolished. This provoked the elitist philosopher Plato who claimed that one’s destiny is predetermined from birth.

Aristotle [384–322 BCE]

Aristotle was born in the Macedonian town of Stagira in 384 BCE. He went to Athens in 367 to study at Plato’s legendary school, the *Academy*, where he remained until Plato’s death in 347. Aristotle then founded his own school in Athens, the *Lyceum*.

In the beginning of his career Aristotle followed in the footsteps of Plato, siding with Plato in his harsh criticism of the sophists for what he regarded as the depraved teaching of persuasion. Although he did not retract his criticism of the sophists, it later became evident that Aristotle did not share Plato’s dedication to the abstract contemplation of universal truth. Aristotle directed his attention to more pragmatic issues, producing systematic accounts of such diverse topics as physics, logic, music, poetry, politics, biology, ethics and rhetoric.

Aristotle began teaching rhetoric around 350 BCE while he still belonged to Plato’s Academy. His commitment to rhetorical inquiry resulted in the

book *Rhetoric* (Rhet). What Aristotle offered in this foundational book of rhetorical theory was not only a manual of persuasion but also a conception of rhetoric that was thoroughly connected to philosophical reasoning. In opposition to Plato, he recognized rhetoric as an art (*techne*). Aristotle argued that an art did not have to be based upon universal and eternal ideas. To be in possession of the art of rhetoric is to know “what happens for the most part”.

Aristotle conceptualized rhetoric as a metadiscipline, rather than a pragmatic art of persuasion.

It is, then, established that rhetoric is not concerned with any single delimited kind of subject but is like dialectic and that it is a useful art. It is also clear that its function is *not* persuasion. It is rather the *detection of the persuasive aspects of each matter* and this is in line with all other skills. (Rhet 1355b)

The very first words of the *Rhetoric* establish that rhetoric is “*the counterpart of dialectic*” (Rhet 1354a). The term “counterpart” is a translation of the Greek word *antistrophos*, which is the same term Plato used when Socrates disparagingly remarked that oratory is the counterpart of “pastry baking” (Gorgias, 465). Consequently, the opening words of the *Rhetoric* could be read as a critical comment on Plato’s view of rhetoric.

In principle Aristotle shared Plato’s understanding of dialectics as a method by which to deduce logical truth, starting with commonly accepted opinions. Even so, whereas Plato used the word *doxa* to signify opinions that guided decisions and actions generally, Aristotle used *endoxa* to signify opinions that have some form of authority as they represent not only *doxa* but also what appears to be true to “the wise men”. Aristotle maintained that both dialectical and rhetorical analyses are grounded in *endoxa*, and both can argue for either side of a case, but rhetoric also engages a type of proof that is not accepted in dialectic. Rhetorical proof is not only based on the words or the thought itself (*logos*). Proofs concerning character (*ethos*) and emotion (*pathos*) are also persuasive, Aristotle explained.

When treating rhetoric as a legitimate verbal art equal to dialectic, Aristotle departed dramatically from his master’s understanding of rhetoric. This is not to say that Aristotle adhered to the radical perspectivism of the sophists; “truth and justice are naturally superior to their opposites”, he asserted (Rhet 1355a). Aristotle accused the sophists of shallow and inadequate rhetorical analysis, dealing with trivial aspects of human life, and he resolutely concurred that the art of rhetoric deserved better than the treatises found in the

existing handbooks of persuasion, which typically focused on forensic speech. Altogether, forensic oratory concerned Aristotle far less than did deliberative and epideictic oratory, which itself might be taken as a statement against the sophists.

The division of species, or genres, became significant features of rhetorical theory. Each of the three genres is occupied with a different set of questions related to differences in audiences and purposes of speech (Rhet 1358b). *Deliberative oratory* embraces questions about the most suitable course of action, debating what should be done. In order to decide on such matters arguments on both sides have to be assessed and “weighed”. While deliberative oratory is directed toward the future, *epideictic oratory* concerns the present. Epideictic or demonstrative oratory is typically performed at public ceremonies at which the orator either delivers praise or blame. In so doing, this genre of oratory embraces questions concerning virtue and immorality. *Forensic oratory* deals with justice rather than policy. The model of this genre is the law court at which the orator speaks either to defend or to accuse. The focus is not on the future or the present, but rather the past – what was done, who did it and why. The purpose of forensic oratory is to convince a jury of one particular version of the case. Although Aristotle made a detailed elaboration of the differences between the genres of rhetoric he also acknowledged it was often a matter of style. As an example, things said when giving advice would become praise (*encomia*) “by a change in the expression” (Rhet 1367a).

Plato taught dialectic as the only acceptable method of achieving insight and objective truth. The sophists took an exceptionally pragmatic and subjective approach to persuasion. Aristotle cannot be included in either of these positions. Aristotle’s version of rhetoric is something different than strict logic, pragmatic sophistry or elegant poetry. If anything, Aristotle’s rhetoric is “analytic”, not to say “problematic”. What is true and virtuous depends on the interest and the problem at hand. Knowledge in rhetoric is what enables critical examinations “of the persuasive aspects of each matter”.

Let us now move forward some two or three hundred years and get acquainted with two other dominant figures in the rhetorical tradition, *Cicero* and *Quintilian*.

Marcus Tullius Cicero [106–43 BCE]

Cicero was born in Arpinum, outside Rome, in 106 BCE. In his early years his family moved to Rome where he received rhetorical education rooted in

the Greek tradition. Cicero grew up to be a famous orator, a prolific writer and a successful politician. There are good reasons to suggest that Cicero is *the* most prominent person in the history of rhetoric. Six books on rhetoric, 58 speeches, and more than 800 letters have survived, which underscores his importance for the emergence of rhetorical theory. Let us take a closer look at some of his books.

The first book, *De Inventione* (De Inv) was written before he began his career as a politician and lawyer. The book was intended to adapt Greek rhetorical theory to Roman conditions. *De Inventione* was produced around 85 BCE, which makes it contemporary with another exceptionally influential work on rhetoric, *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (Ad Her). Since the two works brought forward similar conceptions of rhetorical theory it was long assumed that Cicero was the author of both. But, systematic inquiries have concluded that *Rhetorica ad Herennium* did not come from Cicero's pen, and the author of the work remains unidentified.

Although Cicero and the author of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* did not have access to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, they connect to Aristotle's doctrine when maintaining that the orator has to be acquainted with three subjects or causes: the *demonstrative* (or *epideictic*), the *deliberative* and the *judicial* (Ad Her 1.2, De Inv 1.5). Moreover, Cicero and the author of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* also reinforced the five parts, or faculties, of rhetoric: invention (*inventio*), arrangement (*dispositio*), style/expression (*elocutio*), memory (*memoria*) and delivery (*actio*) (Ad Her 1.3, De Inv 1.9). Cicero explained them as follows.

Invention is the discovery of valid or seemingly valid arguments to render one's cause plausible. Arrangement is the distribution of arguments thus discovered in the proper order. Expression is the fitting of the proper language to the invented matter. Memory is the firm mental grasp of matter and word. Delivery is the control of voice and body in a manner suitable to the dignity of the subject matter and the style. (De Inv 1.9)

Cicero established what we today know as the five canons of rhetoric. The five canons divide the orator's work into separate sections, or *partes*, each of which represents a distinct course of inquiry. These are as fundamental to the rhetorical tradition as is Aristotle's idea of *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*.

Cicero presented a Roman version of the Greek "topical system", which is a model of how arguments should be discovered and arranged.

In every case some of the arguments are related only to the case that is being pleaded, and are so dependent on it that they cannot advantageously be separated from it and transferred to other cases, while others are of a more general nature, and adaptable to all or most cases of the same kind. These arguments which can be transferred to many cases, we call common topics [*locos communes*]. (De Inv 2.47-48)

Name, nature, fortune, feeling and so forth could be regarded as commonplace arguments, *loci communes*, useful in a variety of contexts. *Loci* are “places” visited when inventing arguments; the transferable *loci communes* are the end result of the process of invention.

Cicero later referred to *De invention* as “unfinished and crude essays” that “slipped out of the notebooks of my boyhood” (De Or 1.2.5). His more developed works, *De Oratore* (De Or), *Brutus* (Br) and *Orator* (Or), are less restricted to the technicalities of forensic speaking and more concerned with the *orator perfectus*, the perfect orator. Cicero argued, in accordance with Aristotle and the division of *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*, that the orator’s duty (*officia oratoris*) is to prove (*docere*), to please (*delectare* or *conciliare*) and to sway (*movere* or *flectare*) (Or 69).

Altogether, these books constitute the Ciceronian programme for rhetoric, which was designed to promote an intimate relationship between eloquence, wisdom and action. The Roman understanding of wisdom was considerably different from Plato’s pursuit of universal knowledge. At least this is what Crassus, one of the main characters in Cicero’s *De Oratore*, argues. Crassus takes side with Gorgias and criticizes Socrates for separating “wise thinking” from “eloquent speaking” (De Or 3.60). The perfect orator, *perfectus orator*, is portrayed as an extroverted person who gains wisdom through practical experience of rhetoric and then uses this wisdom to do good things for society (De Or 1.34). Crassus argues that rhetoric is *the* civilizing force of society, a force to be used to overcome man’s inclination toward primitive physical power. In so saying, Cicero upheld rhetoric as an indispensable field of knowledge and area of study that was fundamental to Roman government and public life. Thus Cicero went far beyond Aristotle’s description of rhetoric as an ability to detect the available means of persuasion.

Marcus Fabius Quintilian [39–96 AD]

The most comprehensive treatise on rhetoric from antiquity is *Institutio Oratoria* (Inst Or), “The Orator’s Education”, which was composed around 95 AD by Marcus Fabius Quintilian. Quintilian was born in the Roman province

of Spain but went to Rome to study rhetoric, and then practiced as a judicial advocate. After a successful career in the Roman law courts the emperor Vespasian appointed Quintilian to an official chair in rhetoric, around 70 AD. Quintilian continued his teaching until he retired around 90 AD. It was then he wrote the influential work *Institutio Oratoria*, based on his lecture notes and two years of dedicated research.

*Institutio Oratoria* is first and foremost a handbook of rhetoric. It is composed of twelve books in which Quintilian presents the canons and terminology established by early authorities such as Plato, Aristotle and Cicero. Each new section of the work opens with a careful historical review, assessing different interpretations of a particular concept. Quintilian then presents his own interpretation and conclusion, upon which he then adds further comments. In so doing he methodically advances what eventually forms an all-inclusive treatise of rhetorical theory.

Quintilian had the highest respect for Cicero; nonetheless Quintilian clearly disagrees with Cicero's efforts to unite rhetoric and politics (Inst Or 2.15.33) and with his embellished interest in style (Inst Or 12 Pr. 4). Quintilian locates the orator and his moral character at the heart of rhetorical education.

The definition [of rhetoric] which will best suit this notion of its real nature is that "rhetoric is the science of speaking well". This includes all the virtues of speech in one formula and at the same time also the character of the orator, because only a good man can speak "well". (Inst Or 2.15.34)

Quintilian divided rhetoric into three domains: the *art*, the *artist* and the *work* (Inst Or 2.14.5). We study the art to improve in the "science of speaking well". The artist is the person who masters the art, "whose goal is to speak well". The rhetorical work is what the orator accomplishes – usually a text or a speech. Even if Quintilian has a broad perspective, his focus is always on the orator, the "good man skilled in speaking", or in Latin, *vir bonus dicendi peritus* (Inst Or 12.1.1). The Quintilian *perfectus orator* is "a sort of Roman Wise Man" able to play the part of a statesman in "experience and activity of real life" (Inst Or 12.2.6-8). These were orators with "exceptional powers of speech", which among other things made them "fit for the management of public and private business" (Inst Or 1. Pr. 9-11).

We must, in general terms, conclude that rhetoric consists of action, for it is by this that it accomplishes what belongs to its duty. (Inst Or 2.18.3)

To understand the ideal orator we have to situate Quintilian and the orator he is addressing in a historical perspective. In antiquity, the spoken word was analogous to a person's intellectual capacity, his function in society, his artistic creativity and the "power of [his] personality". Thus rhetoric cannot be reduced to the "power of persuasion" (Inst Or 2.16.11). The orator cannot afford to be close-minded, as experts on dialectics who have a very narrow perspective, "incompetent in any more serious field as certain little animals that are nimble enough in a confined space but easily caught in the open" (Inst Or 12.2.14). In this respect rhetoric is not an exact science built on eternal rules. When studying orators in action we will find that no single form or style has pleased everybody "partly because [of] time or place, and partly because of the tastes and aims of each person" (Inst Or 12.10.2). All styles should be used "as circumstances demand" (Inst Or 12.10.69) since "almost everything depends on Causes, times, opportunity, and necessity" (Inst Or 2.13.2). Consequently, the orator should be tied to as few universal rules as possible (Inst Or 2.14.14), analogous to wrestlers who have a stock of holds, tricks and throws from which they can "apply one or two, as occasion offers" (Inst Or 12.2.12).

Having presented Quintilian and the other masterminds of the rhetorical tradition, I now end this general introduction to classical rhetoric and turn my attention to those particular ideas and concepts that will be used to activate and advance the rhetorical analysis of marketing work, starting with issues concerning the immediate rhetorical context.

## 2.2 Two conflicting understandings of rhetorical context

### **Locating *kairos* at the heart of the analysis**

Aristotle's definition of rhetoric – the detection of the persuasive aspects of each matter (Rhet 1355b) – stipulates that a rhetorical analysis should be conducted with a particular case in mind. The particular is also central to Cicero's treatises on rhetoric. An efficient speech "consider[s] propriety", which means that it takes the particular speaker, the particular subject and particular audience into account (Or 71). A successful speech has to "fit all conceivable circumstances" (Or 124). To Cicero this is largely a matter of



style, whereas Quintilian argues that appropriateness also “shares ground with invention” (Inst Or 11.1.8).

The equivalent Greek term for “propriety” is *to prepon*, which is related to the term *kairos* insofar as time and place must be taken into consideration when assessing the propriety of a speech (Poulakos 1983:36). *Kairos* is most often translated into English as “the right and opportune time to do something” (Kinneavy 1986:80-84). *Kairos* is thus different from *chronos*. *Chronos*, refers to the “fundamental conception of time as measure”, whereas *kairos* indicates the qualitative aspects of time, as in “the right time for action” (Smith 2002:47). Put differently, *kairos* shows us how “thought should encounter reality [---] on the spur of moment” (White 1987:13).

Kinneavy explains that *kairos* and *to prepon* form a general principle of “the appropriateness of the discourse to the particular circumstances of the time, place, speaker, and the audience involved” (Kinneavy 1986:84). However, Miller argues that *kairos* is different from appropriateness. *Decorum* and *prepon*, which are the classical notions of appropriateness, beg for a realistic approach to a rhetorical situation, whereas the idea of *kairos* rests on a different ontology.

[Kairos] presumes a relativism in which the nature of a situation is not objectively knowable – in which (as Gorgias apparently put it) deception is inevitable since language cannot truly report the world, and (as Protagoras apparently taught) contradictory arguments are possible in any case” (Miller 1994:83).

*Kairos* was a fundamental concept for both Plato and the sophists, whereas Aristotle’s analytic interest in rhetoric, rather than the everyday practice of it, made him less concerned with *kairos* (Kinneavy 1986:82). Nonetheless, Plato and the sophists had completely different views on the nature and use of *kairos*. To simplify it greatly, Plato emphasized the ethical dimension and used *kairos* as the foundation on which he built his theory of virtue. Neglecting *kairos* leads not only to rhetorical failure but also to moral deprivation (Pheadrus). The sophists, on the other hand, pointed out that solutions to rhetorical challenges cannot be generated by applying unchangeable and transcendent social laws. As a consequence, virtue and the absolute truth appeared less interesting to the sophists than did the immediate circumstances in time and space that the speaker faced (Bizzell and Herzberg 2001:24).

The aim of the reasoning here goes no further than to claim that a rhetorical analysis guided by *kairos* justifies an inquiry into the immediate context

of human communication, the *rhetorical situation*. Drawing on the discussion above, there are two extreme positions regarding the understanding of a rhetorical situation. As argued by Miller, either “*kairoi* are important exigences punctuating *chronos*”, as Bitzer (1968) implies, or “every moment along the continuum of *chronos* has its *kairos*”, as Vatz (1973) implies (Miller 1992:312). Let me expand this reasoning with reference to Bitzer (1968) and Vatz (1973), and their influential dispute on the nature of rhetorical situations.

### **Rhetoric is situational**

Is rhetoric situational? Or are situations rhetorical? These questions started an extensive and passionate scholarly discussion forty years ago concerning the situations in which rhetoric is practiced. The very concept “rhetorical situation” was introduced by Bitzer in his article *The rhetorical situation* (Bitzer 1968). Although the word *kairos* does not appear in the article it is undisputed that Plato, the sophists, and Bitzer are dealing largely with the same aspects of rhetoric, namely, the immediate rhetorical context.

Bitzer defines the rhetorical situation as “a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations” presenting an imperfection that can be resolved by discourse. A rhetorical situation “dictates” a certain discursive response.

[R]hetorical discourse comes into existence as a response to situation, in the same sense that an answer comes into existence in response to a problem. (Bitzer 1968:5)

Bitzer writes that “situation” is not a standard term in rhetorical theory in the way “audience”, “speaker”, subject”, “occasion” and “speech” are. He argues that the rhetorical situation is only discussed indirectly, if not totally ignored. About twenty years later, Kinneavy (1986) would reason in a similar manner, concluding that *kairos* is a neglected concept in rhetorical theory.

Whereas Kinneavy had his eyes on the classical understanding of *kairos*, Bitzer formulated a version of a rhetorical situation characterized by recognizable social structures. According to Bitzer, a situation has a “nature” in which meaning resides. The nature of a situation is *not* a rhetorical construction. It is, ontologically speaking, a “real” situation. Moreover, an act is rhetorical “because it is a response to a situation of a certain kind”. What is rhetorical or not is thus only intelligible in relation to a specific situation.

The function of a rhetorical discourse is to provide a fitting *re-action* to a situation which “needs and invites” it. Hence, every rhetorical situation has an “imperfection marked by urgency”, called *exigence* in Bitzer’s vocabulary. There are numerous exigences in different contexts but only those exigences that can be modified, and be modified by rhetorical discourse, are defined as rhetorical. Exigences related to unchangeable necessities, or direct (silent) human action, are not considered rhetorical.

The second constituent of a rhetorical situation, besides exigence, is the *audience*. This is not just “a body of mere hearers or readers”. The rhetorical audience is only “those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change”.

The third constituent of Bitzer’s conceptualization of the rhetorical situation is the set of *constraints* that are parts of the situation “because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence”. These constraints might be, for example, beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, motives and the like, as determined by the situation. Constraints included in the situation are also aspects related to the characteristics of the orator, such as his character, personality or style.

Bitzer’s understanding of a rhetorical situation has implications for the overall understanding of rhetoric. Bitzer explicitly challenges the foundation of classical rhetoric.

Not the rhetor and not the persuasive intent, but the situation is the source and ground of rhetorical activity – and, I should add, of rhetorical criticism. [---] When the orator, invited by the situation, enters it and creates and presents discourse, then both he and his speech are additional constituents. (Bitzer 1968:6)

Bitzer takes a structuralistic view of the rhetorical situation, and of rhetoric. He also clings to a realistic, not to say Platonic, understanding of reality, when in the last part of the article he concludes:

In the best of all possible worlds, there would be communication perhaps, but not rhetoric – since exigences would not arise. (Bitzer 1968:13)

The “real world” we live in, Bitzer continues, presents imperfections that invite and demand change affected by humans who “properly address a mediating audience” rhetorically. Hence rhetoric has its function, and its justification, as a method of handling imperfections. The “scientific method” brings us closer to reality. Rhetoric can then be used to “effect valuable

changes in reality”, Bitzer states, concluding the article *The rhetorical situation* (Bitzer 1968).

### **Situations are rhetorical**

Bitzer’s “rhetoric is situational” was challenged by Vatz (1973). The title of his essay, *The myth of the rhetorical situation*, indicates an entirely different theoretical position compared to Bitzer, a position which he reinforced 35 years later in *The mythical status of situational rhetoric: implications for rhetorical critics’ relevance in the public arena* (Vatz 2009). This is Vatz’s main claim:

No situation can have a nature independent of the perception of its interpreter or independent of the rhetoric with which he chooses to characterize it. (Vatz 1973:154)

According to Vatz, Bitzer’s outline of a rhetorical situation draws on a stimulus–response model, which requires a “realist” philosophy of meaning, with some “unfortunate implications for rhetoric”. Vatz argues that every examination aimed at revealing *the* correct understanding of the nature of a given rhetorical situation is a pointless speculative exercise.

First, there is a choice of events to communicate. The world is not a plot of discrete events. [---] Bitzer argues that the nature of the context determines the rhetoric. But one never runs out of context. One never runs out of facts to describe a situation. What was the “situation” during the Vietnam conflict? What was the situation of the 1972 elections? What is any historical situation? The facts or events communicated to us are choices, by our sources of information. (Vatz 1973:156)

Vatz explains that this line of reasoning builds on Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, which he underlines with the following citation.

By the very fact of selecting certain elements and presenting them to the audience, their importance and pertinency to the discussion are implied. Indeed such a choice endows these elements with a *presence* [---] It is not enough indeed that a thing should exist for a person to feel its presence (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1971:116-117, cited in Vatz 1973:157)

A consequence of this understanding of rhetoric and argumentation is that the orator must be held morally accountable not only for “fitting responses” gen-

erated to deal with imperfections, but also for the selection of events to be experienced as the present rhetorical situation. This is an ethical dimension ignored by Bitzer, Vatz argues. Presence is not only a matter of choice, it is also a creation, or “invention of significance” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1971:121). The rhetoric that portrays the situation has moral dimensions. The orator is responsible not only for what is made salient (or what is *not* made salient) but also for *how* this salience is rhetorically created.

Vatz concludes that the understanding of rhetorical theory depends on the understanding of rhetorical situation, that is, if rhetoric is a cause or an effect of meaning.

If you view meaning as intrinsic to situations, rhetorical study becomes parasitic to philosophy, political science, and whatever other discipline can inform us as to what the “real” situation is. If, on the other hand, you view meaning as a consequence of rhetorical creation, your paramount concern will be how and by whom symbols create the reality to which people react. In a world of inexhaustible and ambiguous events, facts, images, and symbols, the rhetorician can best account for choices of situations, the evocative symbols, and the forms and media which transmit these translations of meaning. Thus, if anything, a rhetorical basis of meaning requires a disciplinary hierarchy with rhetoric at the top. (Vatz 1973:157-158)

Some 35 years later Vatz concluded that the dispute on perspectives was won by Bitzer’s philosophy, and as a result contemporary salience-making concepts, such as agenda-setting and framing, have been located outside the conventional vocabulary of rhetorical analysis (Vatz 2009). How presence is talked into existence is not discussed in “rationalistic conceptions of reasoning”, which lead to an incomplete understanding of the overall process of argumentation, particularly because “deliberate suppression of presence is an equally noteworthy phenomenon, deserving of detailed study” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1971:116-118). Following the same line of reasoning, Billig suggests that the appeal to “situational demands” does nothing more than to locate the choice of expression “in the social situation rather than within the emotional life of the individual” (Billig 1996:260). This is not an inaccurate standpoint, Billig remarks, but it is too limited because it downplays the contradictory aspects of human interaction as it was outlined by Protagoras and his idea of antilogic thinking (Billig 1996:74, 261-263).

It appears that Vatz (1973, 2009), Billig (1996) and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1971) share three fundamental ideas of a rhetorical situation. First, what is present in a particular rhetorical situation is a matter of argu-

mentation rather than a disinterested observation. Second, the negotiated meaning is not fixed, because there are always hidden, suppressed and undetected aspects to add to the rhetorical situation at hand, which could potentially alter the imaged situation dramatically. Third, the concept of a rhetorical situation is best elaborated in the light of a wider argumentation theory that draws on the doctrines of the sophists discussed earlier.

Linking to argumentation theory is by no means controversial, given the growth of scholarly associations, books and academic journals that have been devoted to this field of interest in the last half of the twentieth century. Still, as the following section will demonstrate, how argumentation should be understood is as disputed as is the idea of a rhetorical situation.

## 2.3 Exploring theories of argumentation

### The domain of argumentation theory

Argumentation is a research domain in its own rights (Benoit *et al.* 1992, Eemeren *et al.* 1996, Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, Blair 2012), which is quite remarkable considering the various conflicting perspectives struggling for acceptance and prominence within the domain. Rowland explains:

The problem facing argumentation theorists today can be explained quite simply: there is no agreement on the defining characteristics of argument form, the theory which should undergird the study of argument, the proper method of evaluating that study, or even the meaning of the term argument itself. This disagreement is so fundamental that some theorists believe that others are not even studying argumentation. (Rowland 1987:141)

In order to gain some distance from contemporary disputes on argumentation theory I shall return to the authorities of classical rhetoric. Even if we can imagine that reflections on argumentation, understood as “reason-giving”, must be as old as language itself, it was Aristotle who began the development of a theory of reasoning (Wolf 2010). Aristotle brought forward three forms of argumentation: *apodictic*, *dialectic* and *rhetorical* argumentation. *Apodictic*, or logical, argumentation referred to a formal syllogistic demonstration to produce scientific facts. *Dialectic* argumentation on the other hand was not based on objective facts but on *endoxa*, common opinion. Finally, *rhetorical*

argumentation referred to the practice of a public orator who strived to persuade an audience. The rhetorical proof, the *enthymeme*, is a sort of incomplete argument to which the listeners have to add meaning to make complete. In logical argumentation the premises are demonstrated explicitly, and lead with certainty to a universal conclusion. In rhetorical argumentation some of the premises are left implicit. The listener has to use common sense to add the necessary, but unexpressed, premises. Thus, rhetorical argumentation always draws on *endoxa* to be persuasive.

This is a brief version of the foundation of Aristotle's argumentation theory. As Wolf (2010) underscores, the three forms and their subforms are exceptionally difficult to comprehend since Aristotle keeps changing the criteria when he analyses them. Besides, what we label "logic" today was often called "dialectic" in antiquity, whereas Aristotle referred to logic as "analytic", and then developed a new understanding of "dialectic" as the art of debate (Eemeren *et al.* 1996). Indeed, establishing an outline of argumentation theory can be a rather confusing undertaking. The reason to turn to Aristotle in the first place is his importance in the early development of argumentation studies. This is not to say that the sophists did not have ideas on argumentation, but their teachings were designed for persuasion in an everyday social context. Argumentation in the sophistic tradition was originally not a separate subject; argumentation was treated as an integral part of rhetoric (Benoit 1992:50-51).

The close connection between rhetorical and argumentational issues in ancient Greek and Rome gradually dissolved, eventually becoming categorically split in the sixteenth century. In 1549 Peter Ramus published *Arguments in rhetoric against Quintilian* in which he manifested that invention and arrangement should be excluded from the domain of rhetoric.

There are two universal, general gifts bestowed by nature upon man, Reason and Speech; dialectic is the theory of the former, grammar and rhetoric of the latter. Dialectic therefore should draw on the general strengths of human reason in the consideration and the arrangement of the subject matter, while grammar should analyse purity of speech in etymology, syntax, and prosody for the purpose of speaking correctly, and also in orthography for the purpose of writing correctly. Rhetoric should demonstrate the embellishment of speech first in tropes and figures, second in dignified delivery. (Ramus 1549/ 2001:684)

Ramus reduced the rhetorician to a man with eloquent speech, in contrast with Quintilian's idea of the orator as *vir bonus dicendi peritus*, a good man

skilled in speaking. Ramus promoted dialectic as the only acceptable method of reasoning, much in line with Plato. An argument should be examined to decide whether it is “true” or “false”, not in terms of its persuasive qualities. Moreover, to deal with the moral aspects of life the dialectician should turn to moral philosophy, not rhetoric.

Rhetoric understood as a comprehensive theory that incorporated sound thinking, the individual’s moral development *and* persuasive oratory, was gradually lost in the Renaissance. Argumentation became a matter exclusively for logicians and dialecticians (Bizzell and Herzberg 2001:676). This logical–deductive paradigm in argumentation studies remained intact until the twentieth century. Then, in the mid-1960s, things changed dramatically. One reason was the new interest in the symbolic and interactional aspects of communication. Brockriede (1992) points out that no concept of argument viewed as an interpersonal interactive process existed before the 1960s. The idea that deductive and strictly formal logic should provide the overall theoretical framework was criticized. The relationship between argumentation and rationality became the focus of attention. A view emerged of argumentation as intentional and strategic manipulation of symbols to “produce any sort of perceptual, attitudinal, or actuative change” (Gronbeck 1992). Even so, the dispute over how argumentation and rhetoric should be understood is far from settled, which calls for a closer look at contemporary positions in argumentation.

### **Argument as product, procedure or process**

Aristotle established three main perspectives in argumentation theory: logic, dialectic and rhetoric. Each of these suggests different answers to the question *what is an argument?*

“An argument,” says the logician, “is a set of statements consisting of premises and conclusion, or claim and support.” “An argument,” says the rhetorician, “is a mode of appeal, a means of persuasion, a behaviour typical of symbol users communicating.” “Argument,” says the dialectician, “is a disciplined method of discourse for the critical testing of theses.” (Wenzel 1992:125)

Those different answers to what argument is about can be summed up in three words: *product*, *procedure* and *process* (Wenzel 1992, Eemeren *et al.* 1996). The logician tries to understand the outcome of argumentation, focus-



ing on the representations of human talk as objectified aspects of meaning. Thus, the logician deals with *argument as a product*. The dialectician, on the other hand, situates the concept of argument in his methodology for overcoming differences in opinion by means of reasonable debate. He focuses on *arguments as a procedure*. Finally, the rhetorician seeks effective management of symbols to influence attitudes and actions. His motive is persuasion, but not necessarily by means of rational argumentation. The rhetorician views *argument as a process*.

This sort of taxonomy should not be laid out without a warning. Differences are highlighted, and similarities are neglected. It is important to underscore that logic, dialectic and rhetoric all originate from language users' desire to understand argument and argumentation both practically and theoretically (Wenzel 1992). Nonetheless, the arrangement of perspectives above can be used to frame three different versions of what constitutes a "good" argument. When someone seeks *certain* arguments, *reasonable* arguments or *effective* arguments, we know where to direct them theoretically. At the same time, logicians and dialecticians' attacking of rhetoricians for ignoring "validity" when dealing with argumentation provokes a rather pointless palaver (Wenzel 1992).

Since the late 1950s it is the rhetorical perspective that has assumed a dominant position in argumentation theory (Eemeren 2009), although not without resistance from traditional argumentation theorists (Brockriede 1992, Gronbeck 1992). Many argumentation theorists are still focused on resolving differences of opinion by means of sound procedures (Garver 2000). Add to this Kock's claim that contemporary argumentation theorists adhere to an understanding of rhetoric at odds with the ancient rhetorical tradition, which focused on choice of social action rather than consensus of opinions (Kock 2009).

What has been said so far leads us to the somewhat unexpected conclusion that in order to study everyday argumentation rhetorically we should seek inspiration beyond the borders of contemporary argumentation theory.

## **New Rhetoric**

A research field as that of argumentation, which attracts logicians who reject psychology, psychologists who dismiss logic and humanists side by side with anti-humanists, should be met with suspicion, according to Willard (1989:7). Willard is critical of the view of argument as an icon of rationality. This bur-

dens argumentation theory with the task of determining what a proper argument is. One of the major mistakes that have been made, it is suggested by Anderson and Mortensen (1967), is the taken-for-granted stability, and transparency, of the rhetorical context. As Toulmin has demonstrated, the *power* of an argument may be the same regardless of the context, but the *ground* required to justify the argument varies from field to field (Toulmin 1958/2003:33). Toulmin compares an argument to an organism. Argumentation embodies a sort of anatomical structure. He is not interested in the “gross structure” but rather in the “detailed physiology” of an argument (Toulmin 1958/2003:87). An argument is “presented in a sequence of steps conforming to certain basic rules of procedures” leading to the conclusion that “rational assessment is an activity necessarily involving formalities” (Toulmin 1958/2003:40). However, according to Anderson and Mortensen, Toulmin neglects to point out that the connection between the ground and the conclusion is not to be *discovered* in everyday argumentation, but rather to be *invented*. This, in turn, is a creative process dependent on the analyst’s “language background, personal bias and intellectual ability” (Anderson and Mortensen 1967:149). Subsequently, argument has no essence or nature.

Willard (1989) understands argumentation as a form of *ad lib* interaction, or happening. Humans improvise, act and react while encountering others’ argumentation. The context is not a solid structure that determines the interaction, as suggested by Bitzer (1968). On the contrary, “selves, situations, and meanings are all matters of negotiation” (Willard 1989:271).

Willard offers an interactional approach to argumentation, located in the field of communication, and rooted in Burke’s understanding of rhetoric as an indispensable function of language itself (Burke 1969b). This approach positions rhetoric as a *first-order* phenomenon, in contrast with conceptualizations of rhetoric as a *second-order* phenomenon, that is, as an art *of*, theory *about*, or teaching *in* persuasion (Fleming 1998).

Burke (1969b, 1969a) along with other seminal authors, as for example Richards (1936), Toulmin (1958/2003), Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1971) and Perelman (1982), marked the beginning of a new era in rhetorical theory, which created new frontiers for dispute among rhetoric scholars.

On one side we have Gaonkar who criticizes the advocates of “new rhetoric” for stretching the idea of rhetoric too far, which “severely undermines rhetoric’s self-representation as a situated practical art” (Gaonkar 1997:76). He argues that the ancient rhetorical treatises that constitute the foundation of *rhetorica docens* are too “thin” for theorizing. *Rhetorica docens* does not

provide grounds for the form of “big” interpretative rhetorical theory Burke is trying to establish (Gaonkar 1997).

On the other side, Leff argues that Gaonkar’s critique of universal or “big” rhetoric rests on an overly rigid idea of agency. Gaonkar assumes that analysts have no alternative but to “lock their perspective either within the subjectivity of the rhetor or within the subjectivity of their own theoretical interests” (Leff 1997:93). Leff admits the possibility of a self-reflexive and fluid relationship between the agency of the analyst and the agency of the rhetorical subject. This connects to Schiappa’s argument, also in a direct response to Gaonkar, “what counts as ‘rhetorical’ depends on our own interpretation rather than one using a rheto-meter to detect a given ‘quality intrinsic to the object’” (Schiappa 2001:269), or as formulated by Vatz (1973), the analysts do not “find” rhetorical situations worth analysing, they *invent* them.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca maintain that the various elements in a process of argumentation “are imprecise on all sides”. Diverse arguments interact with each other, with the overall argumentative context, with the conclusion they suggest, and with the very discourse used to portray the arguments (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1971:460). Drawing on Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1971), and Perelman (1977/2004), Billig underscores that argumentation is a *two-sided* and *controversial* affair.

The context of rhetoric, as an argumentative context, is not confined to the relations between the speaker and the audience. The context might include the opinions which the speaker is attempting to justify to the audience, but it also comprises the counter-opinions which are implicitly or explicitly being criticized. (Billig 1996:118)

If there are always two sides to an issue, then any single opinion, or “individual argument”, is actually, or potentially, controversial. Therefore, any individual argument is actually, or potentially, a part of a social argument. (Billig 1996:74)

The same reasoning applies to the idea of *loci communis*. What is brought forward as common sense in an argumentative context – for example, by means of a proverb – can always be confronted or circumscribed by an *opposite* proverb, demonstrating another aspect of common sense; “each *locus* can be confronted by one that is contrary to it” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1971:85).

Therefore, to understand the meaning of a sentence or a whole discourse in an argumentative context, one should not examine merely the words within the discourse or the images in the speaker's mind at the moment of the utterance. One should also consider the positions which are being criticized, or against which a justification is being mounted. Without knowing these counter-positions, the argumentative meaning will be lost. (Billig 1996:121)

This is my understanding of *new rhetoric*. New rhetoric is rooted in Protagoras' doctrine that every sound argument comes with an equally sound counterargument – sometimes held by the audience, but always lurking in a multi-level argumentative context and within the speaker himself. As Billig points out, referring to the Greek sophist Isocrates, the same arguments used to persuade others are also enlisted when we deliberate with ourselves (Billig 1996:140). Hence the conclusion that the theory of argumentation presented above comes with wide-ranging implications not only for the understanding of social interaction, but also for the understanding of the human being engaged in this interaction – for example, in doing marketing work, which will be the topic of the next section.

## 2.4 *Homo rhetoricus*

This section explores the actors engaged in arguing, and how they become *rhetorical subjects*. This is how Greene explains it.

To be sure, there are many different ways a rhetorical subject might appear (deliberative citizen, orator-statesman, salesperson, audience, voter, consumer) but each of these forms require a particular articulation of the rhetorical subject in specific political, cultural or economic directions. (Greene 2009:50)

In order to study the becoming of a rhetorical subject Greene suggests that Lanham's idea of a *homo rhetoricus* provides a beneficial point of departure (Greene 2009:51). The idea of *homo rhetoricus*, "rhetorical man", was presented by Lanham (1976) to discuss the rhetorical ideal of life for a human subject entirely formed by training in rhetoric.

Lanham contrasts *homo rhetoricus* with *homo seriusus*, "serious man". *Homo seriusus* has "a central self, an irreducible identity", living in a real society in which he has "invented language to communicate with his fellow man" (Lanham 1976:1). His communication style is measured by *clarity*

when he communicates facts, and by *sincerity* and “faithfulness to the self” when he communicates emotions. However, locate this man in a rhetorical universe, train him extensively in impersonation, have him understand the “correspondence between verbal style and personality type”, and cultivate “an acute sense of social situation”, and you end up with a subject with a completely different frame of mind. A new human species has appeared – a *homo rhetoricus* with “an overpowering self-consciousness about language” (Lanham 1976:2-3).

Rhetorical man is an actor; his reality public dramatic. His sense of identity, his self, depends on the reassurance of daily histrionic re-enactment. He is thus centred in time and concrete local action. The lowest common denominator of his life is a social situation. [---] Rhetorical man is trained not to discover reality but to manipulate it. Reality is what is accepted as reality, what is useful. [---] The rhetorical way of life, then, begins with the centrality of language. It conceives reality as fundamentally dramatic, man as fundamentally a role player. [---] *Homo rhetoricus* cannot, to sum up, be *serious*. (Lanham 1976:4-5)

Expanding the reasoning above, *homo rhetoricus* has a different understanding of communication than does *homo seriosus*. *Homo seriosus* communicates facts and concepts, striving for clarity, and feelings, striving for sincerity, holding a transparent style as the most effective (Lanham 1976:1). *Homo rhetoricus* on the other hand treats facts, concepts, emotions, clarity and sincerity as results of *rhetorica utens*, the use of persuasive resources. These processes are highly dynamic since they require a continual movement between language and concept, between inner and outer worlds, between “a nominalist universe and a realistic one” (Lanham 1976:23). Furthermore, drawing on Harré, this language-oriented model of communication assumes a human being “engaged in talk – speaking of others so as to construct at least some part of his psychology, that is, of the many-faceted mechanism controlling action, as he goes along” (Harré 1980:205).

Greene argues that although Lanham’s conceptualization of *homo rhetoricus* lacks scientific rigour, it is still an instructive demonstration of how a rhetorical subject apprehends a “set of characteristics and dispositions” (Greene 2009:51).

*Homo rhetoricus* portrays humans as “rhetorical beings who use persuasive speech not only to influence others but also to shape themselves” (Oesterreich 2009:49). As suggested by Fish, *homo rhetoricus* is a manipulator not only of reality but also of the rhetorical subject that enacts the reality:

“By exploring the available means of persuasion in a particular situation, he tries them on, and as they begin to suit him, he becomes them” (Fish 1989:483).

When making an argument we also make the rhetorical subject who then “becomes a force in the emerging discourse” (Hawhee 2002:17). Subsequently, an analysis influenced by *homo rhetoricus* denies the rhetorical subjects an essence beyond the persuasive processes. The authentic personality of such a rhetorical subject is the one that is impersonated in a particular situation: “the wider his range of impersonations, the fuller his self” (Lanham 1976:27).

Oesterreich argues that this does not presume a radically individualistic theoretical position. The personality of *homo rhetoricus* is a “societal self” constructed among competing interpretations of this self. So, undertaking an analysis in the light of *homo rhetoricus* does not invite an analysis of the subjective inner space of the rhetorical subject, but rather of the “intersubjective sphere of culture and society” (Oesterreich 2009:52).

Oesterreich draws on Lanham’s *homo rhetoricus* to explore the possibility of a “rhetorical theory of culture”. In so doing he finds Lanham’s devotion to the classically trained orator troublesome.

Lanham is one-sidedly oriented toward the European tradition of the art of speaking (*ars rhetorica*), and neglects the universal, inartificial phenomenon of the rhetorical that possesses a cultural ubiquity not as art but as capacity within the sphere of living. (Oesterreich 2009:57)

Oesterreich’s project is to establish a rhetorical anthropology of everyday life, beyond the “art of rhetoric”. For example, he regards the process of creating a persuasive speech (*inventio, dispositio, elocutio, memoria, and action*) to be a “heuristic key for the fundamental-rhetorical notion of mind” rather than elements on the curriculum of rhetorical education” (Oesterreich 2009:50). In a direct response to Oesterreich, Gross expresses reservations about a fundamental, rhetorical approach to culture and, indirectly, to the rhetorical subject. Given the antiessentialist position of Lanham it is highly problematic to make *homo rhetoricus* part of a scientific universal rhetorical anthropology (Gross 2009:61).

Indeed, I am not pursuing an anthropology of a particular human being; however, Oesterreich raises an important objection when he points out the potential distance between *homo rhetoricus* and everyday interaction with everyday audiences. As argued by Billig, when studying everyday matters

rhetorically we should emphasize the similarities between the orators and their audiences rather than theoretically increase the gap between them.

This might seem surprising, because it is easy to suppose that, in the rhetorical situation, the orator is the extraordinary person and that the audience represents dull ordinariness. In the courtroom, it is the jury who are selected for their ordinariness, whereas the barristers are chosen for their specialist skills. Politicians will address the “public”, in order to put themselves at its head and advertisers cajole the ordinary shopper, in order to make fortunes for themselves and their clients. [---] However, in certain respects orators are not figures set apart from their ordinary audience. [Quintilian and Aristotle] urged the speaker to be at one with the audience. [---] If orators adapt themselves to their audiences, then the image of the powerful orator playing masterfully with the emotions of the helpless crowd is a myth. (Billig 1996:223-225).

The rhetorical subject imagined by Billig (1996), Fish (1989) and Lanham (1976) has the ability to argue both sides, in the spirit of contradiction, in an everyday argumentative context. According to the authors, this is best understood and elaborated in the light of the ideas on human communication and thinking provided by Protagoras and Gorgias.

Hence we are back where this chapter started, with the doctrines of the ancient sophists. That said it is time to bring this chapter to an end, and ask what it has accomplished.

## 2.5 What this chapter has accomplished

The purpose of this chapter was to make sense of the rhetorical theory upon which the analysis of marketing work is based. I anticipated a rather extensive chapter as I wished to present an accessible introduction to the rhetorical tradition and its philosophical roots in axioms such as “every argument has two sides” and “man is the measure of all things”.

As this chapter has demonstrated, rhetorical theory may have ancient roots but it embraces a diverse and dynamic field of contemporary inquiry. Re-interpretations of historical documents and general academic quarrels about the function and scope of rhetoric make it pointless to put a conclusive frame on rhetorical theory. When pursuing a workable rhetorical theory, the foundational question “What *is* rhetoric?” should be downplayed in favour of the

more inclusive question “What can rhetoric be?” (Lucaites *et al.* 1999:19). This chapter has provided answers to the latter question.

I follow a humanistic rhetorical tradition that acknowledges the human being as the origin of speech rather than a location from which discourse is articulated (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1971, Vatz 1973, Lanham 1976, Fish 1989). Then again, what we experience as reality is not the result of a single actor’s doings and considerations. Meaning and reality (with a small *r*) is the outcome of an *intersubjective* rhetorical process (Brummett 1976), marked by many-sided argument and controversy (Billig 1996). Put differently, persuasion is a *social* practice, accomplished in the spirit of contradiction.

Furthermore, how and with what effect people use their persuasive resources (*rhetorica utens*) is possible and meaningful to study regardless of whether these people recognize themselves as orators or not. The texts, doctrines and ideas of the rhetorical tradition (*rhetorica docens*) allow the researcher to see and represent “things” – for example, marketing work – that would otherwise be hidden or poorly represented.

Yet there are good reasons to embrace the division of *rhetorica utens* and *rhetorica docens* with a critical mind. Using rhetorical theory as an interpretative lens is beyond the ancient understanding of *rhetorica docens*. The masterminds of classical rhetoric, with the possible exception of Aristotle, had a predominantly pedagogical interest. They were not driven by a desire to use rhetoric hermeneutically to explain social practices. When rhetoric is expanded to include every aspect of human affairs, far beyond the classical idea of public speaking, then rhetorical theory runs the risk of becoming so globalized and extensive that “rhetoric’s self-representation as a situated practical art” is seriously at stake, potentially leading to weak rhetorical scholarship (Gaonkar 1997:76).

Then again, as maintained by Schiappa (2001) in a direct response to critics of “big” rhetoric:

To define a term broadly does not necessarily make the term meaningless or useless. What is significant about the rhetorical turn is not that “everything is rhetoric”, but that a rhetorical perspective and vocabulary potentially can be used to understand and describe a wide range of phenomena. (Schiappa 2001:268)

Certainly, I am not claiming everything *is* rhetoric. Nor am I drawing on *rhetorica docens* as a fixed and coherent analytic instrument. As Sigrell ar-



gues, rhetoric is best understood as a perspective and a meta-language that can be used to “facilitate a reflected standpoint to persuasive communication” (Sigrell 2011), given the assumption that no perspective is untouched by human controversy.

In conclusion this chapter has marked the cornerstones of the awaiting rhetorical analysis. I now confidently turn to the empirical matters of this study.



# Chapter 3.

## Self-reflexive research in the spirit of contradiction

This chapter deals with methodology and method. *Methodology* is actualized when we plan and execute a research study in terms of choices relating to theoretical perspective, methods and research process; *method*, on the other hand, embraces the particular research techniques applied (Silverman 2006:15).

The scope of this chapter follows Bryman, who urges the researcher to prioritize *theoretical issues*, the *research process* and the *researcher's style* rather than step-by-step technicalities connected to particular methods (Bryman 2001:4-5). That is not to say that practical aspects of the research process will be overlooked. For example, I shall discuss in detail how conversations “in the spirit of contradiction” were accomplished and why they proved to be so profitable in this study.

The overall methodological approach is influenced by my intention of presenting a multifaceted account of marketing work. This warrants an “ideographic approach”, which stipulates that “one can only understand the social world by obtaining first-hand knowledge of the subject under investigation [--] involving oneself in the everyday flow of life” (Burrell and Morgan

1979:6). Accordingly, to produce this book I spent time being personally involved in the field of marketing. The empirical material forming the basis of this research was obtained through observations and conversations. The material entails pre-arranged, recorded and transcribed observations and conversations with marketers, and a multitude of more or less accidental encounters with marketers (face to face, telephone, email, social media).

Fieldwork began in 2009 and ended in 2012. This does not mean I was fully occupied in fieldwork throughout the entire period. There were long periods of reflection – and hesitation how to continue – that eventually led to new insights into my role as researcher, and reconsideration of the research process. This is the reason why I chose to roll out this chapter roughly in chronological order. The idea is to make explicit the standpoint of the spirited but somewhat naïve author who initiated this study, as well as the perspective of the reflexive and somewhat less naïve author who concluded it. It will be argued that there are lessons to learn if these two voices, from the same author, are juxtaposed and discussed critically.

Who then is the author of this book, and how might his subjective outlook have influenced the process and outcome of the research? For a start, I have over twenty years' experience of working with professional services. My collection of old business cards tells its own story. On these cards are titles as Communication Consultant, Project Manager, Marketing Manager, Senior Marketing Consultant, General Manager and Senior Advisor. Nonetheless, the challenge has basically been the same over all these years: to influence other organizations to buy the services provided by my co-workers and me, and then enact these services to the benefit of the customer. This has required intense interpersonal interaction, and an endless amount of talk in all kinds of situations. As a result I have a fairly clear idea of what it takes to deal with professional services, and particularly how to act as a consultant, coach and instructor in the domain of marketing and communication.

How might my experience of marketing work have influenced my research? Researching well-known situations is indeed problematic. My pre-understanding of marketing could result in a narrow outlook; that is, I might not see things other researchers would see simply because I have seen it so many times before. Pre-understanding might also result in unreflexive, naïve and/or egocentric interpretations. Add to this the dilemma that I knew Carl and some of the other marketers in this study before they entered it. The only way out of these dilemmas, as it is for any researcher in any methodological

tradition, is to engage in a continuous self-reflexive discussion of the research process and the result of it.

Then again, pre-understanding of the empirical setting also comes with advantages, especially when one takes the approach of Brownlie (1997), Lien (1997), Hackley (2000) and Lenney (2009); that is, uses oneself as the main research instrument to gain first-hand experience of marketing work. It is partly an issue of access. The doors to rooms in which marketing activities take place are usually closed to outsiders, figuratively and literally speaking. Besides, what goes on in these situations can be very difficult to interpret if you are unskilled in marketing talk, which poses overall interpretive complications when you are trying to make sense of marketing work from the professionals' perspective.

For better or worse, in this research I have endeavoured to make use of my extensive experience in the business, rather than suppress it. This chapter will explain how this was done.

### 3.1 Writing ethnography

This study takes an interest in marketers' work, *as they commonly do it*. It explains a methodology that enables the researcher to study human activities in "naturally occurring settings". Drawing on Brewer, this study would benefit from an *ethnographic* approach to research.

Ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or "fields" by methods of data collection which capture their social **meanings** and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally. (Brewer 2000:6, bold in original)

The origin of ethnography can be found in studies undertaken by Western anthropologists who spent years "in the field" researching foreign cultures to develop an understanding of them from the inside. Over time, ethnography came to denote both the direct and personal contact with the field and the theoretically informed interpretation of field material to learn more about social organization and culture (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:1).

The contemporary ethnographer is still focused on fieldwork but is at the same time rather pragmatic when selecting techniques by which to research

the particular field. Observations in naturally occurring settings have continued to hold a privileged position but interviews, studies of artefacts, projective tests and even surveys can be brought to use, which suggests that ethnography should be understood as a research *orientation* rather than a coherent methodology (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2009:85-86).

Support for ethnographic studies of organizations can be found in Czarniawska (2007), Ybema *et al.* (2009), and Kostera (2007). There are also a number of marketing scholars who favour an ethnographic approach to marketing research – for example, Gummesson (1991b), Hackley (2003a) and Moisander and Valtonen (2006). While they may differ in their perspective on marketing, they all argue that “being there”, *where marketing happens*, enables a “rich” description of what goes on.

In practical terms then, what do ethnographers do? According to Hammersley and Atkinson most ethnographers study “people’s actions and accounts [---] in everyday contexts”, they gather data by means of rather unstructured “participant observations and/or relatively informal conversations”, they focus on a few cases to “facilitate in-depth study”, and they analyse data to interpret “the meanings, functions, and consequences of human actions and institutional practices, and how these are implicated in local, and perhaps also wider, contexts” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:3).

There are a number of challenges associated with a methodology that relies so heavily on “being there”. One of these concerns the writing. If the report from the field and the theoretically informed conclusions shall be considered plausible, each empirical activity must be well explained and documented.

How can the researcher do justice to the piles of notes, recordings, artefacts and other stuff that are the result from fieldwork? The answer depends on the theoretical outlook of the researcher. Researchers promoting ethnographical studies come from different theoretical traditions. Brewer (2000), for example, urges the researcher to “collect data” and “capture social meaning” but do so without interfering with this meaning. Within this “realistic” tradition of ethnography data are believed to have integrity that must be preserved.

Brewer is on a quest to rescue ethnography “from those postmodern critics who deconstruct it to the point where it dissolves into air” (Brewer 2000:7). The critics he refers to reject every natural, realist and objective account of the social world, regardless of whether the researcher has “been there” or not. Researchers are by necessity a part of the social world they

investigate. In order to construct informative and reasonable accounts of this social world we have to include our own roles and research practices within the research focus, “exploiting our participation in the settings under study” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:18). The researchers have to ask themselves not only what the meaning of “data” is, but also how this meaning is brought forward by the researchers’ interpretations and writings. This calls for reflexivity and self-awareness not only in the method section but throughout the text to avoid narrow-minded research (Adler and Adler 2008:16). Even so, as Clifford argues, this does not mean the end of ethnography and the relevance of “being there”.

[I]s there not a liberation, too, in recognizing that no one can write about others any longer as if they were discrete objects or texts? And may not the vision of complex, problematic, partial ethnography lead, not to its abandonment, but to more subtle, concrete ways of writing and reading, to new conceptions of culture as interactive and historical? (Clifford 1986:25)

In line with this reasoning the choice of writing style cannot be separated from the choice of overall research approach since the “narrative and rhetorical conventions assumed by the writer also shape ethnography” (Van Maanen 1988:5). So, finally, what is the intended style of this book?

The methodology favoured in this study is inspired by ethnography, as it is outlined by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), at least in principle, which will be discussed further on. Moreover, my aim is to produce a multifaceted account of marketing work, based on my first-hand experience of it. This experience includes my years of fieldwork, but also the years I spent as a marketing professional, whether I acknowledge it or not, given the idea that I am this study’s most important research “instrument”.

In terms of style I have chosen to engage in what Van Maanen (1988) calls a “confessional tale” of the field. A confessional tale is characterized by a personalized and self-absorbed style. The purpose is to expose and demystify the practice of fieldwork and in so doing establish a form of intimacy between the author, the field and the reader, which in my case is expected to contribute to the presentation of a multifaceted and intriguing account of marketing work.

However this choice of style also leads to a problem. This is how Van Maanen explains it.

As autobiographical details mount in confessional tales, it becomes apparent that the point of view being represented is that of the fieldworker. Typically, the concern for the fieldworker's perspective is told as something of a character-building conversion tale in which the fieldworker, who saw things one way at the outset of the study, comes to see them in an entirely different way by the conclusion of the study. [...] Confessional tales usually end on an upbeat, positive, if not fully self-congratulatory, note. (Van Maanen 1988:77, 79).

This comment of Van Maanen is of great importance for my writing. It would be a failure if the voices of the field were weakened by my confessional tale. This would be the case if I become *too* self-absorbed and passionate in my writing, or if I claimed that my "confessional voice" is *actually* the field's voice. As Van Maanen points out, the confessional writer's "tacking back and forth between an insider's passionate perspective and an outsider's dispassionate one" calls for a "schizophrenic" attitude that is very difficult to maintain in writing (Van Maanen 1988:77). I will return to this dilemma of writing and representation at the end of this chapter.

## 3.2 Doing fieldwork

### Considering interviews

According to Van Maanen (1988:2), fieldwork in its widest meaning implies living *with* and *like* those being studied. This obliges the researcher to get close to the subjects of interest. Closeness is not mainly a geographical issue, as when a researcher tries, initially from a distance, to move literally close to a research object. Closeness is equally a question of mental distance. Being a total stranger to a situation makes it difficult to experience subtle nuances in different actors' behaviour. Accordingly, one of the first and most delicate issues in any fieldwork is to obtain close access to the field.

When I began planning the fieldwork I remembered the times I had been the subject of research in my role as marketing professional. I have been interviewed a number of times by both undergraduate students and senior researchers, which was always a pleasant experience. I talked extensively, and they listened and made notes with great interest. My behaviour in these interviews supports the claim that marketing people have a particular desire to



talk convincingly and extensively about themselves (Brownlie and Saren 1997).

I am definitely a person who is keen to talk passionately about marketing when invited to do so. However, it was always a matter of rather innocuous stories, stories that seldom touched on controversial, emotional or immoral behaviour. They were one-dimensional accounts of my practice, which is exactly what I wanted to avoid in my own research. Besides, I have often talked to researchers but never let them observe me in action. It is rather delicate matters to have someone listen to the intimate conversation you have with, or about, customers. When researchers have asked if they could observe me I have referred to “the confidential nature of a client relationship”, or “practical logistical matters”. Frankly, I did not want them to observe me “sweet-talking” potential customers. My point is that marketing work is (also) accomplished in situations in which the presence of a researcher would be perceived as intimidating.

I saw two parallel challenges when embarking on fieldwork: how to gain access to relevant people and situations, and how to avoid one-dimensional accounts of marketing work. I decided to start with in-depth interviews with marketers, and then later engage in observations of marketing work in naturally occurring settings.

In-depth interviews are a method often used in marketing research when researchers seek to gain deep understanding of phenomena (Cotte and Kistruck 2006:466). The first interviews would be “pilot interviews”. Pilot interviews enable the researcher to gain experience of the interview situation and gradually refine the interview agenda (Hackley 2003a:120). The insights obtained from the first interviews would also be valuable to me when I arranged the observations, I thought.

The professionals to interview were found in my personal network. The common denominator was the work they were involved in. When selecting professionals I was also inspired by Hackley who urges marketing scholars to widen their scope and study the practice of, “for example, ‘part time’ marketers, service personnel, strategic planners and even consumers”, rather than focus exclusively on professionals found in conventional marketing departments (Hackley *et al.* 2009:132).

The professionals I selected were all working in organizations that provided various services to other organizations, and they were all directly or indirectly in contact with customers for business purposes. Some of the professionals were my friends. Some of them were former customers. Some of

them were both friends and former customers. Asking friends to be involved in research reduces the distance between researcher and interlocutor (Owton and Allen-Collinson 2014). As argued by Tillmann-Healy, "the more emotional and multifaceted the topic, the more appropriate it becomes for researchers and participants to share emotional and multifaceted ties" (Tillmann-Healy 2003:745). Notably, I had no ongoing commercial relationship with any of them when this research began in 2008. And, I had, and still have, no plans to re-establish it in the future.

### **The first interviews**

The first interviews were conducted in March 2009. The idea was to interview the professionals about their daily challenges and in so doing have them talk about what they did to promote the services they provided. The interviews would also be opportunities to talk about, and arrange, upcoming observations.

The first person I contacted was "Erik" from "NOVO". Erik is a middle-aged man with an academic background in engineering, extensive experience of consulting, and particular expertise in operational management. We had met early in 2008, before I began this study. At that time Erik was searching for an expert in rhetoric. He had come to the conclusion that everyone at NOVO was in serious need of rhetorical skills to do better business. Erik found me via a common acquaintance and I agreed to meet him to present my services. That meeting was something extraordinary. Erik had an exceptionally self-ironic and captivating style, and he told me loads of anecdotes full of intriguing details about his and his co-workers' endeavours to bring in business by promoting consulting services. Erik and I pooled our ideas, which resulted in a two-day training program in rhetoric for all the employees at NOVO. When planning my fieldwork half a year later my thoughts went to Erik and the lively conversations we had had about everyday business matters. Although Erik did not have an official responsibility for marketing I got the strong impression that his ideas about marketing and sales had an impact on both his co-workers and NOVO executives. I emailed him and asked for an interview, at the same time explaining very carefully that this was about research and nothing else. I said to him, I will write critically about the things you do when you are involved in marketing work. No problem at all, Erik responded.

The second person I contacted was “Carl” from “TERRA”. His area of expertise was sales and marketing management, and sales coaching, although his educational background was in engineering. He was younger than Erik but had the same long experience of working in business relating to professional services. I had known Carl professionally for over ten years. It started when he attended one of my open courses in relationship marketing for professionals. We then had a sort of semi-professional friendship, rather difficult to define. We met as friends once or twice every year. We usually started to chat about our private lives, but before long we engaged in animated conversations about the nature of marketing and selling. This was the main reason why Carl was asked to participate in the study. I knew he would be willing to share his ideas and experiences, and at the same time respect me as a researcher.

Carl had a friend, “Anna”, whom he often talked about. He admired her skills in marketing and interpersonal communication, and he had also hired her occasionally to coach him in these areas. Much like Carl Anna had extensive practical experience in marketing and sales in various roles. She had undertaken a vocational business education. After that she had been running her own consulting agency for many years, with a special focus on services related to management communication. But, at the beginning of 2009 she was employed as a marketing manager – sort of – by “PUBLIC”, which is a government organization. I asked Carl if he could set up a meeting of all three of us to discuss marketing work, and so Carl did.

The next professional to enter this study was “Stefan” from “COMPETE”. Stefan and I grew up close to each other but since I was much older than he was we had no contact with each other then. When we ran into each other some years ago I found out he was a self-made and successful salesman working in the field of professional services. Stefan was very outspoken about his job. The conversations I had had with Stefan were often in a spirit of competition. We both held very strong views on how to do proper sales work, and we were reluctant to change our views. So we argued, although in a friendly spirit. This was the reason why I asked to interview Stefan. I knew he had a different perspective than I did.

When I began to do interviews early in 2009 Carl was working closely with his colleague “Anders” at TERRA. As I understood it, Anders and Carl had similar roles at TERRA but worked in different geographical areas. They were both involved in the coordination of marketing activities and in sales coaching. Carl often referred to discussions he had had with Anders concern-

ing how poorly managed marketing and sales were at TERRA. I became more and more curious about these discussions so I asked Carl if he could set up a meeting of all three of us to discuss marketing, and so he did.

All in all I conducted four in-depth interviews early in 2009. Each interview lasted two-to-three hours. They started with the same short formal announcement. The formulation was something like this:

Tomas: Well... before we start... I have something important to say. I have approached you in my role as researcher. That means I will interpret and analyse what you say, and then write a book of it, and this book will include critical comments on what you say and do. Then again, you and the people we talk about will of course be anonymous. It will also take at least three years before my thesis is published. Is this okay with you?

In no case did this introduction trigger any hesitation about participating in this study. This could be because they did not realize how painful it can be to appear, naked (metaphorically speaking), in a book. Another reason for not hesitating to be part of my research, one less than flattering for academia perhaps, could be that the persons I have encountered in my fieldwork look upon academia as a closed institution, about which they assume that “what goes on there, stays there”. In any case, they seemed to trust me, or just did not care, so I placed the audio recorder in front of them, and began to ask questions, as one does when undertaking research interviews.

They were asked, for example, about their idea of marketing, what they do at work, what sort of persuasive challenges they experience and how they deal with these challenges. In retrospect I wonder why I had this particular focus on persuasive challenges. One explanation might be that I have often used the expression “rhetorical challenge” when doing consulting work. It has been a form of heuristic device I have employed when “researching” a client’s communicative problems and opportunities. Without giving it much thought every interview began with talk about work-related *challenges*, with a particular focus on what they experienced as *persuasive* challenges. The idea was to navigate the interviews to cover rhetorical aspects of their practices. This proved to be quite difficult – not getting them talking, but having them talk about communication and persuasion in particular. Later, when listening to the recorded interviews, it was quite embarrassing to find out I was talking as much as they were. In fact, it did not sound like a research interview at all. It sounded like an everyday conversation about marketing and sales. Looking at the transcribed text it was almost impossible to separate

the person asking questions from the person answering them. Questions and answers seemed to be absorbed in an ongoing conversation full of disagreements, digressions and laughter.

Finding out I was unqualified to conduct research interviews without arguing was not encouraging. These first interviews were supposed to make my research approach more distinct. They did not, and I was deeply worried about the remaining fieldwork.

Indeed, the first encounter with the field provided my research with considerable material. I had transcriptions from the interviews. I had also other texts – notes made almost unknowingly when setting up interviews, when talking to marketers on the phone, when reflecting on my own experience as a marketer and when randomly meeting business professionals who wanted to contribute to my research by telling the “truth” about marketing. My desk was overloaded with more or less readable notes. The problem was how to make sense of it.

### **Reconsidering methodology**

The first phase of fieldwork had encompassed a number of conversations with marketers about...well, everyday matters concerning marketing *and* research about marketing. Questions were asked, stories were told and emotions were shared, quite passionately. I was indeed an “emotional fieldworker”, which is a type of contemplative researcher who dismisses well-structured interviews in favour of unorthodox interview methods that encourage the participants to enact emotionality in an open-ended conversation (Gubrium and Holstein 1997:57-74).

Here is an illustration of what could happen during my talks with Carl and the others.

I have been involved in marketing for so many years that I have heard (and told!) every story there is about “relationship marketing” and the importance of being “service-minded”. Frankly speaking, sometimes I am just fed up with all the unreflexive service marketing jargon generated by others, and myself. When this happened in my conversations with Carl and the others I found myself interrupting them. When they told long anecdotes about the necessity of relationships I asked them, rather kindly, if there might be “another way of seeing it”. Sometimes I was less subtle, and just said “rubbish!”. Then they would look at me, often with a smile, and launch a *new* anecdote to argue for what they first said, or to argue *against* what they only

a minute before had established as the final account of, say, relationship marketing. This also happened the other way around. Sometimes they interrupted me. This often happened when I tried to formulate a question, or an argument, and got stuck in theoretical reasoning concerning marketing and rhetoric. When they said or non-verbally demonstrated “that did not make sense”, or “I do not agree”, or just “rubbish”, I found myself reformulating and *re-thinking* what I had just said.

In a way it reminded of “creative interviewing”, as described by Douglas, in which affection between the interviewer and the interviewee improves their collaboration and creative search for mutual understanding (Douglas 1985:25). However, Douglas has been criticized for a one-sided focus on using the interviewer’s creative techniques to probe the respondent’s “sincere” emotions. Holstein and Gubrium argue that Douglas neglects the creativity of the respondent, which is a creativity that goes beyond emotional utterances (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:13). Interviews are “interpretatively active, implicating meaning-making practices on the part of both the interviewers and the respondents” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:4). Holstein and Gubrium make a case for “active interviewing” that takes the form of collaborative storytelling, in which it is difficult to make a clear distinction between the one asking questions and the one answering them (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:28-29).

Then again, my conversations with the marketers were characterized by controversy and contradiction. This gave not only extra fuel to the conversations but also, in an odd way, direction and meaning. This insight relates to Pool’s suggestion that clear and confident answers do not “represent the whole story” in conversations for research purposes. The respondent varies his or her answers “not from uncertainty but from deliberation” (Pool 1957:196). In other words, debate and disagreement in research conversations are not necessarily a mark of collapsed and inoperable pieces of fieldwork. On the contrary, Billig argues, controversy is a heuristic device useful to explore many sides of a phenomenon – for example, in discussion groups.

By studying arguments in discussion groups, analysts can observe thinking in action. Speakers, in offering their opinions, do not repeat themselves, as if expressing a fixed cognitive framework. Even when arguments appear to go around in circles, speakers rarely repeat themselves word for word. Instead, they are engaged in a continually changing context of criticism and justification. New criticisms are offered and have to be considered. Thus, there is creative novelty in argument. In fact, one often discovers what one thinks by hearing oneself argue, for positions are tested and developed in argumentation. (Billig 1995:71)

When challenging the positions taken by participants in a research conversation we encourage the participants to think through and reconsider their established opinions rather than merely express them (Billig 1996:283), which relates to the idea that interviews are “reality-constructing, meaning-making occasions” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:4).

The text extract below provides a specific illustration of the deliberative character of the conversations. It started with a comment on the importance of relationship marketing. Anders and Carl agreed that “commitment” was *the* key to success, but I insisted it was not that simple. There are always other aspects to consider, I maintained, quite stubbornly. Eventually we came to talk about gender issues. Suddenly, Carl changed his perspective.

Anders: I still think we will have problem in the future [---] considering the women, about 30–35 years old, who have to go out and build customer relationships [with older men].

Carl: But then you have to...hmm, we have not really talked about this, Anders. It is also the other way around. We will have buyers, customers, who are women in the age group of 30-35. And then comes the next question. How do I build relationships with them? Can I call her and ask her out for dinner? Or is it completely different mechanisms [than commitment] that will be important?

Tomas: This is what I mean! As I said earlier, we all agree that we need to build relationships, and one way is to show commitment. But suddenly we end up in a discussion of what *type* of commitment to demonstrate. And *when*!

2009-05-15

From this point the conversation took a new direction, partly contradicting what we had agreed upon some minutes earlier. In so doing we added new

aspects to the idea of relationships and commitment in everyday marketing work, aspects that might have been unaccounted for in a less controversial conversation.

These insights changed my way of doing fieldwork. When conducting the first interviews I was troubled to find out how the conversations drifted away beyond my control. Moreover, arguing was seen as an undesirable intrusion in the interviews, making it difficult for the marketers to express “authentic” answers concerning their everyday activities at work. However, during the summer and autumn of 2009 I gradually changed my mind, taking inspiration from Holstein and Gubrium (1995), Pool (1957) and Billig (1996). I particularly followed Holstein and Gubrium who advise the researcher to look beyond the long list of constraints that must be applied to a research conversation, and instead recognize all participants’ creative contribution to the production and analysis of the empirical bits and pieces (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:4).

I decided to continue the fieldwork in *the spirit of contradiction*, and deliberately use controversy as a heuristic device to explore marketing work.

### **Returning to the field**

The fieldwork resumed in August 2009, and was intensified during the following six months. Carl and Erik were asked if it was possible to observe them when interacting with customers. This was not possible for practical reasons, they said, so they asked some of their co-workers instead. Erik introduced me to “Lars”, and Carl to “Axel”.

Lars was Senior Sales and Marketing Manager at NOVO and had had a long career in business. He was about to retire when we met, but said he had been asked to stay on working in sales to help the person who was to take over his job.

Axel from TERRA, on the other hand, was in a way the total opposite of Lars. Axel was in my age but had very limited experience of marketing and sales. At the time we met he had just been appointed sales coordinator and sales coach at TERRA, which was a role of which Carl had long experience.

I was not acquainted with either Lars or Axel before they entered this study. Regarding Axel, we immediately became “speaking partners”. He was curious about my research and asked questions, promising to help me as best he could. Lars, on the other hand, was not interested in my research at all.



Even so, he politely answered my questions, and arranged the practical matters concerning the observation.

I observed Lars for two consecutive days during which we visited three potential NOVO customers. Axel let me observe him in a sales meeting and in a number of internal meetings. There were also other observations during this period – for example, observations of sales training and sales coaching that involved the above professionals from NOVO and TERRA. At the same I continued the conversations with these professionals, both face-to-face and via phone or email.

Other professionals entered the study. Erik introduced me to “Linus”. Linus is the youngest of the professionals in this study. He had recently graduated from university with a degree in management. His role at NOVO was rather vague, he told me. Officially a management consultant, but in practice dealing with various administrative matters and short-term marketing activities.

At the end of 2009 and beginning of 2010 I tried a new form of fieldwork, namely, workshops. Carl, Anders and Axel belonged to a group of “marketing coordinators” at TERRA. The group’s exact mission and responsibilities were unclear to me but I knew they met regularly to discuss marketing and sales issues. While I cannot recall if the initiative came from Carl or from me, Carl had arranged for me to participate in one of these meetings. He wanted me to talk about my research and simultaneously give a lecture on the significance of making a “good impression” when meeting customers. I explained carefully to Carl that a workshop was to be preferred over a lecture. It was the persuasive challenges they faced that should be in focus for the workshop. Fair enough, said Carl.

In fact, Carl arranged two workshops. First off was a workshop with some ten marketing coordinators, along with two representatives of TERRA’s marketing department. Then a couple of months later I meet with a number of area managers who were interested in marketing and sales issues. This second workshop was designed, as the first had been, to focus on everyday persuasive challenges. Both of the workshops were held at the TERRA head office. The two workshops had the same title: “Rhetorical Challenges in Marketing Work”. The method was rather unsophisticated. I gave an introduction to rhetoric, and then began to ask them questions about what they considered to be significant persuasive challenges they faced when doing their job. They were very eager to share their anecdotes and arguments. Now and then I interrupted them for clarification, or just to provoke new themes,

by asking “but what do you *do*, and what is so *challenging* about that?”. After the two workshops, which I audio recorded, I was in the possession of several hours of elaborated, self-reflexive and disorganized verbal accounts of marketing work *and* my first-hand experience of how these marketers argue with each other about the work they do.

It was a very busy period of fieldwork from early Autumn 2009 to the beginning of 2010. There were face-to-face conversations, participation in internal meetings, business lunches, and a multitude of phone calls and emails.

The last period of fieldwork, spanning roughly from September 2010 to March 2012, were less eventful than the earlier periods. Carl referred me to his colleague “Gunilla”, so I introduced myself to her, which resulted in new conversation and observations. Moreover, I coincidentally became acquainted with “Per”, who was running a consulting company, “HUMAN Resources”. It was my then five-year-old son who brought us into contact with each other. One day he was playing with Per’s son, and for no particular reason we started to talk about our jobs. Per told me he had the overall responsibility for business development and marketing at his workplace. It sounded so interesting so I asked him if we could meet for an hour and talk about marketing, and so we did. He later allowed me to observe him in two meetings with potential customers.

During this last period of fieldwork I only had sporadic contact with Carl, Axel and Lars. Carl left TERRA and got a new job as a marketing manager with an engineering company. He called me a couple of times to talk about his new job. Axel stayed at TERRA but acquired a new role. He called me, as he wanted some ideas on how to present a case to a potential customer. There was really no time, as I was deeply involved in the analytic process, so I hesitated. When he said he wanted to pay me for doing it, I said no and explained that that was not doable or useful to me in my role as a researcher, which he accepted seemingly without hard feelings.

### **Reflections at the end of fieldwork**

It is fair to say that the beginning of 2012 marked the end of my fieldwork. The analysis had then been going on for a year and had proven to be very time-consuming. I had the impression that my study would not benefit from additional empirical material so I decided to direct all my attention to analysis and writing.

When overviewing the fieldwork and the emerging analysis, I noted that my research style had changed over the course of the fieldwork. It had started with the aim of conducting rather conventional interviews, but before long I had found that arguing produced more intriguing stories from the field. The observations had also changed in character. All observations had been conducted without a detailed observational scheme. Notes had been taken swiftly and discreetly when something significant happened that was more or less to marketing work. Occasionally I got permission to audio record conversations and meetings, for recall purposes, given that this did not interfere with the conversations or meetings.

Initially the observations were treated as more or less isolated events, with the marketers' interactions with other people at the centre of attention, and with me as a passive observer. I always made it clear I was a researcher, although some of them already knew I had extensive experience of marketing, or found out by asking me. I explained I was there for research purposes. However, this did not prevent people from pulling me into conversations when they found it advantageous – for example, to confirm their reasoning. To them I was a useful resource when they argued, whether or not I wanted to be one.

Moreover, as the fieldwork progressed I saw less and less of a difference between my observations and the conversations. Every observation was soaked in conversations, and every conversation involved opportunities to experience first-hand what marketers do when they do marketing work in “naturally occurring settings”. It was practically impossible to say where a conversation or observation started or ended. Anecdotes, stories and arguments travelled from conversations prior to the meeting, into conversations during prearranged meetings, and then back to conversations about the meeting. Subsequently, what I had first regarded as two distinct research methods blurred into one dynamic research process, a process that interested the marketers. Most of them wanted to contribute to my research not only as empirical sources. They wanted to know my research question and engage in the analysis.

This was no longer research *on* marketers. It was research *with* marketers, reminiscent of the “co-operative inquiries” described by Reason (1988). In retrospect the fieldwork became a form of para-ethnography, which means the marketers participated as empirical sources *and* as active partners in the research process itself (Holmes and Marcus 2006). They, Carl and Erik in particular, had arranged meetings and observations, had suggested how to

analyse marketing work from new angles, and had even given advice on literature useful in the analysis. They appeared as research colleagues rather than research objects. In so doing they affected both the research agenda and the outcome of the research.

Why is this so? Why were most of the marketers so keen to engage in my research? I do not believe they felt obliged to contribute to academic research. Nor do I assume they got involved in my study for distraction and pleasure, or to do me a personal favour. I assumed they reasoned, as I would have done in the same situation: “Fair enough, I participate in your research as long as it is worth something for me, preferably in terms of how to do better business in the future”.

Both the “researcher” and the “researched” have reason to engage in a co-operative inquiry. I investigated marketing work in order to understand it better and write a thesis. The marketer reflected upon marketing work in order to understand it better and improve business. The emphasis here is not on improvement, change or emancipation. If anything it is an acknowledgment of the overlapping motives that bring the co-researchers together in a co-operative inquiry.

### 3.3 The analytic process

In any ethnographic undertaking, the analysis of data is not a distinct and isolated task. The entire research process is saturated with analytic work, from the first draft of the research problem, to the pre-fieldwork, to the fieldwork and then to writing it up, because nothing of this can be achieved without theorizing (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:158).

Data is never “raw”. Data is always *interpreted* data framed by theoretical preconceptions of that very data. This relates to the idea of an *abductive* research process in which the analysis “alternates between (previous) theory and empirical facts whereby both are successively reinterpreted in the light of each other”, ending with the conclusion that we see what our perspective allows us to see (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2009:5-6). In my case the analytic work was powered by rhetorical theory. This means I made myself sensitive to the persuasive aspects of marketing work, both when doing the fieldwork and when dealing with the empirical bits and pieces that the fieldwork generated. However this is not particularly informative about the analytic work undertaken to make sense of the empirical material the fieldwork generated.

As argued by Holstein and Gubrium, even if active interviewing calls for an “artful” rather than “scientific” interpretive practice this does not mean the analysis is less rigorous (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:79). The analytic work has to be accounted for, which is the purpose of this section.

To start with, the material itself consists mainly of audio recordings and handwritten notes originating from conversations (face to face, and via telephone and email) and observations, from 2009 to 2012. The recordings were transcribed and entered into TAMSAAnalyzer, along with the handwritten notes. TAMSAAnalyzer is open-source software designed for qualitative analysis. Other materials, such as advertisements, folders, binders and letters, given to me by the marketers, were also useful in the analysis although they were not included in the TAMSAAnalyzer analysis.

The analysis of the empirical material was, technically speaking, accomplished by means of TAMSAAnalyzer. In several aspects this work followed the procedure for ethnographic analysis presented by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:158-190). For example, I found it important to know my material in depth, and therefore returned to it frequently when doing the analysis. I arranged similar quotes, anecdotes, words and ideas in categories such as *competence*, *cooperation*, *talk about co-workers*, *diplomacy*, *professional as researcher*, *emotional work* and *working through others*. These categories were then reinterpreted and rearranged by means of analytic concepts, as for example *ethos*, *antilogic*, *rhetorical situation*, *argumentation*, *impersonation*, *homo rhetoricus*, *kairos* and *copia*, which were brought in from rhetorical theory. Some of these concepts had already been employed in the fieldwork; for example, the idea of rhetorical situations was in focus during the TERRA workshops.

As Hammersley and Atkinson point out, the categories and concepts that emerge in the initial ethnographic analysis are seldom “well-defined elements of an explicit analytic model”, so they need to be refined in a detailed coding process involving all of the material (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:164). This process of coding was very challenging. Basically every sentence was read and carefully coded by means of the list of categories and concepts. When about half the material had been covered I found there were two overarching analytic themes, *rhetorical situation* and *rhetorical strategy*. These two themes addressed two fundamental questions that emerged partly from the empirical material and partly from my emerging understanding of rhetorical theory: *When marketers do marketing work, what is the significance of*

*the immediate situation?*, and *In such situations, how do marketers argue for business purposes?*

Once I had recognized these two themes, my approach to the analytic work gradually changed. I became less tied to TAMSAAnalyzer and the list of categories and codes, and more devoted to the authorship of the account of marketing work *per se*. This could be understood as “a shift from the observing eye and toward expressive speech” (Clifford 1986:12). Inspiration came from Van Maanen and his idea of “impressionist tales of the field”. An impressionist tale is not primarily written to a scientific standard dedicated to accuracy and precision. The impressionist tale is written according to a literary standard that asks the author to consider whether the story attracts the reader, if it is coherent and if it seems credible (Van Maanen 1988:105).

Drawing also on Czarniawska (2004:63), producing exact quotations is one thing; doing a “recontextualization that is interesting (‘novel’), credible, and respectful” is quite another. In more practical terms it meant that I regularly ignored the analytic categories and the constraints of accuracy, focusing instead on the overall research question and on how to answer it with the analytic themes in mind. The empirical material was searched for arguments, not only to support claims made but also to refute them, in the spirit of contradiction. If anything this made me very sensitive to voices and audiences, which provoked new questions concerning *who* is arguing, and with whom? This in turn provoked a third analytic theme, *the rhetorical subject*.

Altogether, the three themes, situation (chapter 4), strategy (chapter 5) and rhetorical subject (chapter 6), form the cornerstones of the rhetorically informed analysis of marketing work.

### 3.4 The representation of everyday marketing work

Finally, does the research process I have described in this chapter produce reliable and valid research results? *Reliability* can be defined as the extent to which the result of a study is “independent of accidental circumstances of their production”, and *validity* as the lack of “error” or inaccuracy in the answer to the research question (Kirk and Miller, 1986, in Silverman 2006:282, 289).

The question about reliability and validity has to be answered from the overall theoretical perspective to which a particular study adheres. My study is based on the assumption that scientific truths are products of successful

rhetorical strategies (Latour 1987, Simons 1989, McCloskey 1998). This means that scientific facts are invented, constructed and *made* normal – not discovered (Kuhn 1996). Once a scientific fact is established within a “thought collective” it creates a self-evident reality that in turn conditions what will be interpreted and accepted as science within this collective (Fleck 1979).

Rhetoric is the overall theoretical perspective of my study. As this chapter has demonstrated, it has potential effects on methodology. On a practical level, arguing as a research method challenges the participants to think about their attitudes and ideas rather than merely uttering them, which in turn fosters self-reflexive conversations (Billig 1996:283). On a more abstract level, the rhetorical perspective makes the conventional discussion about reliability and validity irrelevant, as argued by Van Maanen.

[E]mpirical evidence, objectivity, reason, truth, coherence, validity, measurement and fact no long provide great comfort or direction. If such concepts are language-based, they are relative, not absolute. They are therefore contestable in whatever form they appear. [---] As much as we might like to believe that hard fact and cold logic will support our claims and carry the day, there is no escape from rhetoric: from the informal, hidden arguments carried in texts, to the figures of speech, the metaphors, the tropes and the appeals to good sense or tradition or authority made by writers to support their claims. (Van Maanen 1995:134)

Scholars, like Van Maanen, who favour a rhetorical approach to ethnographically oriented studies, also favour multivocal, dialogical and impressionistic representation of fieldwork (Clifford and Marcus 1986, Hammersley 1993). Although this does not exclude a realistic interpretation of fieldwork, an interest in rhetoric typically comes with scepticism towards realistic representations of “reality” (Van Maanen 1995, Gergen and Thatchenkery 2004). The idea that representation of fieldwork should be understood as a rhetorical rather than a reportorial affair was one of the key elements of “postmodern ethnography”. Postmodern ethnography emerged in 1980s and grew rapidly in the 1990s, promoting great scepticism toward scientific representations. Scholars in this field were critical of “traditional ethnographic standards”, seeing them as “destructive, limiting, and restrictive” precisely because these standards ignored the rhetorical aspects of representation (Adler and Adler 2008:15).

Although I am sympathetic to so-called postmodern ethnography and its devotion to rhetoric, I am still not prepared to take the extreme position of

claiming that all representations of reality are illusory and dishonest. I believe it makes sense to look at the empirical material as if it means *something*. Likewise, it would not make sense to conclude that *none* of the conversations and observations says *anything* significant about marketing work “out there”.

At the end of the day, good scholars contribute to good research conversations by means of “plausible statements, whether ‘scientific’ or not” (McCloskey 1998:175). Whether a single observation or a whole study appears reasonable and is “valid” has everything to do with argumentation (Kvale 1995).

### 3.5 Fieldwork – an overview

As reported above, the fieldwork on which this study is based embraced a multitude of more or less pre-arranged encounters with marketers from 2009 to 2012. A number of these turned out to be more significant than others for the overall result of this study. Here is an overview of the marketers and the encounters that will dominate the forthcoming analysis, although not all of them will be referred to specifically in the analysis.

#### **The marketers in this study**

From TERRA Consulting Sweden: Carl, Axel, Anders and Gunilla

From NOVO Consulting: Erik, Lars and Linus

From PUBLIC Administration: Anna

From HUMAN Resources: Per

From COMPETE Association: Stefan



## **The most significant encounters**

- 2009-03-19: Conversation with Erik, at Lund University, Campus Helsingborg.
- 2009-04-19: Conversation with Carl and Anna, at the TERRA head office.
- 2009-05-05: Conversation with Stefan, at his home.
- 2009-05-15: Conversation with Carl and Anders, at Lund University, Campus Helsingborg.
- 2009-08-20: Conversation with Erik, at the NOVO head office. I spent several hours at the office, where I also met some of Erik's co-workers.
- 2009-08-21: Observation of a one-day sales kick-off for some 15 TERRA consultants, arranged by Axel and Carl, at the TERRA regional office.
- 2009-09-04: Conversation with Lars, at Lund University, Campus Helsingborg.
- 2009-09-14: Observation of a one-day course in "effective selling" arranged by Axel for some 20 TERRA consultants, at the TERRA regional office.
- 2009-09-15/16: Observation of Lars when he met with three potential customers at the customers' head office. This also included several hours of conversations with Lars at the airport, in the car between the meetings and at the hotel where we spent the night.
- 2009-10-12: Observation of Axel doing sales coaching of a TERRA consultant, at the TERRA regional office.
- 2009-10-15: Conversation with Erik and Linus, at Lund University, Campus Helsingborg.
- 2009-10-21: Observation of Axel and a co-worker when they met with a potential customer, at the customer's head office. This also included several hours of conversations on the way to the customer.

- 2009-11-05: Conversation with Linus, at the NOVO head office, which also included observations.
- 2009-11-26: Workshop on “rhetorical challenges” with some 15 TERRA marketers, arranged by Carl and Anders, at the TERRA head office.
- 2009-12-03: Conversation with Lars, at Lund University, Campus Helsingborg.
- 2010-02-08: Workshop on “rhetorical challenges” with some 15 TERRA area managers, arranged by Carl and Anders, at the TERRA head office.
- 2010-05-07: Conversation with Carl, Anna and two of their friends, about personal aspects of doing business, arranged by Carl, at Carl’s home.
- 2010-10-11: Conversation with Axel, at the TERRA regional office.
- 2011-06-20: Conversation with Lars, at a restaurant.
- 2011-08-16: Conversation with Per, at the HUMAN head office.
- 2011-08-29: Observation of Per when he met with two potential customers, at the customers’ head office. This also included several hours of conversations on the way to the customer.
- 2011-09-16: Conversation with Gunilla, at Lund University, Campus Helsingborg.
- 2011-09-27: Observation of Gunilla doing sales coaching of TERRA consultants, at the TERRA regional office.
- 2012-03-15: Conversation with Per, at a restaurant.

# Chapter 4.

## Analysis of rhetorical situation

As was discussed in Chapter 2, a rhetorical analysis of human affairs presumes a close investigation of the time, place and circumstances of these affairs. Drawing on Aristotle, rhetoric is sensitive to the persuasiveness of the *given* (Rhet 1355b). However, there may be different opinions on the constitution of a particular situation and on the extent to which the situation dictates the rhetorical activities. Chapter 2 presented two perspectives on the nature of rhetorical situations, represented by Bitzer (1968) and Vatz (1973). Bitzer argues that rhetorical activities are *dictated* by the situation, whereas Vatz argues that rhetorical activities *invent* the situation. This is where my rhetorical analysis of marketing work begins. That is, with an investigation of the time, place and circumstances of marketing work, seen from two conflicting rhetorical perspectives.

The analysis starts with a self-reflexive report on an early attempt to place marketing work into coherent categories based on the marketers' assessments of various rhetorical challenges. This attempt fell short of fulfilling its purpose but led to important findings regarding the dynamic environment of marketing work. The rest, the major part of the chapter, is devoted to the

analysis of this dynamic environment by means of Bitzer (1968) and Vatz (1973).

Although Bitzer and Vatz agreed that rhetorical activities and accomplishments *should* be contextualised, they clearly took different theoretical positions regarding the analysis of rhetorical situations. There have been several attempts to synthesize the Bitzer-Vatz controversy (cf. Consigny 1974, Garret and Xiao 1993, Grant-Davie 1997). Still, it seems that one of the positions offered by Bitzer or Vatz will always be favoured (Krause 1996). Indeed, I have no intention to contribute to the ongoing theorizing on the rhetorical context. It is the fundamental differences in perspective represented by Bitzer (1968) and Vatz (1973) that will be brought to play here, in the spirit of contradiction. As Winther argues, this theoretical two-sidedness of the rhetorical situation allows the analyst to enter a “communicative space” and there investigate the aspects that dictate a response *and* the rhetorical actions that constitute the space itself (Winther 2012:90). As this chapter is intended to demonstrate, the two perspectives will produce entirely different accounts of everyday marketing, to the benefit of the multidimensional account of marketing work this book presents.

## 4.1 Omnipresent rhetorical challenges

The idea of analysing rhetorical situations emerged early in this study. The problem was to determine what situations to analyse. Asking marketers about their experience of “critical rhetorical challenges”, in which they saw a need to be prepared, seemed to be a convenient way to identify situations of relevance to them.

“Rhetorical challenge” is not an established concept in the rhetorical tradition. When it does appear in treatises on rhetoric it is briefly explained as the particular communicative task posed by a particular situation (Jost and Olmsted 2004:40). The rhetorical concept equivalent to “rhetorical challenge” is perhaps *intellectio*. The term *intellectio* comes from a text by Sulpicius Victor from around 200 AD, presented in Halm (1863:313-352). *Intellectio* can be understood, roughly, as the particular context analysis carried out by an orator before dealing with *inventio* – finding and inventing arguments. *Intellectio* was not included in the classical five-part division of rhetoric (*inventio, dispositio, elecutio, memoria, actio/pronuntatio*). Nonetheless, there are contemporary rhetorical scholars who are in favour of a greater

emphasis on contextual matters and who suggest the classical five-part division of rhetoric should be replaced by a six-part division including *intellectio* (Sigrell 2001:32, Hellspong 2013:101-113).

Returning to the marketers. Two workshops were arranged in order to specifically discuss rhetorical challenges with professionals from TERRA. For the purpose of the workshops, “rhetorical challenges” were defined roughly as “difficult communicative tasks posed by specific situations”. I had anticipated conversations about “customers”, “service delivery”, “customer value” and other concepts, found in contemporary service marketing discourse, in which I knew they were interested. Certainly, at the beginning of every workshop we talked extensively about customer communication. One of the participants in the workshop, “Ingrid”, got the discussion going with the following comment on my question concerning rhetorical challenges.

Ingrid: A meeting with a customer is the first thing that comes to mind.

2009-11-26

All the others appeared to agree – at least they enthusiastically offered examples of problematic customer meetings, and simultaneously argued for their way of dealing with the situation. This is how Anders tried to frame one situation he found challenging:

Anders: When you have a first meeting with a customer, and have a chance to come and present what you know, don't be concerned about presentation technique! You have to, sort of, reach out with what you want, to them. That is, rhetorically, do it in the right way so you will continue to be interesting to them, so that they will be customers, or suppliers of our services [to other customers]. They have to feel this when we leave the meeting. This is... a rhetorical situation, in which I may be a bit nervous. It takes a whole lot of preparation before I meet them.

Anders argued that customer access is a particular challenge.

Anders: I have an example of a potential customer I'm working on right now. I'm trying to arrange a personal meeting but it has been really difficult. For six or seven months I have been emailing and calling. We agree to meet but they want to do business on the phone. For me personally it is really hard because I get no sense of where I am in the process. I become insecure. [---] The face-to-face meeting is extremely important for me.

As the above comments indicate, situations involving interaction with customers were often in focus when the marketers reflected upon their rhetorical challenges at work. Still, when I made an attempt to sum up the discussion, with the purpose of extending and deepening the inquiry into rhetorical challenges relating to customers, they hesitated.

Tomas: So, when I say rhetorical situations you think of customer meetings?

Ingrid: Well, not really...

Axel: The most difficult thing is to lead or inspire a group.

I was not sure what Axel was referring to.

Tomas: So you mean coaching, instructing, influencing, motivating?

Axel: Yes...

Ingrid: When “selling” something to someone.

When Ingrid elaborated her idea of “selling” she did not make any clear distinction between “selling to customers” and “selling to co-workers”. She and the other participants seemed to use “selling” as an overall synonym for “persuasion”.

As the workshop progressed the focus on customer interaction became less obvious. The marketers argued that other everyday events were equally important. Anders commented that communication regarding monetary issues – salary negotiations, for example – presents complicated rhetorical challenges. “Ludvig” told a story to demonstrate the difficulties involved in talking about this with co-workers.

Ludvig: Talking about tough conversations, I had a project in which we went over budget big time, because of one individual on the team. [---] Finally we had to put an end to it [and talk to him], and that is not easy when it is a co-worker you work with every day.

Before long everybody was talking about “difficult conversations” and how these called for extraordinary attention to communication. The discussion got more and more animated. After a couple of hours we had covered difficulties and challenges relating to areas such as gender, age, ethnicity, sales meetings, coaching, administration and marketing communication. It was a remarkably wide range of topics. Notably, the distinction between intra- and extra-

organizational issues was blurred because none of the participants made any effort to frame or limit their daily activities in terms of organizational borders or functions.

There was a second workshop arranged a couple of months later that resulted in the same findings. From the marketers' perspective there are no given rhetorical challenges related to their work. There are indeed challenges, in which there are (also other) challenges, and so forth. Trying to distinguish *the* most significant rhetorical challenges and rhetorical situations in marketing work turned out to be far more complicated than expected. As Erik said in one of the conversations, "every part [of marketing] has its own little challenge".

Consequently, my decision to focus the forthcoming analysis of marketers' conversations *with* and *about customers* cannot be explained by the fact that these are more significant than other types of conversations. It just happened that we talked a lot about customer meetings at the beginning of our conversations. Then again, as the analysis will demonstrate, what counts as a meeting with a customer is far from obvious.

## 4.2 If marketing talk is dictated by need

### **Taking Bitzer's perspective**

The theoretical guidance in this section comes from Bitzer (1968). More precisely, this analysis is accomplished by examining the three essential aspects of a rhetorical situation according to Bitzer: *exigence*, *audience* and *constraints*. Before we get into the analysis, a brief reminder of Bitzer's perspective might be in place.

Rhetorical situation may be defined as a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence. (Bitzer 1968:6)

Bitzer argues there are plenty of exigences, defined as *imperfections marked by urgency*, in different contexts, but only those exigences that can be modified by means of discourse are defined as rhetorical exigences. Hence rheto-

ric has its function, and justification, as a method of handling imperfections, Bitzer argues, which leads to a number of questions. What imperfection is the cause of marketing activities? What rhetorical audience does a marketer encounter? And, how should we understand the factual conditions that constrain the marketer's attempts to modify the exigence?

### **Imperfection and urgency**

What exigences does a marketer encounter? More specifically, to what is the marketer's talk at a meeting a response? What obliges him or her to speak? Consider the following extracts from two of the observed encounters with customers. The first is from the beginning of Axel's meeting.

Customer: We need more consultants now as we cut down [on existing staff].

Axel: That's nice for us. What type of consultants do you need?

2009-10-21

The second extract is from the end of Lars' meeting.

Lars: You need to work hard, and we can help you.

Customer: Well, no... we already have projects going on.

Lars: There will be stressful situations when you have people in new positions.

2009-09-15

These examples were chosen to demonstrate the significance of *need* in the selling of services to a potential customer. As Axel indicates, facing a customer with a need is believed to be highly advantageous to the marketer. In the particular case it led to an intense question-and-answer session in which Axel tried to figure out exactly what services the customer needed. Lars, on the other hand, had great difficulty persuading the customer that he had any need at all of the services NOVO provided.

Lars and Axel talked extensively about how they could satisfy the needs of their customers adequately. Interpreting this by means of Bitzer, the situation seemed to oblige them to produce fitting, and thus rhetorical, responses to the customer's unspoken question "*What can you do for me?*".



When dealing with services, you work together with the customer, which creates opportunities for you to make the customer “see the need”. At least that is what Anders told me in a conversation about his work.

Anders: Our work is selling services, which means you decide together [with the customers], “how are we going to get there”. “Well, it is like this... and then you need this help from us... and it costs this much”. I can build trust and have them see the need, and they can see what they gain from hiring me [or the organization I represent].

2009-05-15

Anders argued that his job is to identify urgent needs, display these needs to the customer and then satisfy them in cooperation with the customer. This understanding of marketing work was present in virtually every conversation I had with the marketers in my study. It can be illustrated by an imagined start of a conversation between a marketer and a potential customer.

Customer: What can you do for me?

Marketer: It depends. What are your needs?

Customer: I have no need for your services.

Marketer: You are wrong. Just tell me something about your situation, and I will show you the need and how our services can satisfy them.

Although the marketers in this study dealt with similar professional services, their answers to the implicit question “What can you do for me?” were exceptionally diverse. Lars frequently used the condensed expression “We sell money” to indicate the end result of NOVO’s services. Axel, on the other hand, used the pragmatic but rather vague “We can offer a complete solution, but you can also decide which specific service to buy”. In another customer meeting I observed how Per approached a customer with an advanced and theoretically informed presentation of his services. Bear in mind that in this particular case Per offered fairly standardized and unsophisticated services, whereas Lars and Axel’s services included high-tech analyses of complex operational procedures.

We should not push this reasoning further than to suggest that, generally speaking, the customer need does not seem to dictate the level of complexity and formality of the response in a customer meeting. Short, informal and

low-tech responses could well be produced to meet what may seem to be a wide-ranging, formal and high-tech exigence.

Furthermore, recall that an exigence is an imperfection marked by urgency. How could *urgency* be understood in the context of a customer meeting? When talking to Erik about behaviour in customer meetings he argued that urgency is partly discovered and partly created.

Erik: When customers have talked about their problems, then you reinforce their experience of the problem, [if] you know you have the solution [to their need]. If you don't have the solution then you would not reinforce it of course. This is really the basic selling technique [smiling]. You try to influence the decision gradually, so [the customer says] "damn, this is a really big problem for me". When we began to talk, this problem was perhaps only the tenth of his most important problems. He pushes it slowly but steadily upwards in importance. If you ask me, this is the whole purpose of the chat I have with the customer.

2009-10-15

Erik is implying that every meeting comes with a range of urgent issues that can be identified. At the same time Erik argues that urgency is a subjective experience that appears as a result of successful talking. Urgency is something that can and should be *influenced*. As Gunilla told me in a conversation, "boosting urgency" is a delicate challenge; you have to have the potential customers understand they are in deep trouble, without actually saying it.

Just before we entered a meeting with a customer I asked Per if he was well informed about the customer. First he said a steadfast no but then he changed his mind and said he usually does a check-up on the customer before a sales meeting, typically on the Internet and through personal contacts. Even so, drawing on the fieldwork and my own experience of these types of meetings, marketers usually do not know what particular problems the customer has when entering a meeting, especially when it is the first meeting. Take Lars as an example. In the three meetings at which I observed him, he began in the same manner – first some small-talk, then a short presentation of the NOVO model of consulting.

Lars: This is proven model. We have accomplished about 300 projects, being fairly successful. We are ordinary people. Normally talented, as our customers. We are like the people who will do the job. Everybody can kick the football, but some do it better. We know all the acronyms there are in the business, but we get things done.

Then Lars began probing for cues that would suggest that the customers were in urgent need of NOVO's services, that is, in need of support to "get things done", with the final objective of increasing profitability. Lars asked questions but most of all he told anecdotes to exemplify what NOVO had accomplished in previous projects. These were anecdotes involving a number of senior-level executives. They were also anecdotes full of implicit arguments for all the negative things that could happen if the customer ignored the parade of problems Lars brought to their attention. However, given the customer's lack of enthusiasm, Lars' anecdotes usually failed to generate a positive response. Then he more or less smoothly changed topic, and told another anecdote, and talked about other people he knew, and people he knew who knew other people. In this manner he managed to cover "cost reductions", "website communication", "career issues", "performance measurement" and "coaching of management" almost in one breath.

Axel, too, covered a range of topics in his pursuit of customer need. Still, whereas Lars told anecdotes about what NOVO had accomplished in earlier projects, Axel targeted the customer's situation more directly by asking short questions.

Axel: [Is there a need for services regarding] water supply?

Customer: Nothing right now.

Axel: We also deal with "soft" parts...

Customer: We have that internally.

Axel: Electricity?

Customer: Headquarter does the buying.

Axel: What about logistics? Is it managed by business HQ?

Customer: No, we handle it here.

Axel: Anything else we could look into?

2009-10-21

A month before this sales meeting Axel had arranged a sales course for the group of TERRA consultants that had Axel as sales coach and coordinator. Axel had hired a professional trainer for a day's training in "better sales". I had the opportunity to participate as an observer. Axel participated also, alt-

hough a bit on the side. The trainer had the participants practice how to present themselves on the telephone, how to ask questions to identify customer need and how to motivate yourself to do sales work in the first place, which was not obvious for the consultants. They were reluctant to do sales work. They saw themselves as “problem solvers”, not “pushy salespeople”. If there is a “real” customer need they would, sort of, be “pulled” to that need, which would not require dubious sales techniques, they argued. When I later observed Axel in the sales meeting I found he applied much of what was taught in the sales course. His questions were both specific and structured, and above all, they were generally formulated in terms of the customer’s need.

Given the above reasoning, it seems that customer need is *the* controlling exigence of marketing talk in sales meetings. It invites the marketer to probe for the *specific*. This in turn motivates the customer to respond in an affirmative manner, and encourage the conversation, or respond in a negative manner, forcing the marketer to decide whether to increase the urgency of the current need or probe for another need.

### **The audience**

Bitzer argues that the constitution of the audience affects the complexity and structure of the rhetorical situation (Bitzer 1968:11-12). A speaker is dealing with a complex situation in which “many elements must be made to interact”. Moreover, a rhetorical situation is highly structured when the audience is systematically selected and concentrated, and knows its relationship to the speaker. The audience in a highly structured rhetorical situation is informed as to what to observe and what to reject, and both the audience and the speaker know what to expect from each other, much like a jury in relation to judge, Bitzer explains.

Applying this reasoning to a customer meeting, what could be said about the rhetorical audience, and the constitution of the rhetorical situation? For a start, based on the multitude of diverse topics marketers cover in their conversations with customers, I conclude that these meetings are highly complex rhetorical situations. Secondly, based on the previous section, marketers visit customers because they are assumed to have a need for the particular services marketers provide, which suggests that marketers target their audience to achieve a match between need and service. Customer need acts as a controlling exigence, obliging and permitting the marketer to ask questions. The customer seems to expect these questions, and answers them more or less

enthusiastically. From this perspective customer meetings appear to be complex and highly structured rhetorical situations. Then again, as Bitzer remarks, locating the rhetorical audience is sometimes difficult because audiences and situations are interrelated. “At a given moment, persons comprising the audience of situation A may also be the audience of situations B, C, and D” (Bitzer 1968:12). This means dealing with both direct and indirect mediators of change at the same time, which in turn affects the structure of the rhetorical situations. Rhetorical situations with unclear audiences should be understood as loosely structured, Bitzer argues. How might we understand the audience in a customer meeting from this perspective?

“Are you the person to talk to about the services I provide?” was a question that appeared in different versions in every sales meeting I observed. For example, Axel asked the customer which department he should talk to about a particular set of services, and Per made an inquiry about the members of the company’s board and which board member was currently doing the customer’s competence analysis. Lars, on the other hand, was more focused on the audience present at the meeting, and on how to make them listen to his anecdotes. In the car after the last meeting Lars told me that certain people are more eager to listen than others. We both agreed that the last of our three meetings was the most successful. Lars argued it was the customer, and the situation, rather than his presentation, that made the difference.

Lars: This man was not dealing with production. He was a salesperson, and used to... he had been a business area manager before... and wanted to show [he knew what we were talking about] but he didn’t want to discuss the details. He does not know the details. [---] He focuses on customer satisfaction, shorter lead times, increased delivery precision, and of course, he also wanted to increase productivity, but he is customer-oriented the whole time. He would not have wanted to discuss the details of production. [---] For some reason it is much easier for us to sell to a CEO or a business area manager who is interested in the market. They see more of the customer value, so to speak.

2009-09-16

When talking to Lars about the customers he met it seemed as if customer-oriented customers, with specific needs, are exceptions. Typically he faces a very heterogeneous group of professionals of mixed ages, backgrounds and preferences, and usually with vague needs, which is unfortunate, according to Lars. He prefers customer-oriented customers, possibly because then Lars

does not have to talk about the details of production, which he said to me he only knows little about.

To the best of my knowledge Lars could not tell beforehand he would face a customer-oriented customer, but when this occurred he swiftly adapted his talk to the new situation. Sometimes the adaptation is complicated by contradictory audiences in the same situation, as illustrated by Erik.

Erik: On one side [in a meeting with a customer] I have a thirty-year-old young academic who knows loads of theories but cannot apply them. He wants to change the current situation, and he thinks all the old stuff is crap and should be burnt. And then there is this brave old man, who has two years left before he retires, and has nothing to give. He has taken the long route through the organization. To have them do their best when cooperating with me takes a lot of understanding, on my part, of them. [laughing]

2009-03-19

It appears that every marketer in my study encounters audiences of diverse backgrounds, knowledge, attitudes, positions and organizational authority. The person who makes the final decision is often out of reach, or at least difficult to identify, even at an executive level in an organization, according to Erik.

Erik: You sell [services] to someone who has to sell [these services] to someone else. This is how it is. If you are at the executive level, dealing with projects of 10-15 million [SEK], it is someone else who makes the decision, because it has to go through the board of the company.

2009-03-19

This leads to the conclusion that Erik, Lars and the other marketers always have to question whether the present audience is “a genuinely rhetorical audience – one able to be mediator of change” (Bitzer 1968:12). Thus, working with a widespread and heterogeneous rhetorical audience entails a complex rhetorical situation not only because it can be difficult to find *the* controlling exigence but also because messages become detached from their sources when traveling from one person to the other.

By means of Bitzer and his reasoning on the rhetorical audience I am able to problematize what first appears to be a highly structured rhetorical situation. I conclude this section with the claim that customer meetings are loosely structured and highly complex given the ambiguity of the audience in these situations.

## Constraints

Constraints are “parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence” (Bitzer 1968:8). Bitzer’s list of standard constraints includes beliefs, attitudes, traditions and motives related to the audience, as well as constraints related to the speaker, such as his or her character, logical proofs and style. Drawing on Aristotle (Rhet 1355b), Bitzer organizes these constraints in two general classes: “artistic” constraints managed by the speaker, and “inartistic” constraints *not* managed by the speaker. In a later article Bitzer adds to the understanding of constraints by declaring that rhetorical exigence entails “a factual condition plus a relation to some interest” (Bitzer 1980:29). In so saying he excludes those environmental conditions and constraints “not perceived as being for or against anyone’s interest”.

Two examples of constraints will be discussed below. One of them is relatively easy to find and explore, while the other is not. Both influence the particular rhetorical situation the marketer is facing.

The Swedish Public Procurement Act is an example of a legal constraint that affects the rhetorical situation of the marketers in my study. According to Carl this act influences their interaction with customers. The problem, Carl explains, is that customers lack competence in this area. When customers construct a procurement policy consistent with the legislation, they sometimes make the situation less transparent for the competing suppliers of services by requiring the suppliers to communicate via an electronic system that quantifies their offerings. It becomes very difficult for the suppliers to ever meet the customer in person and pitch their services face to face

However, there are ways to work around even as sturdy a constraint as a procurement policy, according to Carl.

Carl: People who are good at law and know how to read the customer’s specification, can go into the system, and say “Do this, skip this, but increase this, and then the system will automatically give your offering the top score”.

2009-04-19

The solution to Carls’ problem seems to be found in the constraint itself. When the procurement policy and the electronic system are known in detail, it is possible to literally manipulate the electronic procurement algorithm often used in these situations, without anyone knowing. For example, you

can enter an exceptionally low price for services you are sure will never be bought, which will decrease the average price per hour of the offering as a whole. In so doing, the marketer sort of short-circuits the system to his or her advantage. Although Carl disapproves of such behaviour he is careful to point out that it is not illegal to manipulate the electronic system. Carl recommends working on the “soft parts” instead and advises marketers to find new ways to interact personally with customers.

Carl: It is still very much based on relationships. This is what we see. If you have a good relationship with someone, and they know you are competent, then things often work out in the end.

2009-04-19

The procurement policy is an example of an objectively observable, almost physical, factual condition that seems to prescribe two different marketing practices. A procurement policy can be circumvented by manipulating electronic formulas, and/or by cultivating intimate personal relationships by means of interpersonal communication.

The next constraint to focus on lacks everything of the tangibility of a procurement policy. Nonetheless, considering the “mental environment” of a customer, meeting this aspect is indeed a troublesome issue for marketers who approach customers to do business.

“The factual component may consist of literally thousands of elements”, including ideas, images, meanings, attitudes, interests and feelings, which are difficult to perceive (Bitzer 1980:30). One such constraint I have studied is the stereotype of the salesperson, which appears to dictate particular rhetorical responses from marketers. At least this is what Carl argued when telling me how he coaches TERRA consultants to do more and better sales meetings.

Carl: In the past few sessions [with the consultants] I have been quite clear: “When you are with customers, the most important thing is they *not* see you as a salesperson, because it could hurt your relationship”.

2009-05-15

Carl argues that the best salespeople are those who are not perceived as salespeople. So, when you approach customers for business purposes your work must be hidden, according to Carl.



This appears to be an overall problem for the marketers in my study. Customers do not trust professionals who meet them expressly to talk business. This is what the marketers told me. This is also what I learned from observing meetings and overhearing conversations with and about customers. Moreover, it resonates with my own experience as a marketing professional. According to the findings of this study, and my own experience, there is an aversion to professionals involved in marketing work, which implies that marketing work is often undertaken in potentially hostile situations. I will return to this point later to discuss it in more depth.

To sum up the reasoning so far, Bitzer (1968) stipulates that artistic constraints are operable, while inartistic ones are not. This should be understood in the light of his assumption that exigences related to “unchangeable necessities” are not considered rhetorical in the first place. However, the example of a public procurement policy demonstrates how difficult it is to determine what is an inoperable inartistic constraint. A law or a public policy is per definition an unchangeable necessity. From Carl’s perspective, however, it is not: it is in fact a constraint that is operable, even without deliberately violating the law. Notably, a solid constraint can be overturned quite straightforwardly, albeit by means of some unconventional business practices, whereas multi-element constraints, such as negative attitudes, seem to embrace a whole range of complex rhetorical challenges. As forthcoming chapters will show, dealing with unfavourable attitudes calls for certain rhetorical strategies.

In so saying it is time to bring the analysis informed by Bitzer (1968, 1980) and his situational perspective, to a close.

### **Loosely structured and ambiguous rhetorical situations**

Bitzer’s conceptualization of a rhetorical situation enables an analysis in which the marketer is set aside, figuratively speaking, in favour of contextual issues of marketing work. So, what can be learnt about the rhetorical context of marketing work when approached from Bitzer’s perspective?

“A situation which is strong and clear dictates the purpose, theme, matter, and style of the response”, Bitzer (1968:10) explains. Are the meetings I have discussed so far “strong and clear” situations? Well, yes, and no. On an abstract level every meeting that directly or indirectly involves a customer appears to be dictated by the specific need for services. In other words we might argue that the *function* of these meetings is to identify the particular

need a particular customer has of a particular service. This in turn presupposes attentive and analytical marketers who use their persuasive resources to identify and clarify customer need, while explaining and justifying the services that will satisfy the need.

However, when looking into the details of meetings that involved customers it is difficult to see which response is connected to which need, and what the specific exigence was from the start. When engaged in customer meetings the marketers seem to almost randomly pick up factual conditions that could be attributed to urgency. If the customer expresses interest, then the communication continues regarding the particular need. If the customer fails to express interest, then the marketer immediately shifts to another potential need.

Moreover, since marketers face audiences with different backgrounds, knowledge, attitudes, positions and organizational authority, their strategies must include probing tactics not only to detect needs but also to identify the mediators of change. Add to this that the audience in one situation is interrelated with other audiences and situations. Altogether this indicates that the marketing work analysed so far is situated in loosely structured and weak rhetorical situations.

## 4.3 If marketing talk invents significance

### **Taking Vatz's perspective**

When changing perspective from Bitzer (1968) to Vatz (1973) the idea of agency and rhetorical power becomes significant. "Situations obtain their character from the rhetoric that surrounds them", according to Vatz (1973:159). Events in the environment have no pre-existing meaning. Put differently, there is no rhetorical situation until someone uses his or her persuasive resources to talk a particular situation into existence. The source of rhetorical power is the speaker's ability to guide the audience's interpretation. Vatz presents an example.

We have "leaders" or "bosses", "organizations" or "machines", and "education" or "propaganda", not according to the situation's reality, but according to the rhetor's arbitrary choice of characterization. No theory of the relationship between situations and rhetoric can neglect to take account of the initial linguistic depiction of the situation. (Vatz 1973:157)

The following analysis draws attention to the framing of marketing work rather than the argumentative processes “within” a rhetorical situation. This is not to say that the communicative activities in focus here should be understood as “non-argumentative”. In contrast with the next chapter, in which arguing for business purposes is analysed in detail, this section seeks to understand how the context of marketing emerges and develops as an effect of the marketers’ “linguistic depiction of the situation”. This could also be understood as an inquiry of “invention of significance”, based on Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1971:121).

### **The initial depiction of a meeting**

Prompted by Vatz’ idea that “situations are rhetorical” I analysed how a meeting becomes a meeting, paying particular attention to the “initial linguistic depiction” of a meeting (Vatz 1973:157).

For a start, when observing Lars I found he repeatedly began conversations with potential customers by stressing the similarity between NOVO and the particular customer. “We are ordinary people [---], we are like you”, he often said, and then gradually introduced issues related to customer need, as if wanting to frame the meeting as a conversation between two people with a common interest.

Another informative example of how a particular meeting was talked into existence can be found in the “sales kick-off” that Axel arranged for some 20 TERRA consultants. It was the group of consultants that Axel was suppose to instruct and coach to conduct more and better sales meetings. Since Carl had more experience of sales coaching, Axel had invited him to share with them his experience of sales work.

Carl began his talk by asking the audience “What do you think of sales-people?”. He did it in a rather playful tone. The consultants seemed surprised by the question, but when they realized Carl was waiting for an answer they replied with words such as “greedy”, “lazy”, “stupid” and “annoying”. For every defaming expression, Carl smiled even more, and asked them to continue. When the group quietened down, he began talking about trust and relationships in a quite dramatic and emotional manner. He also invited me into the discussion, wanting me to say something about “how to behave rhetorically as a consultant”, as to confirm that trust are highly serious matters for everyone in the room. I responded by giving a brief presentation of my research project.

After a short break for coffee Carl returned to talk about trust, and relationships. His examples of how you deal with friends, to keep up a relationship, made everyone laugh heartily. Suddenly he became serious again.

Carl: There are some people in their fifties who have found out that their family has disappeared, because they were at work twenty-two hours per day. And there goes that relationship.

2009-08-21

The light-hearted atmosphere that was created in the very first minutes disappeared immediately. Soon he came to his key point: how to persuade the consultants to do more and better sales calls.

Carl: [When you loose friends] you feel sad. “Damn, I should have called them months ago, but it never happened”. That’s how it is with relationships. We need to meet, or to have contact in some way. This is where I see our worst problem. We have no system [for maintaining relationships]. How many of you have structured [the people] you have to keep in contact with? At home you may do as you want. But when we do business! I am very surprised! We live on our relationships!

2009-08-21

Sitting at the far end of the room, I was captivated by the speech. Looking at the faces of the consultants I could tell it was a tense moment.

As Carl continued, he worked up a self-reflexive two-sided story. The image of a “bad” salesperson was contrasted with the “good” practice of a professional who takes “private and business relationships seriously”. This contrast seemed to establish a communicative space that seemed heavy with blame and guilt, but also with options and opportunity. It was as if a new meeting had emerged within the first meeting, very much in Carl’s favour. He had everybody’s attention. The consultants nodded slowly when Carl talked, as if in sympathy. He obviously talked about things that resonated with the consultants.

Drawing on Vatz (1973), Carl *invented* a rhetorical situation that benefited his overall purpose. He did so by sharing anecdotes with emotional tensions, which located him and the consultants in a rhetorical situation that begged everybody to self-critically reflect upon their relationships with both personal friends and customers. In so doing Carl was able to sharply criticize

the lack of selling activities among the consultants without weakening his own credibility.

It should be noted that when the consultants protested, which they did later in his speech, never once did they make Carl a target of their criticism. Carl returned over again to his theme – “You must take care of your relationships: this is not about selling; it is a personal issue”.

This is how Carl ended his presentation.

Carl: I beg you.....You have to come to the meetings [at which we discuss the sales work we do]. And you have to be honest and straightforward about these things, and talk about them. If we feel uncomfortable [with asking customers to buy our services], or if we do not have time [to call customers], then we have to talk. Sometimes people do not come to our meetings because they have not done what they were supposed to do. Do you understand what I mean? Be honest and have a dialogue about this, and help each other in the teams. It is in fact a rather fun journey to be on together.

2009-08-21

When Carl finished his presentation it was time for Axel to talk. He was expected to present his idea of sales coaching, and how the consultants could generate more sales meetings. This was how Axel began.

Axel: How we will approach the job... so we trust each other, everyday. And how we will do it... we will have a rather structured agenda... when we meet, in small groups. Not in this big forum. Smaller groups, every second week. And... I would prefer if we met on Tuesdays, after lunch. We'll coordinate it... and it makes it a bit easier for some of you, and for me. [long silence] There is a project plan, but I do not know if you've all seen it. It is like... the outline and guidelines for this.

2009-08-21

Axel's and Carl's talks were completely different, and it was noticeable in the very first minutes of their appearances. Carl immediately drew heavily on his personal experience to make relationships salient, which created a situation in which he could deliver strong criticism of anyone not taking his invention of “relationship selling” seriously. It was successful to the extent that the audience listened and participated by asking questions and telling short anecdotes relevant to Carl's main theme – “relationships matter”. The audience became co-performers of the conversation while being won over by Carl's reasoning. As a sharp contrast, when Axel talked to the consultants he

gave an impression of insecurity. He spoke slowly, with a low and unvaried voice, non-stop for over an hour. What is more evident, he had no two-sided story to tell, no emotional anecdote to share. The consultants did ask questions but only technical questions, for example asking Axel to explain minor details of the upcoming sales coaching. They did not express any intention to engage emotionally. At the end of the presentation one of the consultants made a telling comment, “I don’t know what to say... this is new... and it doesn’t *really* apply to what I *personally* do at work”.

My conclusion is that Axel created an indistinct rhetorical situation. Carl’s argumentation made sense in his particular co-performed context, characterized by guilt and relationships. Axel did not invent a similar context to imbue his argumentation with meaning. His idea of sales coaching followed a fairly standardized model although it was expressed vaguely, without *pathos*. The atmosphere Carl had established, reminiscent of a mentor-to-adept conversation, quickly vanished when Axel began to talk. It was as if we had all suddenly returned from an inspiring journey back to a tedious daily grind, being now forced to listen to someone exhorting us to sell more, for unclear reasons.

Drawing on Vatz (1973) and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, the initial depiction of a situation *is* the situation, in which the speaker “make[s] present, by verbal magic alone, what is actually absent but what he considers important to his argument” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1971:117). In the above case I learned that relationship talk marked by a high degree of self-reflexivity established an informal and in many aspects successful meeting.

My point is not to declare Carl the winner of a verbal competition. The intention is to demonstrate that a sales kick-off is not just a sales kick-off. For a start, Carl and Axel could have chosen another label altogether for their meetings with the consultants, such as “workshop”, “brainstorm” or “training”, and thus created a significantly different initial linguistic depiction of the meeting. In fact, in a later conversation Axel told me how he had experimented with labels for meetings. By changing name from “project meeting” to “workshop” he said he managed to create better dialogues with the customers. Hence we might suggest that a pre-arranged meeting begins long before the participants gather physically. It begins when someone argues there should *be* a meeting. It is not that idea of a meeting comes first, followed by the framing of that meeting. Having an idea of a meeting *is* what makes it salient. In so saying, where should an analysis of a rhetorical situa-

tion begin if the framing of a meeting is already filled with significance? And where should it end?

There are indeed reasons to expand the analysis beyond the initial depiction of a situation. There will be lessons learned regarding the volatility of rhetorical situations in marketing work, which is not discernible in the above reasoning on initial depiction of meetings.

### **Volatile rhetorical situations**

Based on Bitzer (1968) I argued earlier that marketers meet customers to locate the particular need a particular customer has of a particular service. Customer need is the reason for the marketers' presence and dictates the marketer's conversation at the meeting. However, with Vatz (1973) in mind, meetings are altogether a different story. Instead of understanding the marketers' talk as a response to a customer's unspoken question "What can you do for me?", their talk could be understood as an attempt to create salience, and in so doing invent a situation in which their arguments make sense. As was suggested above, a meeting of a certain character does not simply arise from nowhere; marketers create the character of the meeting through their initial linguistic depiction of it, which affects the rest of the meeting.

Marketers' talk has so far been understood as consisting of fairly well-organized communication practices with a detectable beginning, middle and end. Indeed, this understanding is in accordance with the ancient rhetorical tradition and its emphasis on arrangement (*dispositio*). "However rich the material, it will be nothing but a random accumulation unless Disposition organizes it, links it all up, and binds it together" (Inst Or 7.Pr): "it is through the Arrangement that we set in order the topics we have invented" (Ad Her 3.16). Indeed, in the example of the sales kick-off I know both Carl and Axel had prepared their presentations carefully, especially the introductions.

Arrangement in the midst of action calls for a more pragmatic attitude. Quintilian and the author of *Rhetorica ad Herrenium* maintain that the speaker's preparations must not stand in the way when circumstances call for improvisation, which they often do. Sometimes the whole cause may change dramatically, Quintilian explains – for example, if an expected counter-argument fails to appear (Inst Or 10.7.3). Quintilian argues accordingly that "the power of improvisation" is the "greatest fruit" of rhetorical studies (Inst Or 10.7.1). This emphasizes the dynamic aspects of a rhetorical situation, in

which human speech extends somewhat arbitrarily, which is thus rather different than well-prepared presentations at a sales kick-off.

In the light of an emergent and dynamic rhetorical situation we have to consider some aspects of the meetings analysed above. First of all the integrity of the “initial linguistic depiction of a situation” must be questioned. As implied earlier, it is often impossible to empirically locate *the* beginning of a particular talk or meeting or encounter. Was it when the marketers started to speak, or when they entered the room, or when they sent the invitation, or when they first came up with the idea of a meeting? If we theoretically acknowledge the emerging character of human communication then the search for *the* beginning of a particular meeting appears less significant. *Every* moment invites a linguistic depiction that invents and re-invents rhetorical situations, which makes a given rhetorical situation exceptionally unstable and volatile.

In order to illustrate the volatility of meetings I have two informative examples in which a conversation was suddenly and quite dramatically restructured by one of the actors in the meeting. The first is a story I told Lars in the car, as we drove between two of the sales meetings. I had just asked Lars how he handles problematic customers when I remembered a meeting I attended a couple of years ago. This is what I told Lars in the car:

Tomas: When thinking of it... Once I visited a potential customer to sell marketing courses. Right from the start, the customer was very arrogant. He told me he was an expert in marketing. He made it clear he thought I could not reach up to his standard. His superior attitude irritated me, but for once I managed to stay calm and listen to his big-headed talk. Then suddenly I heard myself ask him, without any sarcasm at all, if my company could buy services from him, since he was such an expert. The whole situation changed! He totally lost his train of thought and became insecure. I noticed this and pushed him further, talked about setting up projects together where his expertise would be very valuable. I didn't get a contract that day but the meeting went much more smoothly after we “switched roles”, and I became his potential customer. He listened to me, supported my ideas, made constructive comments and waived goodbye with a big smile. The point is, I wasn't lying. Just colouring the truth a bit. We were actually interested in his services, but I could never have anticipated how dramatically this would change his attitude, and the whole situation really.

2009-09-15



Lars laughed. I guess he recognized himself in the situation. He must have been in hundreds of meetings like that.

The reason for retelling the story here is to demonstrate how a few words may be enough to reconstruct a rhetorical situation. In this case I invited myself to a potential customer who was very reluctant to talk to me. This changed instantly when I addressed him as a provider of services instead of customer. Then *he* asked questions with great enthusiasm about the services I was there to offer him.

As it happened, this anecdote also changed the conversation between Lars and me, right there in the car. It was as if the anecdote and our laughter brought us closer. What was a conversation between a practitioner and a researcher became a conversation between pals. Before that moment I had found Lars somewhat reserved, as if he did not trust me. Whether he did trust me or not is hard to tell. Nonetheless, immediately after I had told my story Lars told me about one of his co-workers at NOVO who frequently offers potential customers a job at NOVO if a project goes wrong for some reason. What is a conventional sales meeting suddenly becomes a career-coaching meeting, for the purpose of doing business.

Finally, the most dramatic example of a reconstruction of a meeting occurred at the end of Axel's meeting with a potential customer. We were just about to wrap up the meeting and leave the room when the customer looked at me, the silent researcher, and smiled cunningly.

Customer: How did he behave? [turning to me]

2009-10-12

Axel looked at the customer with great surprise. The customer stared intensely at me. I was stunned.

Tomas: Yes, well... it went fine, I suppose. As it should...

When we first met the customer I introduced myself as a "marketing researcher interested in rhetoric". In the meeting I kept a low profile, smiling when it seemed appropriate, and nodding occasionally. Now suddenly I was the focus of attention, unwillingly. The customer looked at me as if he expected an instant review of Axel's behaviour in the sales meeting. It was one of the most awkward moments I have ever experienced in a setting like this. I cannot even remember what I said – just muttering I suppose. The customer kept smiling and turned to Axel.

Customer: You have taken a sales course haven't you?

Axel: Well, yeah... [mumbles]

Customer: You asked some good questions. [smiling]

When the customer presented himself at the beginning of the meeting he told us he had worked as a consultant earlier in his career. I presume he was familiar with sales talk, and thus recognized that Axel's structured way of asking questions was a result of professional sales training. He waited for the right moment, and then turned this against Axel, at first indirectly, by pulling me into the conversation, and then directly, by approaching Axel with praise for his sales technique, with the result that Axel became altogether speechless.

It seems ironic that praise can silence a person that fast. However, as explained by Quintilian, there is a "certain tacit approval to be won by proclaiming ourselves weak, unprepared and no match for the talents of the opposing party" (Inst Or 4.1.8). Simultaneously, by paying our opponent honour and pretending to be afraid of his eloquence we can have an audience look at our opponent with disbelief (Inst Or 4.1.11). It is not the rhetorical strategy that is of interest here. It is the entirely rearranged situation, again accomplished with a few and seemingly harmless words. In retrospect it appears as the customer had participated in the sales meeting for the sake of amusement. He was not rude to Axel. He did not mock him for following the sales script too closely. He just seemed amused to be in total control of the situation, much as I felt when able to reconstruct the meeting with the arrogant customer.

In conclusion, the investigation of the marketers' meetings, through the lens of Vatz (1973) and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1971), suggests that this form of human encounter is unorganized, improvised and highly volatile. This has consequences for my overall understanding of the context of marketing work, which I shall discuss in the final section of this chapter.

## 4.4 The argumentative context of marketing work

This chapter has analysed the immediate context of marketing work, assuming that the work carried out by marketers only makes sense in relation to a particular context, here analysed as a rhetorical situation. Using two theoretic-

cally contradictory perspectives on rhetorical situations, represented by Bitzer (1968) and Vatz (1973), enabled a two-sided analysis.

In the light of Bitzer I found that marketers spend a considerable amount of time and effort to detect and respond to what they describe as “customer need”. Marketers argue their services “satisfy customer need”; consultants take courses how to do better business by asking the right “need questions”; and customers answer questions willingly if these have to do with their “need”. Implicit, ambiguous and indistinct needs have to be boosted with urgency, or else a conversation with a customer declines. In the light of Bitzer I also found that marketing work is undertaken in situations in which the inquiry of need is accepted and expected, but the professionals who do the work are met with suspicion and disbelief. It seems the stereotype of marketers is a serious constraint when marketers do their work.

In the light of Vatz (1973) marketers *engage* in the immediate context. Setting a particular theme for a meeting, or stressing similarities in a conversation, or permeating a conversation with emotional talk, inflicts the particular situation with new meaning, and changes it. New perspectives, issues and emotions are made salient, which the participants in a conversation respond to, and interact with. The analysis focused on the beginning of meetings but before long I realized the difficulty of defining where a meeting starts, or ends. Besides, conversations were often interrupted, sometimes quite dramatically. From Vatz’ perspective it seems unproductive to classify a meeting in terms of complex or non-complex, formal or informal, or rational or emotional. These are *temporal effects* in ongoing conversations. Thus we have to acknowledge the importance of *kairos*, “the right and opportune time to do something” (Kinneavy 1986:80-84) when analysing the context of marketing.

Drawing on Miller (1992:312), either “*kairoi* are important exigences punctuating *chronos*” as Bitzer (1968) implies, or “*every moment along the continuum of chronos has its kairos*” as Vatz (1973) implies. From one perspective we might claim that the opportune moment for “sales talk” is when a rhetorical situation invites the marketer to address customer need. From the other perspective, the opportune moment is *any* moment the marketer is able to interact with the context.

Thus understood, the context becomes *argumentative*. As explained by Billig, when we approach the context as an argumentative context we are able to account not only for the opinions the speaker is trying to justify but also for the counteropinions included in the argumentative context (Billig 1996:118). Given this reasoning marketers’ talk about need satisfaction

works in two ways. It enables them to identify and respond to urgent need the customer might formulate, *and* it works as a counterargument against the implicit and omnipresent stereotype of marketers as self-sufficient exploiters.

Then again, the “facts” and “truths” in a situation are only significant when the audience considers them as starting points for argumentation; once they are implanted in the argumentative context as conclusions they lose their status (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1971:68). This explains why Axel’s talk about need lost its significance in the end of the meeting with the clever customer. The “fact” that marketers ask questions to address customer need lost its relevance the instant the customer proposed that Axel had advanced skills in sales. The peculiar twist is that Axel actually *had* participated in a sales course a month before. Even more peculiar, the customer invited the silent observer, *me*, to be the reviewer of Axel’s skills. This says something of the volatile and playful aspects of the argumentative context of marketing work.

This leads to the overall conclusion that a study of marketing work would be severely limited if it only paid attention to rhetorical strategies that respond to facts and constraints *given* by a particular rhetorical situation. If so occurred we would be ignorant of the rhetorical resources (*rhetorica utens*) employed by the marketers in the communicative space in-between “what is expedient” and “what is becoming”, which according to Quintilian is what orators consider in order to speak “appropriately” (Inst Or 11.1.8).

In so saying I move on to analyse rhetorical strategies.

# Chapter 5.

## Analysis of rhetorical strategy

This chapter analyses the rhetorical strategies employed by marketers when arguing for business. Rhetorical strategy refers, broadly speaking, to the practice by which persuasive resources are used to consider the “situation, audience, opponent, and many other factors [to design] rhetorical strategy”, *and* to enact the strategy to bring “a world [to the] listener’s here and now” (Kaufer 1997:269).

The analysis in this chapter acknowledges the presence of a rhetorical situation *and* the potential to engage rhetorically with this situation. This calls for a theory of argumentation that does not focus on the single argument or the most valid method of overcoming differences in opinions. In terms of Wenzel’s categorization I am inclined to acknowledge argumentation as a “process” rather than a “product” or a “procedure” (Wenzel 1992:134). I draw specifically on Billig, who explains that argumentation is a form of social collaboration in which there can be no final criteria for assessing a particular argument, simply because every criterion must itself be justified by another argument.

As suggested by Andersson and Mortensen, “given the full powers of language, much rhetorical argument may be simply beyond logic” (Anderson and Mortensen 1967:143). Indeed, we need logic to formulate an argument,

as we need skills in grammar and style. Still, arguments are therefore not necessarily *about* logic, grammar and style (Billig 1996:131). Given this understanding of argumentation it would not make sense to examine marketing talk in order to assess the validity of an argument, much less to determine the meaning of an argument.

I begin the chapter with an analysis of how marketers address their audiences, with particular interest in the process of identification. Then follows a brief analysis of the strategic use of questions. This in turn will be followed by an extensive analysis of relationship talk, in the light of Aristotle's conceptualization of *ethos*. The reader will then learn how I discovered the marketers' use of impersonation and averted speech, and how these are used strategically to accomplish conversations in the spirit of contradiction. Finally the chapter ends with a discussion of the findings this chapter adds to the multifaceted account of marketing this book aims to bring forward.

## 5.1 How marketers address their audiences

### **Identification processes marked by contextual sensitivity**

In classical rhetoric the introduction, called *principium* or *exordium* in Latin, and *prooimion* in Greek, is of particular importance. It is the part in which the minds of the audience have to be won before "one enters on the real matter" (Inst Or 4.1.1-5). In the opening of a speech goodwill has not yet been established, and the speaker's motives seem here to be directed against the audience. To meet on "common ground" the speaker has to acknowledge the general opinion (*doxa*) the particular audience holds. This calls for certain rhetorical strategies in the opening of a speech, according to the rhetorical tradition.

Turning to the marketers in this study, how do they establish common ground with their audiences?

When talking to marketers about their everyday challenges they often referred to the difficulty, and importance, of "connecting" with customers when meeting them for the first time. In the first of the TERRA workshops the participants argued for the necessity of face-to-face interaction when establishing a new business relationship. This is how one of them expressed it.

Ingrid: Yesterday I had a first meeting with a new customer. We had had email contact, and then we had picked up the phone, and yesterday we met for the first time. Afterwards we said to each other “good, now it feels better when we write email and talk over the phone in the future”. It was a relief to have the physical meeting! [---] I got a new assignment [from the customer] after this meeting, too. Communication will work better now when I know more about whom I am dealing with.

2009-11-26

Note how Ingrid and her customer explicitly acknowledged the moment when they “connected”, quite emotionally as it appears, as if much was at stake when they met. Moreover, they interpreted the whole meeting as a *common* accomplishment, which according to them will affect their future relationship in a positive way.

In the same workshop Anders suggested that meetings without face-to-face interaction are not “real” meetings. A first “real” meeting with a customer is something extraordinary, Anders argued.

Anders: A meeting by phone or email is a sort of meeting, but it is not for real. As for me, I have no image of the person, who he or she is. If I have read [about the person] on the Internet I might have some information about what that person has done before, and things like that. [---] I might ring the reception just to check “Is it Kjell-Åke who is responsible for this?”, and then you always get a good answer – “Yes that is correct, he has been dedicated to this and will be responsible for project A”, “Ah, good, then I know, thanks”. [---] Still, I only have a superficial picture of the person.

2009-11-26

The overall impression is that marketers entered meetings with new customers with rather vague ideas of the audience they would face, and also with vague ideas about the meeting itself. Still, the first moments with a customer seem to be crucial for the rest of the meeting, which calls for great attention to details, and then improvisation. This is how Anders addresses his audience when he, quite literally, enters a meeting that involves a new customer.

Anders: [When I enter] I try to scan the room we are in. [---] If there are photos on the wall, photos of golf or so on, I start informally. “So you play golf?”, or “You are interested in golf?”. [---] If there are photos of children [I might talk about them], or just ask “how long have you been in this property?”.

2009-11-26

Anders seems to be very alert when entering the room. He reads the physical space to collect bits and pieces of information, which he instantly brings to play in the conversation with the customer.

Anders preferred to talk about rather personal issues in the opening of a meeting, as did several others of the marketers I talked to or observed in meetings. Sometimes it was the customer who was most eager to create an informal situation, such as the customer Axel met. In the beginning of the meeting the customer did most of the talking. He told us about his personal background and he also revealed, in a self-ironic spirit, how his family hated his choice of career. This brief anecdote of his life was told with a comical twist, which made us all laugh heartily. Then Axel spoke of his father who had worked in a factory similar the one we were visiting. It was as if Axel wanted to suggest that he had a sort of emotional connection to this particular industry. We all listen closely to what was said. We nodded, smiled and laughed. We shared a moment of pleasure, like newfound friends. It was the customer who advanced the meeting when he started to talk about technical details of production. It then appeared as the opening of the meeting was officially over, although we were still smiling.

A person is persuaded only if you talk the person’s language “by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his” according to Burke (1969b:55). Hence we might understand the anecdotes told by Axel and the customer as strategies employed in a process of identification. They shared not only personal matters. They shared personal matters that were *interrelated*, and in so doing constructed common ground.

I found that the marketers in my study seldom addressed business issues in the beginning of a meeting. It was particularly obvious in meetings with customers. No one ever opened a meeting with “I am here to do business”, or “Let me present my company”, or something similar. Talk about need, services and business entered the meeting gradually, and most often smoothly, as if carried into the meeting by means of personal anecdotes.



The most dedicated advocates of the necessity of “small talk” when doing business were undoubtedly Anders and Carl. They claimed that “informal” communication is crucial, and presented a multitude of anecdotes in support of their claim. However, in the TERRA workshops their female co-workers protested. They argued that informal communication is not always a realistic strategy to make common ground in a meeting. Ingrid spoke of her own experiences. She preferred to be perceived as formal in the opening of a meeting.

Ingrid: When you hold a meeting for ten department managers, who have been working twenty years longer than you, then it is perhaps not a good idea to tell them your children threw up in the morning, or a lot of private details. Then it is important to show you are... to keep it strict, be on time, and be well prepared.

2009-11-26

Anders was upset to hear his female co-workers say they sometimes were forced to establish a more formal relationship than men would have in the same situation. Anders saw it as exceptionally troublesome for the female professionals at TERRA. He added several examples of how females were restricted in everyday marketing work because of misinterpreted identification processes. Ingrid seemed to be uncomfortable with Anders’ somewhat dramatic description of women’s difficulty in establishing operational business relationships. Ingrid argued that it was not such a troublesome issue after all. She had alternative ways of finding common ground with customers.

Ingrid: The traditional arrangements you [Anders] just talked about, as watching sports or having a beer, these are rather... well, male behaviour. [--] We might not be able to go the same way, because it is not expected, or because you do not even have these interests. You have to find your own way to have an informal contact [with customers] also. It is not like women *have* to be formal. [---] There are ways, there a lot of things to do.

Tomas: Could you give some examples? What do you do [with customers] if *not* go to watch football? Or do you watch football?

Ingrid: Well, sometimes you have to bite the bullet. [everyone laughing] But there is much else to do. You might go out for a beer but perhaps not to a sportsbar, but to another place, music or something, local events. [---] Or just see something related to work, which people are interested in.

2009-11-26

When examining how marketers address their customers to find common ground I find they reflect on the physical context as much as on what to say and do in various meetings. Put differently, the physical set-up of a meeting appears to be part of the marketers' rhetorical strategy, which relates to the previous chapter, where I used Vatz (1973) to demonstrate how meetings were invented by marketers. This section adds to this by showing that marketers deliberately choose location to invent a particular meeting.

I began this section by analysing "real" meetings with new customers, which according to the marketers in my study demand a face-to-face meeting, at which much is at stake in the opening of the meeting. Although there is a great variety in how marketers address their audiences, there are reasons to conclude this process is marked by contextual sensitivity and improvisation. In the beginning of the meetings, before goodwill has been established, marketers probe the context as they enact more or less emotional anecdotes in pursuit of common ground for identification.

### **Identification processes in the spirit of contradiction**

In every process of identification there are contrary forces of adaption and contradiction at play, because the common ground that accommodates both speaker and audience is also where opinions and ideas are disputed (Billig 1996:268-269). How are these forces at play in meetings that seem to be marked by contextual sensitivity and improvisation? This is something Gunilla addressed in one of our conversations concerning the beginning of business meetings. I asked her if her meetings with customers are characterized by improvisation.

Gunilla: Yes they are. I try to pinpoint, sort of, what material they are interested in. Then I listen to them. It is not like I go there and do a presentation. I say “now you have to present yourself, what your problems are, what questions you have”, like that. I sort of take in their troubles first, and then present TERRA and what we can do in relation to [the customer’s] need, so to speak. So, I try to... listen first. [But] sometimes I can give them advice [already in the beginning of the meeting]. Without knowing their business I still have a feeling for it “this might work, these two can go together, perhaps you should do this instead”, or “have you thought about this”. Something like that. Then you start to work directly on the relationship [with the customer].

2011-09-16

Gunilla listens carefully, collect bits and pieces of information, rearrange them, and then bring them into the conversation again, proposing something *new*, something the customer has not thought of, something they can do *instead* of what they do today. Hence she indirectly and cautiously challenges the opinions held by the customer in the moment of interaction. Gunilla implies that this is done deliberately, for the purpose of establishing a relationship. In a conversation with Stefan he seemed to argue likewise.

Stefan: You can never have the first moment with a customer back. It is extremely important the customer... has positive feelings for you. It is also in this first meeting you are able to somewhat surprise them. When you sit down with a customer, and you think that they think “really, what can they offer us”, and you know they have been looking [into their problems], and you are able to work up some ideas they have not thought of before. Then suddenly you grow as a salesperson, “Shit, this man, or this women, is not stupid, here is some great stuff”. Then you do a good follow-up, and keep in close contact.

2009-05-05

Although it is unclear if Stefan refers to the opening of a first meeting or a series of first meetings, he still presents “listen, rearrange, confront and surprise” as an efficient method of establishing working personal relationships, in much the same way as Gunilla does.

It appears to be a particular form of interaction in the meeting in which existing opinions, ideas and solutions are explored, but only to be *disputed*. We can imagine this calls for great caution. If marketers provoke the audience too forcefully, or profoundly question the audience’s common sense,

they risk to abruptly ending the whole process of identification. Indeed, as Billig points out, it is a “tricky job” to navigate an identification process marked by contradiction (Billig 1996:268).

To continue the analysis of identification process in the spirit of contradiction, when we were in the car, driving to the first sales meeting, I asked Lars about the specific purpose of the meeting.

Lars: I aim for a new meeting, a qualification meeting [to discuss future projects in detail]. We need to know what troubles them, productivity, delivery, cash cows that leak. [---] It will [also] be a discussion of problems and ways to work together.

2009-09-15

Lars’ gate to business for NOVO, not to mention salary for him personally, is a “prestudy”. The prestudy is presented more or less as a standalone service performed by professional analysts. Lars told me he considers the prestudy to be a part of the sales process. It is the consulting services that usually follow the prestudy that bring in the big money for NOVO, and Lars personally. The prestudy is undertaken to point out exactly what a customer will gain, in financial terms, if the customer continues the relationship with NOVO. In a way the customer pays NOVO to produce arguments for new and larger projects.

In the car Lars also said something that caught my attention much later, when I tried to understand how he argued for business, and in particular how he struggled to construct common ground early in the sales meetings. “NOVO shall not be consultants, we shall be best partners in efficiency”, Lars declared. I remember thinking that this is just one of these empty phrases used frequently by myself and other marketers when there is nothing else to say. However, when examining closely his conversation with the potential customers I found this expression was part of a kind of defence speech for NOVO. The elements of this defence speech are presented below. It is important to note that the customer never explicitly articulated what I consider to be “implicit accusations”.

Lars: The earnings for customers should always be twice what we cost. [Contradicting the implicit accusation that consultants are expensive]

Lars: We know all the three-letter-acronyms there are in this business, but we also get things done. [Competitor A] planned the system but never implemented it. We have no problem about coming in after them. They are theorists. We are practitioners. [Contradicting the implicit accusation that consultants never get things done]

Lars: We are ordinary people, normally talented, as are our customers. We are like the people who have to implement the changes we suggest. [Contradicting the implicit accusation that consultants are prestigious and over-confident people who denigrate the customers.]

Lars: The prestudy costs exactly 200,000 SEK. We calculate and then gain approval, continuously, for the savings the overall project will result in. [Contradicting the implicit accusation that you never know what it will cost in the end.]

The anticipation of possible objections, as suggested above, is called *prolepsis* in rhetorical terms. It is a rhetorical strategy particularly effective in the introduction of a speech (Inst Or 9.2.16-17). In terms of argumentation it works similarly to a refutation, which is the part of a speech in which the speaker engages in “the destruction of our adversaries’ arguments” (Ad Her 1.4-6). Quintilian underscores that “Proof is meant to establish something, and Refutation [*refutatio*] to pull something down” (Inst Or 3.9.5).

Lars began talking to customers seemingly assured he faced an audience that held unfavourable attitudes towards him and what he represents. When indirectly saying “I am not like the consultants you reject, for good reasons”, he establishes an advantageous character, *and* neutralizes arguments the customer might produce later that draw on the negative stereotypes of marketers and consultants. At the same time, *prolepsis* is not a rhetorical strategy that brings arguing to a close. The employment of *prolepsis* obligates further reasoning, implying that new arguments will be brought forward that address the current case differently (Billig 1996:269). Indeed, when talking to customers Lars frequently, and enthusiastically, returned to do yet another interpretation of the introductory theme “we are not as other consultants”.

Lars deliberately situated himself as the one accused. According to Quintilian this comes with certain advantages; “There is only one way of presenting a charge, but various ways of countering it, [---] the defence advocate may deny, justify, seek to transfer the case, make excuses, plead for mercy,

soften, extenuate, divert the charge, or scorn and ridicule it. Thus on one side we have, as a rule, a straightforward speech, a matter of a loud voice, one might say, while the other side needs a thousand twists and tricks.” (Inst Or 5.13.2-3). It adds to the understanding of what refutation might accomplish when marketers argue for business.

Returning to the main question, how do the marketers establish common ground with their audiences?

The short answer is, they meet them face to face, and talk to acknowledge common sense *and* dispute it. What seems to be an “uncontroversial” start of a business meeting, that is, someone asks questions and someone else answers them, quite smoothly, is from a rhetorical perspective a dynamic verbal practice undertaken in the spirit of contradiction. This is an informative illustration of how marketers carry out conversations in interplay with their audience.

Given these findings it is increasingly difficult to uphold a clear distinction between the beginning of a meeting and the rest of the meeting. I commented on this earlier when analysing the initial linguistic depiction of a rhetorical situation. Several of the strategies presented in this section were common in, but not limited to, the beginnings of meetings. They were also employed as the conversations progressed, which suggests that identification is a process that has no given end, which in turn suggests that the common ground established by the marketer is very instable.

This said I now direct my attention, briefly, to the significance of asking questions, and then continue with a thorough analysis of relationship matters in everyday marketing work.

## 5.2 The significance of questions

The aim of this section is to analyse the significance of questions when marketers argue for business purposes, by returning to Lars’ and Axel’s meetings with customers, in which two different questioning strategies were used. In the end I will argue that marketers’ questions are not the disinterested heuristic devices we first might expect.

When meeting customers Lars asked questions about current affairs, and the customer responded in terms of “we are doing fine”, or “we are in trouble”. Then Lars asked “how do you know you are doing fine?” or “exactly how bad is it?”. Lars asked numerous questions but he never dwelled on the

customers' answers. Sometimes I got the impression he was not listening to the customer at all, or at least only vaguely paying attention to what the customer said. For example, Lars asked a question about the owner of a factory, and before the customer got a chance to answer Lars swiftly told an anecdote that made it clear that Lars was familiar with the factory's history as well as the owner.

Moreover, Lars' anecdotes were often full of examples of negative things that could happen if the customer ignored the parade of problems Lars called to attention. When a customer told Lars they used their own "quality improvement models", implying they had no need for the services NOVO provided, then Lars quickly gave an example of how NOVO successfully assisted a company that got into trouble when trying to implement similar models. This example ended with a question if the customer "really" had thought things through. This happened repeatedly. When the customer expressed reluctance towards the services Lars' addressed in a question, Lars directly asked another question. And, when the customer asked a question, Lars often answered with a question. This is what it sounded like.

Customer: You take responsibility for the whole operation?

Lars: Yes. But we can also offer the exact services you need. [then telling how NOVO customizes services, then asking a question if the customer would like to know more]

Lars: Now we have the opportunity to conduct a prestudy. [making it sound like a question]

Customer: It is too turbulent for the moment. We have many new managers in our organization.

Lars: [Yes, but] we can also study how the managers perform. [making it sound like a question]

Lars: The challenge is to make everyone follow the same path. You are in charge. You set the pace. [---] You have to work hard, and we can help you. [making it sound like a question]

Customer: Well, no... we already have our projects going.

Lars: [Yes but] You will have frustration and trouble when you have people in new positions. [making it sound like a question]

2009-09-15

The overall question in the particular meeting above came to be “Can you really handle the difficult situation you and your company are facing?” When formulating this question, and other explicit and implicit questions, Lars also managed to include “we get things done” several times, often with reference to existing customers of NOVO.

When the customer argued they already had what they needed in terms of quality models, change projects, management systems, and so on, Lars typically said something like “yes, but” and added a comment or a long anecdote. From a rhetorical perspective “yes, but” has a different effect than “why” or “how come”. “Why” establishes facts and motivation, as if the marketer is a prosecutor. “Why” suggests an elaboration of a previous statement, whereas “yes, but” makes way for a contradiction. Given the number of times “yes, but” was used by Lars to introduce new questions it appeared to be one of his most important rhetorical strategies when arguing for business purposes.

The third meeting Lars attended was different in some respects, especially the end of it. It went off as the first two meetings but then the customer began to ask questions.

Customer: How long time does it take [to finish a project]?

Lars: It takes about half a year [to do the necessary changes].

[Customer makes a note]

Customer: If you would [conduct a project] here, what would you want to focus on?

Lars: Good question! We always take the customers’ models into account, and we aim for twenty percent improvement of production, or more. We do a pre-study to identify the change potential. It is like we give you a bag of money. You will make money on this.

Customer: I really hope so! [laughing]

2009-09-16

The meeting continued in a friendly spirit. Lars waited for a question, gave a rather short answer, and then waited for next question. My experience was that he controlled the meeting in a very subtle manner. In the car after the meeting Lars told me that it was because the potential customer was “customer-oriented” – focusing on the market – and hence less motivated to draw on technical jargon.



In the end of the meeting it was Lars who asked the questions again. The customer gave shorter and shorter answers, as if he was careful not to inspire Lars to ask more questions or tell yet another anecdote. These were the questions that ended the meeting.

Lars: Perhaps you could visit a customer we work with for the moment [to learn more about what NOVO can accomplish]?

[a short answer from the customer]

Lars: Can I ring you again in fourteen days?

[a short answer from the customer]

Lars: Is there something else we can do you you? [---] Do you have any questions?

Customer: Not really.

2009-09-16

When comparing how Lars and Axel talked to customers I find some significant differences. First of all, Axel entered the sales meeting without any apparent core message or core story, although he had a well-prepared Power-Point presentation, which Lars did not have. Second, it was the customer, not Axel, who took the initiative to establish common ground. Third, the customer provided Axel with details about their current marketing and production situation, and occasionally made a pause almost as if he encouraged Axel to ask questions. After ten-fifteen minutes the meeting had turned into a rapid verbal exchange where short questions were followed by short answers.

Customer: We need more consultants now as we proceed to cut down on operation.

Axel: That is nice for us. What sort for consultants do you need?

Customer: Production, development, energy... Then we have contractors [already] who know the site, but it is not good when they [sort of] buy their own services [for us].

Axel: So what you look for is?

Customer: Well, nothing right now. [When I need services] I have to search outside our organization, and it is as expensive as before.

Axel: Do you need any type of project manager?

Customer: [Maybe later] in planning, control system, machine, quality.

Axel: No reconstructions of the site?

Customer: No, nothing large. But there is always... water. We have a contract that will end in a couple of years. No crisis for the moment but the water quality is not good. Do you have anyone who knows corrosion? [explaining the problem in detail]

Axel: We'll have to see if we have someone.

Customer: Well, now I have talked a lot about our factory. Your turn to tell me who you are.

Axel: Well, yes?

2009-10-12

This is a telling excerpt from the meeting. It illustrates how the customer encourages Axel to talk, first indirectly when saying he is in need of consultants, and in the end quite literally when commanding Axel to present TERRA. Axel then placed his computer in front of the customer, made a comment that this was the first time he had used the slides with the new graphic design, and then presented TERRA in general terms. The presentation was short and ended with a question about the customer's need of services for energy improvement. Thereafter the verbal ping-pong continued.

Axel: What about the transmission network?

Customer: Really bad. We have to deal with the most immediate problems. Another big problem is the chemical system. We need to change it if it leaks too much.

Axel: Is it a big investment?

Customer: It has to wait. We cannot get the money [we need].

Axel: What about the cost when your production is down?

Customer: Yes... well, we change when we must, step by step.

Axel: We have a team who works with financing to overcome problems with investments. Today you have cost when production is down. These costs can be moved to investments instead.

Customer: Yes... I agree... but it has to be approved higher up [in the organization].

Axel: We can provide a specification.

Customer: That is really interesting.

Axel: Do you want us to look into it?

2009-10-12

Axel's questions were not only remarkably condensed but they were also very structured, largely following the conventional "SPIN-method", which stipulates that questions should be asked in the order of Situation, Problem, Implication and Need/Pay-off (Rackham 1995).

I had the feeling that a business contract was in the bag for Axel. But, at this very moment the customer made an unexpected and rather weird comment.

Customer: Yes indeed! If you re-engineer everything, and charge 1,000 SEK a month to operate it all. [laughing]

Axel did not laugh. He smiled faintly, and said:

Axel: No, we do not operate sites.

Axel continued to ask short questions about problems the customer might have, and the customer answered them without hesitation. After some 45 minutes and about 20 questions later the customer began to answer them with less enthusiasm. I got the impression the meeting had come to an end. It was then the customer forced me into the conversation, surprisingly asking me to evaluate Axel's performance as a salesperson. After this no more questions were asked.

What have I learnt about the significance of question when arguing for business? The examples from Lars and Axel's encounters with potential customers demonstrate that questions are not solely about obtaining information. As explained by Quintilian, questions can also be used to "prove a point" (Inst Or 9.2.7). In fact, questions have a range of different rhetorical functions in everyday talk: they can communicate an experience, express emotions, establish a relationship, induce action, and so on (Athanasiadou 1991).

When analysing how the marketers use questions I learn about significant differences in these marketers' rhetorical strategies. Axel asked short and

focused questions presumably to find a specific need for the services he was there to offer. He did not load his questions with personal anecdotes, as Lars did. Lars asked questions in a more varied way, yet his questions were always followed by, or encapsulated in, anecdotes full of emotions and concerns.

Finally, if a question presumes an object to which it relates, and which is confirmed when a question is answered, as explained by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1971:159), what is then the object in the above conversations? The first that comes to mind is *profitability*. Both Lars and Axel argue they provide services that decrease costs. They are engaged in a commercial enterprise, which they make clear for their audiences when asking questions, and which is confirmed when commercial issues are elaborated in the answers. Even so, this is just one facet of a meeting with a customer. Lars' overall promises, "partnership for profitability" and "we get things done", implied a far-reaching commitment from the customer. Hence Lars has to convince the customer that he and NOVO can be trusted. And, Axel, who asks reasonable questions in a systematic order, but still seems to be in the hand of an unconventional customer, to say the least. This section has demonstrated how questions are of great significance when marketers argue for business in these kinds of situations.

## 5.3 Relationship talk

### **Locating *ethos* in the foreground of the analysis**

When talking to Carl and Anna about the meaning of trust in marketing work I suddenly heard myself say "business relationships are only about manipulation". This blunt and rather odd claim generated a heated discussion in which Carl and Anna argued emphatically for the robustness and reality of relationships. They argued that managing relationships is the *essence* of their work.

Later, when reading the transcript of the conversation I was intrigued by the emotional character of their arguments in favour of a relationship-focused approach to marketing. "I am a person who cares about relationships" was a reoccurring comment, not only in this conversation but in many other conversations involving the marketers in my study. Here are some telling examples.

Anna: How do you start a relationship [with a customer]? Many times, or always in fact, I think it is about showing who you are... I do my best, I am clear with what I think and feel on an issue... not for my own benefit, but because I want to give something to someone. In that moment when I see beyond [my egoistic needs], I become an open person, someone you would like to have a [business] relationship with.

2009-04-19

Gunilla: Well, as I see it, my role is about building relationships, primarily to present TERRA out in the field. “We are here, and we listen, and we follow the trends”, so to speak.

2011-09-16

Stefan: I am a relationship-minded salesperson, and base [my work] over time on having a good rapport with people, by being...honest with customers in every situation. I think it is appreciated. As long as you are clear about your intentions – “I will administer your money as if it were my own” – the customer will tolerate your opinions, and you will build a type of...almost a type of friendship with the customer, that is real.

2009-05-15

Rather than analysing the extent to which these comments “truly” reflect the relationship character of marketing work, which the marketers would argue, this section addresses the marketers’ characters. More precisely, I aim to analyse the marketers’ relationship talk as attempts to construct a beneficial *ethos*.

*Ethos* “contains almost the strongest proof of all” because we “readily and sooner believe reasonable men on all matters in general and absolutely on questions where precision is impossible” (Rhet 1356a). Furthermore, *ethos* persuades because “the end of rhetoric is belief and trust, and belief and trust attach primarily to people whom we trust, and only derivatively to propositions which we believe” (Garver 1995:146). It is through the concept of *ethos* we know how speakers construct approving images of themselves, unflattering images of their enemies and “do whatever else advances their purpose through reference to persons” (Leff 2009:304).

To continue the theoretical framing of the analysis in this section, Aristotle identified three universal “ethical” characteristics that cause belief: *phronesis*, *arete*, and *eunoia* (Rhet. 1378a). *Phronesis* might be understood as “practical wisdom”, which is expressed in good practical reasoning which

in turn “*is* the discursive embodiment of good character” (Garver 1995:151). *Arete* is more difficult to explain because it has different meanings in different contexts. A rough translation is “virtue”, but “good moral character acquired through the habitual exercise of virtues” might better convey the broader meaning of the term (Cherry 1998:254). *Eunoia* is the third element of *ethos*. The short common translation is “goodwill”. Whereas *phronesis* and *arete* are a type of characteristic of the speaker, the quality of *eunoia* refers to the audience’s emotions caused by the speaker. (Garver 1995:110). To describe *eunoia* we could also use terms such as approval, sympathy and loyalty, all of which signify the emotional and behavioural bond between the speaker and audience that *eunoia* builds on.

So, how do the marketers in my study construct an *ethos*, seen in the light of their ideas of “relationship marketing”? The following analysis will deal with the three characteristics of *ethos* one by one.

### **Marketers’ ideas of practical wisdom**

“If you have a good relationship with someone, and they know you are competent, then things often work out in the end” Carl said when we talked about the difficulty of dealing with the rigid purchasing and procurement policies some customers set up in order to reduce the influence of personal relationships. Even official and rigid policies can be “worked around”, if the purchaser really wants to, *and* if the purchaser trusts you are competent enough to solve his or her problems, Carl argued.

Competence and trust are two words that often appear together when Carl and other marketers discussed how business relationships work. Still, they rarely talked about *gaining* competence. Studying, sharing experiences, or other conventional practices aimed at improving the marketers’ competence were not seen as a significant part of their work. “What you *actually* know and what the customer *thinks* you know may be two different things”, Erik told me and continued, “What you *actually* know is less important in establishing good business relationship”. This is an echo of how *phronesis*, practical wisdom, is conceptualized by Aristotle. People are persuaded by what they *think* is practical wisdom – “they are not persuaded by what they take to be cleverness” (Garver 1995:147). Rationality and *logos* have no value *per se* when arguing, at least as long as they are detached from praxis.

Practical wisdom is revealed discursively, demonstrating a person’s character, good habits and good judgement. Following this reasoning, compe-

tence is always *made* relevant by the marketers in a particular context. Lack of “real” competence might not be a serious problem when doing business – quite the contrary, according Erik.

Erik: It can be an advantage if you do not have in-depth knowledge, but are better in communication, because the important thing is what we do [and how we communicate what we do].

2009-03-19

Erik and Lars argued that age and experience are two important contextual aspects that must be taken into consideration when establishing a trustworthy character.

Erik: You have to be [at least] thirty-five to be seen as experienced in the eyes of the buyer. [---] It is then they listen to your ideas. It makes sense that it is not the knowledge as such, but how they perceive you, and how you act, [that matters].

2009-03-19

Lars: When we [senior marketers] go out into the field we have little preparation but great experience. The younger [marketers] have to work differently.

2011-06-20

Notably, age and experience are not something fixed. They can be made relevant in different ways. Erik told me he is over 50, and added that he still is the youngest on one of his teams. He laughed as he concluded that compared to them he is “young and hungry”, implying that this is also an important aspect when customers assess whom they want to have business relationship with.

There are several ways to establish the connection between experience, competence and trust. In a conversation with Stefan he turned directly to me and literally disqualified me as a salesperson, although in a careful way. He said “I would not hire you to do sales work despite the great knowledge you have”. As he formulated it I assumed he meant the theoretical knowledge I have about marketing, as he often flattered me to have. In the light of *phronesis* it appears as he held this expertise, demonstrated in theoretical and abstract reasoning, against me, implicitly saying that this sort of pretentious cleverness will not persuade customers. This is indeed also Cicero’s conclu-

sion: “practical knowledge is pleasing to men, but a clever tongue suspect”, thus *lingua suspecta* (suspicious “clever” language) must be avoided (Or 145).

When Stefan argued for business purposes he accentuated his own practical experience, as did Lars. In the sales meetings Lars confidently declared “we know how to talk operational management, but we also get things done”, with strong emphasis on the practical aspects of the services NOVO provide.

In a conversation with Carl he gave me some solid advice on how to appear experienced and competent in the eyes of a customer. “Ask intelligent questions”, he said. As was demonstrated in the previous section, there are many ways to ask questions, and reasons for asking them. For the moment I shall focus on the significance of questions for the construction of *ethos*.

Returning to Lars’ use of questions, I noticed how he sometimes loaded them with technical details when talking to customers, as this example indicates.

Lars: May I ask what you measure [regarding productivity]? Precision of delivery? I can image you score about... 85-90 percent?

2009-10-15

His use of expressions like “precision of delivery” suggests a familiarity with operational management. And, by suggesting “85-90 percent”, which the customer acknowledged as reasonable, Lars appeared even more knowledgeable about productivity and operational management. However, in earlier conversations Lars pointed out that his “actual” knowledge in engineering was limited. Indeed, when the customer asked Lars to clarify his questions, which happened a number of times, Lars laughed tensely, swiftly changed the subject, and asked another question, loaded with other technical jargon. So, again we see how versatile questions are when arguing for business. In this case they were part of a rhetorical strategy to enact *phronesis*, practical wisdom.

## Marketers’ ideas of virtue

Virtue, *arete* in Greek, embraces elements such as “justice, courage, restraint, splendour, magnanimity, liberality, prudence and wisdom”, according to Aristotle (Rhet 1366b). As Cherry points out, Aristotle brings forward other definitions of *arete* in other treatises, giving *arete* a range of meanings rather



than one distinct. Cherry suggests that “good moral character acquired through the habitual exercise of virtues” best captures the wider meaning of the *arete* to which Aristotle is referring (Cherry 1998:254).

Aristotle holds the exercise of virtue as an end *per se*. Persuasion, on the other hand, cannot be an end, unless it is *artful* persuasion (Garver 1995:34-35). This could be understood in terms of given and guiding ends, Garver explains. *Given* ends are fulfilled when the speaker persuades the audience. *Guiding* ends are fulfilled when the speaker has exercised the “art of rhetoric” – found available means and produced an argument. Put differently, the art of rhetoric materializes *in* the speech, not *by means of* the speech (Garver 1995:35).

What if we assume “doing business” to be the given and external end of marketers’ daily affairs? This based on the marketers’ own accounts of what they have to accomplish at work, simply to keep their job. What is then the guiding end of this practice? Put differently, with *arete* in mind, what is “artful” marketing work?

Stefan and I have had many conversations about how to do business “honestly”. These have been conversations marked by controversy, though always in a friendly spirit. Stefan has very strong opinions on the necessity of honesty, and when we argue I take the role of the cynic and argue for a pragmatic attitude to honesty, often insinuating that business is all about manipulation.

One time Stefan told me about a former co-worker, “George”. George was very good at doing business according to Stefan. Stefan explained how the two of them worked in a similar way. They identified new customers, they did follow-up work on old customers, they provided both standard and customized services, they negotiated and they persuaded customers to buy their services. Yet Stefan maintained that their approaches were “*totally* different”. Stefan portrayed George as clever, creative, committed and cocky, with a hearty spirit, determined to do business even when circumstances were not to his advantage. Still, in Stefan’s eyes George was *not* a “good marketer”. He said the wrong things, was myopic, did not have an “inherent feeling for the customer” and was sometimes downright dishonest. Stefan saw himself, on the other hand, as a clear-cut “relationship-minded salesperson” – a person who values honesty and is constantly in pursuit of a “good business relationship”, which Stefan defined as “almost a type of friendship with the customer, that is *true*”.

By contrasting his and George's approaches, Stefan seemed to argue that marketers might be successful at doing business but still fail to live up to the standard of a good marketer, which according to Stefan is all about the management of long-lasting business relationships. Indirectly Stefan argues that "relationship marketing" is a *self-sufficient practice*, much like an art as understood by Aristotle. It is how your character is expressed in action that matters to Stefan. Managing relationships becomes the guiding end of marketing.

Rhetorically speaking, *arete* appears to be *the* difference between any marketing activity aimed at doing business, and, conversely, the art of relationship management that materializes *in* marketers' virtuous interaction with customers. Indeed, business could also be accomplished otherwise, but then *by means of* non-relationship-oriented practices. What comes out of these somewhat bold interpretations is a grand lay theory of marketing that begins and ends with the idea of relationship management, and which brings forward Stefan, not George, as the virtuous and ideal marketer.

I could have chosen to demonstrate the significance of "good" and "honest" business relationships with the voices of Carl, Gunilla, Anders, Axel, Per, Anna, or any of the marketers I encountered in my study. They all argued passionately for marketing based on relationships and permeated with reliability, honesty and ethical considerations. This is what they talked about when I asked them the general question what they do when they do marketing work; according to my observations this is what they say to each other when talking about how business should be done; and this is what they say to customers when explaining who they are and what sort of work they do.

Whether this talk about relationships corresponds to relevant actions, in the spirit of relationship marketing, is beside the point. This section suggests that talking in terms of "good and honest relationships" demonstrates, in itself, that you are the kind of marketer who cares about these virtues. My point is *relationship talk enacts a virtuous marketer*, and is thus part of a powerful rhetorical strategy used frequently by the marketers in my study.

This concluded, let us continue along the path Stefan laid out when he argued that the purpose of virtuous actions in marketing is to institute "almost a type of friendship with the customer, that is true". This path actualizes the third element of *ethos*, which is goodwill or *eunoia*.

## Marketers' ideas of goodwill

To establish goodwill the speaker has to know how to evoke the whole range of emotions that embrace friendship (Rhet 1378a). Drawing on Aristotle, Garver stresses two critical aspects of *eunoia*. First, *eunoia* is a form of potential friendship that embraces “the entire realm of the practical”, and second, *eunoia* is a “relational property of the speaker to an audience” (Garver 1995:111). Although Aristotle does not elaborate the term *eunoia* in the *Rhetoric* he clearly declares that speakers who are not “well disposed” will not be persuasive to an audience despite successful performance of practical wisdom and virtue (Rhet 1378a).

“You have to show who you are”, Anna said when she argued for the significance of relationship management. She continued, “I want to give something to someone [---] then I become an open person, someone you would like to have a [business] relationship with.” Anna often returned to the idea of *sharing* as a way to express goodwill.

Anna: [I tell the customer] “I am really curious about you” or “I am really curious to know if we can get this to work”. [---] It can be as simple [I tell the customer] as “I want to accomplish something just to give it to you, because I have learnt something and I want to help you not make my mistakes; I want to share with you”.

2009-04-19

Anna argued in favour of *eunoia* rather than *phronesis*. Out-of-context phrases like “I am curious about you” and “I am happy to work with you”, appear as quite unrefined attempts to flatter. However, hearing Anna and the other marketers talk about it, with me and others in the audience, made it sound reasonable. Besides, sharing is seldom expressed in a standalone phrase. Take Lars, for example. His standard promise to customers, which is frequently expressed in his lengthy anecdotes, is to give them ten million (in cost reduction). Of course, he will give it only if the customer pays NOVO five million to accomplish it. Still, his talk about sharing could be interpreted as a way to manifest goodwill.

When talking to Carl about these matters he agreed that sharing could be used more or less deliberately for business purposes. At the same time Carl indicated that goodwill would be difficult to establish if sharing were too obvious. Carl explained that consultants with a background in engineering are particularly successful in establishing and maintaining business relation-

ships because, generally speaking, they are seen as “naïve”. Whereas marketers are business-oriented and appear to speak persuasively, engineers share knowledge and services *instinctively*, which is much more efficient, according to Carl.

Carl: There is no strategy involved [in the engineers’ talk with customers], no ulterior motive, and when these mechanisms are removed then it becomes very...honest, very straightforward, so to speak.

2009-05-15

The understanding of the self is important when you are trying to establish goodwill, Carl argued. The consultants who are most successful in doing business are those who do not see themselves as marketers. It is the “naïve and generous professionals” that the customer trusts, Carl explained; “We have to stop talking about sales and start talking about relationship management instead”.

Finally an example of the idea of sharing from Per. I asked him what he does when being criticised by customers.

Per: In tough situations...of course you are questioned [by the customers]. You have to stand there, and accept the criticism, and if you do not know the answers [to their questions] then be honest about it – “Okay, I really don’t know, but I can find out”.

2012-03-15

Per’s advice is clear. If your practical wisdom is challenged, admit the circumstances explicitly. In so doing you will appear honest. Moreover, promise to find a solution and share this solution unselfishly with the customer – this shows goodwill. Thus, being criticized is just another opportunity to establish *eunioa*.

## **Marketers dedicated to relationships**

This analysis of the significance of relationship in marketing work carries no intention to explore the essence or nature of marketing. I am trying to understand the significance of relationship *talk*, in the light of *ethos*, to add new facets to my account of marketing work.

Marketers argue that business relationships are the same as private “non-business” relationships, implying that the same mechanisms of human inter-

action may be found in business and non-business relationships alike. On the other hand, they *also* argue that business relationships are profoundly different from private relationships since the customer knows the marketers are there to do business. According to the marketers in this study business relationships have to be managed systematically, but at the same time the best relationships are unmanaged and “almost” sincere.

This reasoning appears contradictory, but the overall talk about the importance of business relationships makes sense. As I have argued in this section, when marketers talk about the importance of relationships they create a favourable *ethos*. How is that?

Drawing on Aristotle and Garver, it is when, or rather *in*, reasoning that character is constructed (Garver 1995:151). Logic has no superior value when arguing, but examples do. Examples could be selected from a wide variety of sources, and be presented in various forms, and still be rhetorically effective *since the choice itself reveals character* (Garver 1995:158). It is the combination of examples that enacts a beneficial character endowed by practical wisdom, virtue and goodwill. Subsequently, the marketers do not have to say they are “good marketers”. Talk about good relationships, competence, experience, honesty, trust, and so forth, “rubs off” on their *ethos*. Relationship talk establishes the *ethos* of a marketer who is dedicated to relationships.

My conclusion is that relationship talk is part of powerful rhetorical strategy. It is powerful because it is never disputed (not counting provocative researchers), and it is multipurpose and can be employed in literally every imaginable context. There will always be a time and place to talk about relationships.

## 5.4 Impersonation and averted speech

### **Unwrapping multivocal marketers**

The marketers in this study talk fast and at length. A rough calculation of some transcribed recordings suggests a “talking speed” of 100-200 words per minute in an everyday conversation. This is certainly not an attempt to analyse marketing talk quantitatively. It is just an indication of how busy the conversations were, which led to practical problems for me. It made note-taking difficult.

It was not only the problem of speed. People constantly interrupted each other halfway into an anecdote, sentence or word, sometimes to obstruct and contradict, sometimes to acknowledge and encourage. When reading my fragmented notes and listening to the recordings of conversations, I found them to be so full of unconnected talk it seemed virtually impossible to come up with an informative interpretation of them. Of course, this could say more about my transcribing skills than about the material I had before me. Nonetheless, when returning to the same recording of a conversation for the third time, trying to understand what they/we were talking about, I coincidentally put quotation marks on every utterance that seemed to represent one person talking. Then the text became full of quotation marks *within* marks *within* marks. I listened to other recordings, and reviewed my notes from the field. Even more quotations of quotations of quotations. Now it appeared that the text transformed itself, and talked differently to me. I heard new and distinctive voices. Let me illustrate what I mean.

This is the first and “raw” version of a piece of recorded conversation with Carl, in which he talks about how he coaches consultants to improve business.

Carl: Many say they have made a hell lot of phone calls but I still cannot get in contact with the customer. And then someone said, what is a hell lot of phone calls? I have called him three times. Three times?! And then I told them, when I pursued Customer X, then I called him twenty-five times. I talked to him three times, but these three times he was in a meeting, he said. I have no time now, call me again. Next time I called he blew me off. I am in a meeting again. But suddenly, after twenty new calls, he answered! Good, you are calling! You see! Then it might be best to count how many calls they do, when they complain I have no time to call customers.

2009-05-15

This is my creative interpretation of the exchange as described by Carl.

Many [of the consultants] say they have made a hell lot of phone calls. [Carl says to me]

“But I still cannot get in contact with the customer.” [consultant A says to Carl]

And then someone said [Carl says to me]

“What is ‘a hell lot of phone calls?’” [consultant B says to consultant A]

“I have called him three times.” [consultant A says to consultant B]

“Three times?!” [Carl says to consultant A and B]

And then I told them [Carl says to me]

“When I pursued Customer X, then I called him twenty-five times. I talked to him three times, but these three times he was in a meeting, he said.” [Carl says to consultant A and B]

“I have no time now, call me again.” [customer X says to Carl]

“Next time I called he blow me off.” [Carl says to consultant A and B]

“I am in a meeting again.” [Customer X says to Carl]

“But suddenly, after twenty new calls, he answered!” [Carl says to consultant A and B]

“Good, you are calling!” [Customer X says to Carl]

You see! Then it might be best to count how many calls they [TERRA consultants at TERRA] do, when they complain...” [Carl says to me]

“...I have no time to call customers.” [TERRA consultants]

This should not be taken as a theoretically informed piece of analysis. My point is merely to demonstrate how I found that one person is not limited to one voice, which I did not recognize when arguing about marketing work with Carl. At that time I was preoccupied with my own claim that marketing work should always be assessed in qualitative terms. Carl disputed my claim, and I remember thinking, somewhat reluctantly, “Well, what he says makes sense actually”.

From a rhetorical perspective, Carl adopted contradictory voices to argue that the quantitative dimension of marketing work should not be underestimated. When re-reading and re-interpreting other conversations I found marketing talk to be full of contradictory voices. For example, Erik used the voice of a colleague when portraying the work of salespersons.

Erik: The idea is to go there, and in the introduction you ask “Are you familiar with NOVO and our approach?”.

2009-03-19

Here is an example in which Carl assumes the voice of a female colleague, making the point that women face certain difficulties when practicing relationship marketing.

Carl: She had to be direct: “I am sorry you’ve misunderstood me”.

2009-05-15

Anders assumed the voice of a customer when arguing that customer satisfaction is the “true” measure of marketing work.

Anders: The ultimate sign you have a good relationship is when the buyer calls you and congratulates you on your birthday. [---] They sort of feel “I have to call Anders because it is his birthday” [and] “I know what you provide, I know roughly what you cost, and you show up with good ideas, and then you are rather nice as well, so we can chat by the coffee machine, that is why I want to collaborate with you”.

2009-05-15

Here are the voices of friends, and friend’s wife.

Erik: [Our telemarketers] are good. In a way they influence the image of us. I know from my acquaintances “so you work for those terrible people! I turn off the phone sometimes in order not to be disturbed by them”. [laughing]

Erik: A good friend of my wife’s use to say, when she tried to understand her husband, “I am fortunate to have taken a course in child psychology”. [laughing]

2009-03-19

The marketers also talked up more unexpected voices, for example “a person selling watches”, “a sports coach”, “a bartender”, “Jerry Seinfeld”, and “Jesus”. Moreover, a number of times I heard the marketers reproduce my voice when arguing, “as Tomas said earlier”.

Is there any pattern to this peculiar use of multiple voices? Some of the marketers were possibly more keen “voice-users” than others, at least in certain situations, but my overall impression is that voices are enacted in every conversation with such great variety they defy a meaningful categorisation.

What is more striking is that the vibrant and persistent use of multiple voices was totally unknown to me until I had to transcribe the conversations.



Does it say something about the potential power of this rhetorical strategy? And, what do marketers accomplish with their “management of voices”? I turn to classical rhetoric for theoretical guidance, and learn that strategic enactment of voices can be analysed as a matter of *impersonation* and *averted speech*.

### ***Prosopopoeia and apostrophe***

The practice of “giving voice to someone or something” is well documented in the rhetorical tradition, although there are different names for this practice. “Assigning to some person language which as set forth conforms with his character” was called *sermocinatio* by the author of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (Ad Her 4.52.55). Hermogenes used *ethopoeia* when referring to the imitation of a “real person”, and *prosopopoeia* for a “non-existing person” (Kennedy 2003:84). Quintilian on the other hand used *prosopopoeia* as the master concept for all impersonations, including *sermocinatio* (Inst Or 9.2.30-32), whereas *ethopoeia* was related to characterizations by means of humour (Inst Or 9.2.58). To make the discussion less burdened by inconsistent vocabulary I have decided simply to use Quintilian’s conceptualization. Thus *prosopopoeia* will be the rhetorical term used for all the impersonations referred to in the following analysis.

What does impersonation accomplish? Quintilian teaches that a speaker can employ *prosopopoeia* for a range of reasons. It can be used to express our opponent’s internal conversations, to introduce conversations between different persons, including ourselves, and to provide fitting characters for the words we deliver in the speech, *and* “we are even allowed in this form of speech to bring down the gods from heaven or raise the dead” (Inst Or 9.2.30-32). These are only examples, Quintilian declares. It is not feasible to systemize how, when and where impersonation might be effective when arguing. “It is not only that there are as many varieties of Prosopopoeia as there are Causes: there are more, because in Prosopopoeia we simulate the emotions of children, women, nations, and even things which cannot speak, and they are all entitled to their appropriate character” (Inst Or 11.1.41).

Let me try to reformulate Quintilian’s lesson on *prosopopoeia* to discuss the significance of impersonations when arguing for business.

By means of impersonation the speaker is able to accomplish three tasks: 1) set up a verbal performance inhabited by suitable voices, actors and things; 2) have them talk and argue appropriately for the particular cause; 3) leave

the scene, figuratively speaking, by means of impersonation, and take on the role of a spectator. This spectator is detached from the voices arguing, with the potential to celebrate or criticize the actors' performance "objectively" depending on the immediate reaction of the audience; *and*, in so doing make an argument, or should we say a meta-argument, as Stefan asserts in the following case when arguing for the importance of respect when approaching potential customers.

Stefan: How fast can you work up trust for someone on the phone? You have to respect the person you call. If they say they do not have time then I ask "When would it be possible for me to call you?". [---] Maybe you even show respect by sending them an email before [you call] if you know who it is, "I intend to contact you", then right off the bat you give them a chance to answer "We are not interested". It might be a setback depending on the level [in the organization] and what you offer, but considering the level we are at, it is probably seen as respectful to say "We intend to contact you regarding partnership". Then he has the option of saying, if he is professional, "No, because we have put our money elsewhere".

2009-05-05

When investigating the marketers' use of impersonations I found they all embraced one controversy or another; voices enacted by the marketer are *always part of a dispute between persons*. Sometimes it is an animated and open dispute, as in the example earlier in which Carl argued by means of the consultants' voices. Sometimes it is a quiet and less visible dispute, as where Stefan uses his own and the customer's voices to argue against the unspoken claim that marketers do not respect customers. When voices are used in this manner marketers are able to present what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca call arguments "half spoken and half thought" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1971:176).

So far I have been fully occupied with the speakers. However, it is equally important to acknowledge that a voice necessarily *addresses* someone or something. As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca explain it, "By the use of *apostrophe*, a speaker will address that which is personified and has therefore become capable of being made a hearer. By means of *prosopopoeia*, the thing personified is turned into a speaking and acting subject." (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1971:331).

*Apostrophe* could be defined as "averted" speech (Inst Or 9.2.38), which can be used to express opinions "by means of an address to some man or city

or place or object” (Ad Her 4.22). *Apostrophe* belongs to a category of figures related to *evidentia* and *controversia*, which are used to “enact reality”; “Instead of stating *that* an event took place, we show *how* it took place, and that not as a whole, but in detail. [---] The facts seem not to be told us, but to be happening” (Inst Or 9.2.40-43).

Subsequently, when marketers enact a multivoiced controversy they are operating the sender and the receiver at the same time, which increases the complexity of what from the beginning appears to be a fairly straightforward conversation between people physically present.

Moreover, as it was suggested above, at least vaguely, the potential power of *prospopoeia* embraces a form of “situational detachment”. When someone or something is given voice by the speaker, the speaker momentarily leaves the scene, as if saying “do not listen to me, listen to them”, or in some cases when the very listener is impersonated, “listen to your self”. Formulated differently, *prospopoeia* and *apostrophe* bid the audience to experience a controversy first-hand, sitting figuratively speaking next to the speaker who controls the voices. By means of *prospopoeia* and *apostrophe* the speaker merges in the audience (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1971:178).

Let me give an example to make the reasoning less abstract, without downplaying the complexity of this rhetorical strategy. A marketer talks face to face with a potential customer (A), and in so doing the marketer impersonates satisfied customers (B and C) involved in an imagined talk face to face with their senior executives (D and E) about their great need of professional services. However, this enacted conversation might not be aimed primarily at the customer (A) sitting face to face to the marketer, but for the customer’s executive (F) who might be the person who makes the final decision to buy the marketer’s services. Without distinguishing A, B/C, D/E and F in the conversation it is impossible to comprehend what the marketer is arguing for or against. As Billig explains, without knowing both the argumentative position *and* the counterposition “the argumentative meaning will be lost” (Billig 1996:121).

When a marketer argues by means of other voices it is the rhetorical subjects that call for attention, not the marketer’s own voice. The marketers and their audience both end up as spectators of the same performance, on common ground, to experience the voices set up by the speaker. In so doing, controversial and potentially offensive arguments can be detached from the marketers and brought to play on a stage of their own, so to speak. Drawing on

Kerferd, this is how “opposing arguments could be expressed by a single speaker as it were *within* a single complex argument” (Kerferd 1981:84).

Returning to how impersonation and averted speech made their way into the analysis, it seems that for a long time I focused on the wrong question in asking “*what* are the marketers talking *about*?”. Given this question I found the rhetorical subjects unproblematic, but their arguing incomprehensible. When analysing impersonation and averted speech the main question changed to “*who* is talking to *whom*, and *for what reason*?”, which led to an entirely new interpretation of marketing talk.

To sum up, as this section has tried to demonstrate, to understand how marketers argue for business we have to unwrap the various voices and audiences enacted by marketers in a conversation. This is by no means a simple analytic accomplishment. Drawing on Harris, “fixing a speaker entails fixing a listener and a subject, but it also entails fixing another speaker, which entails another listener and another subject” (Harris 1998:174). Only then, when the voices are identified, it is possible to connect a particular piece of talk to a particular voice, to better distinguish controversies set up by marketers when arguing for business purposes.

This leads to the conclusion that an analysis that does not pay attention to the marketers’ impersonation and averted speech could not easily explain the multifaceted arguing in the spirit of contradiction that seems to be what marketers do when they do everyday marketing work.

## 5.5 Controversial rhetorical strategies

This chapter has analysed a number of rhetorical strategies employed by the marketers when they argue for business purposes. Drawing on Kaufers’ conceptualization of rhetorical strategy I have been interested in the enactment of strategy, “the application of language to bring a world [---] to the listener’s here and now”, rather than selection and design of strategy (Kaufers 1997:269). Moreover, I have also acknowledged a theory of argumentation rooted in Protagoras’ doctrine that every sound argument comes with an equally sound counterargument – sometimes verbalised by the audience, sometimes lurking silently in the situation – following in the steps of Billig (1996) and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1971).

So, what is this chapter's main contribution to the understanding of marketer's rhetorical strategies, and what does the application of these strategies tell us about marketing work?

When examining how marketers argue to establish common ground with their audiences I found that this is an ongoing face-to-face process characterised by contextual sensitivity and improvisation. If a piece of talk does not lead to the expected result, marketers quickly change anecdotes, topic, style and even physical location, and try again.

Marketers use language in an experimental manner. This can be illustrated by their use of questions and anecdotes. A question might be asked to obtain information about a particular customer need. If the customer is reluctant to answer, or if the answer is "We have no need for your services", then the marketers might tell an anecdote about a customer who came to another conclusion, and end the anecdote with the question "Are you sure you have thought things through?". Another example of the use of questions is when marketers load their questions with a particular jargon to suggest knowledge and experience in this area. Hence, what may seem as a fairly straightforward exchange of questions and answers can be part of a dynamic rhetorical strategy to create an efficient *ethos* and induce action.

The *ethos* aspect is also significant when marketers talk in terms of "business relationships", which are omnipresent in the rhetorical context of marketing work. My analysis suggests that talk about relationships "rubs off" on the marketers' *ethos*. Relationship talk *per se* establishes the *ethos* of a marketer dedicated to relationships. Subsequently, being recognized as someone *in possession of* business relationships, or *knowledgeable about* business relationships, or *interested in* business relationships, is highly valuable for the marketers in my study. Given this reasoning we are able to understand how contradictory anecdotes make sense when arguing for business as long as they involve a significant portion of relationship talk.

Up to this point in my analysis of rhetorical strategies I had, unknowingly, assumed that one physically present speaker equals one voice. This was how I experienced it when talking, listening and observing them in the field. Every person and every *ethos* occurred to me as a more or less coherent object of analysis, at least in the first years of fieldwork. However, what initially was a minor but irritating problem concerning the typography of the transcribed text eventually led to new and far-reaching insights into rhetorical strategies in everyday marketing affairs. I found that marketers use impersonation and averted speech to multiply the voices and characters present in a conversa-

tion. Does this change the conclusions made so far in this chapter? No, and yes.

*No*, because it brought forward insights that add to earlier discussion regarding how marketers argue two sides of an issue. Marketers talk “through” people by impersonating them. In so doing they can deal with the potentially controversial aspects of an issue by letting other voices/persons assert controversial positions necessary for an argument. In this respect impersonation and averted speech are yet other examples of how antilogic arguing is facilitated.

*Yes*, it affects earlier conclusions, because it problematizes my conceptualization of *ethos*. This is how Harris formulates my concerns.

We make inquiries, sometimes very probing ones, into *ethos*, and occasionally we investigate some rhetoric in great detail. But we take identity for granted. It is “Plato” or “Socrates” or “Burke” doing the speaking. What we fail to notice is that these labels do not designate autonomous, univocal entities. They designate composites – collections of voices, some in harmony, some in conflict. (Harris 1998:168)

When the marketers argue for business they enact, and utilize, a web of rhetorically constructed actors with various *ethos*. This rhetorical strategy makes sense in the light of White’s portrayal of the antique sophist. The career of a sophist unfolds as a “loosely connected sequence of encounters with the world” in which the sophist risks the history “of the self [---] in an endless task of adaptive metamorphosis”. Consequently, White argues, the *ethos* of a sophist must be a fundamentally “fluid one“ (White 1987:39). Given the analysis in this chapter I conclude that the marketer’s fluid *ethos* is both an effect of *and* a prerequisite for the multifaceted marketing work described so far.

This, if anything, problematizes the understanding of marketers, whom I have portrayed as fairly stable and coherent subjects. The above findings call for a closer investigation of marketers as *rhetorical subjects*, as they appear when arguing for business in the spirit of contradiction.

# Chapter 6.

## Analysis of rhetorical subject

I have analysed the argumentative context of marketing work, and then rhetorical strategies employed by the marketers when arguing for business purposes. It has been increasingly difficult to uphold clear distinctions between activities in which marketers participate. For example, my pre-understanding of marketing work informs me that a meeting to discuss personal matters is something other than a meeting to discuss business matters. The analysis so far has problematized this pre-understanding. What a conversation and a meeting is *about* is always an open question, and so are the questions of when and where a conversation or a meeting begins and ends. Or rather, these questions are what marketers argue about in everyday marketing work. Hence it becomes problematic to separate context from strategy. Context seems to be a resource when marketers argue, but context can also be what rhetorical strategies might accomplish.

To advance the analysis I need theoretical ideas and concepts that embrace these emerging insights. I find them at the end of chapter 2 where I discussed the *rhetorical subject*. Three of these ideas are of particular importance for the forthcoming analysis. 1) Rhetorical subjects appear as a “particular articulation [---] in specific political, cultural or economic directions” (Greene 2009:50). That is, the rhetorical subject is “empty” unless

enacted rhetorically. 2) The enactment of a rhetorical subject influences the process of arguing (Hawhee 2002:17). 3) The notion of *homo rhetoricus* draws attention to the “content” of a rhetorical subject, as it is enacted in a life-world created by language (Lanham 1976, Fish 1989).

In this chapter *homo rhetoricus* operates as an overall analytic model of multidimensional rhetorical subjects who argue to invent themselves and the situation in which they occur. *Homo rhetoricus* is thus a potentially productive model to think with in an analysis in which situation, strategy and subject tend to blur.

The main question this chapter seeks to answer is not what marketers *are* but what they *become* for persuasive purposes, and how this is accomplished. I begin by elaborating the finding that marketers are constantly on the move, which leads to new insights concerning the time and place of marketing work. Then, guided by *homo rhetoricus*, I will look closer into the rhetorical resources of marketers, followed by a section devoted to the marketer’s contradictory selves, and thereafter a section acknowledging the self-reflexivity of marketers. The chapter ends with a short summary, and a suggestion that in the light of *homo rhetoricus* marketers take the same form as the ancient sophists.

## 6.1 Marketers on the move

Lanham’s *homo rhetoricus* has a particular approach to reality. What reality *is* appears irrelevant compared to reality *as it is experienced and accepted here and now* by the audience. Change place, time and audience, and *homo rhetoricus* will immediately exploit the useful resources of the present reality, but only to manipulate it (Lanham 1976:4). This brief reasoning begs for questions regarding the “here and now” of marketing work. More precisely, this section focuses on marketers’ movement from one “here and now” to another.

Most basically, I have found that marketers travel from one physical location to another to accomplish their work. When I asked Lars if I could spend time with him to learn more about his work he suggested that I accompany him in a number of customer meetings. This took us on a long two-day journey by airplane, and then by car, and then by airplane back home again. He had planned four meetings with potential customers but one was cancelled for unclear reasons.



When we reached the airport on our way home we had to wait a couple of hours for the flight. Fortunately Lars had access to the business lounge so we went there. I found a comfortable armchair and sunk into it. I was completely exhausted after spending two intense days “on the road” with Lars. Lars, on the other hand, immediately opened his laptop to check his email, and then began to make phone calls. Among other things I heard him arrange new meetings with prospective customers. I just sat there looking at him working.

Suddenly one of Lars’ co-workers from NOVO, “Glenn”, entered the lounge. We had met briefly one time before. I got his attention, and without giving it much thought we started to talk about the same things as last time. I asked questions to learn more about his work. Our conversation both repeated and advanced the arguments made the first time we met. Before long the three of us were engaged in a conversation about our experiences of presenting the results of consulting work. They emphasized how important these rather formal presentations are when pursuing the really big projects, and I argued that then marketers should prepare not only what to say but also how to say it, which they do not do, according to my experience as a marketing consultant, which Glenn found interesting, and so the conversation continued until Lars and I had to catch our plane home.

Even if Glenn and I met in a different place, unexpectedly and literally on the move, it seemed as this meeting followed quite naturally upon the last meeting. Two meetings, separated by considerable distance in time and space, merged smoothly into one conversation. Again I have to ask, where does a meeting start and end?

When we visited customers, Lars did not even leave the building of one customer before he began preparing for the meeting with the next customer. At the airport Lars contacted new customers, and did follow-up work on earlier meetings, as he did in the car (almost scaring me to death when driving fast and talking on the phone simultaneously), at the hotel, and in every place he was able to hold his telephone to his ear or open his laptop. Lars did not travel *and then* work. He did his work *while on the move*.

Follow marketers closely and you will discover how they argue for business purposes at their office, at the customer’s office, in the car, at the airport, at trade fairs and at events with various stakeholders. Moreover, if you have very close access to their everyday affairs you will also find them arguing for business in the bar, in the sauna, when on holiday, and when being interviewed by researchers. My point is, there is no fixed space where marketing work is, and is not, undertaken.

Although marketers move constantly; from country to country, city to city, house to house, room to room, function to function, this does not make them inaccessible. Marketers can always be reached, typically within minutes or hours. As Anders explained in a conversation about his work, “our business is based on good service [---] and good service is to be accessible”.

Time and “the right time” are indeed matters that occupy the minds of the marketers in my study. When talking to Erik about how NOVO gets new customers he argued that it is done on an *ad hoc* basis.

Erik: Our sales process is by nature “spray and pray”. If we call a CEO [who is a potential customer] before lunch, and he has a meeting with the board at one, he might say “I sure as hell do not want to talk to you”. But if we call him at four, when the board has blasted him off the chair, then we are his best friend – “Come, can you be here at seven tomorrow?”. This is how fast one individual can change from red to green. For this reason it is not easy to have broad-based marketing, marketing communication and these things.

2009-03-19

According to Erik the window of opportunity opens and closes randomly, and fast, which he holds as an argument against conventional marketing communication. “Broad-based marketing” is too slow. It cannot be there, in the *particular* time and place, to do the work.

The marketers in my study are occupied with the particular. They are, similar to *homo rhetoricus*, “centered in time and concrete local event” (Lanham 1976:4). Even so, the marketers also argue it can be necessary to *gain distance* from the particular “here and now”. Below is an illustration from a conversation with Anna in which we talked about conflicts at work. Anna argued that patience and self-reflexivity are important.

Anna: [If there is a conflict with a customer] I might of course approach them directly and ask how they thought. But I can also cool down a bit, and let time help me. It is a really good thing to do, let time help you, because you get a wider perspective, and see the bigger picture, and then suddenly you can understand what happened and why someone said and did what they did.

2009-04-19

An ongoing controversy among the marketers in my study is over how to measure time. Carl and Anders, and to some extent Axel, remarked that con-

sultants at TERRA often complain they “have no time to call potential customers”. They *do* have time but it is a question of *timing*, Carl argued. It is a question of *persistent work*, Anders added. They agreed that you should not wait for the perfect moment to do business; you should *create it* by means of hard work. There is a parallel to a discussion I had with Linus about the everyday work undertaken by Lars and other “sales people” at NOVO.

Linus: Lars walk up to a person, “well, they called me from here and I thought I could visit you, as I happened to be passing by”. Lars begins from zero. Damn, he should not even be there! And this seems to be the trick. Some of these old men [the salespersons] are very good at this! They can go out, set up a show, and then after two meetings they have sold a prestudy.

2009-11-05

Linus argues that great marketers do not seek the right moment to do business. They *enact* it. The opportune moment, *kairos*, is enacted literally by moving closer to potential customers, and rhetorically by performing a *kairotic encounter* in which marketers and their speech are both cause and effect of the rhetorical moment. This appears to be a creative act similar to what Hawhee (2002) calls “invention-in-the-middle”. She points to Gorgias and his habit of improvising speech on topics presented by his audience. When given a topic Gorgias began to explore the features *in* the particular rhetorical moment (“initial *kairos*”), but only to invent a speech and an *ethos* that could move him and his audience somewhere else (“by means of *kairos*”). “Invention-in-the-middle” draws attention to the emergence of a provisional rhetorical subject that is invented *by* the situation *and* invents *new* situations (Hawhee 2002:18).

Lars, much like Gorgias, approaches his audience unaware of the particular rhetorical situation. The customer might express a need for his services, or not. However, this is not critical for Lars. The trigger for Lars’ (and Gorgias’) performance is the topic, which Lars acquires by asking a wide range of questions and telling diverse anecdotes. If the customer said “We use our own resources to do what you offer” Lars would improvise a short speech full of voices of customers who got into serious trouble because they did everything by themselves, and during this speech Lars will change his *ethos* from marketer to “expert on change management”, only to work up a rhetorical situation urging the customer to act now to avoid serious problem in a near future.

Moreover, as an example of creation of the right time, in one of the meetings Lars explicitly told the customer that *now* is the opportune moment to buy his services. In so saying he contradicted the common-sense idea that major business decisions “should take time”, which is a counterargument lurking in the argumentative context of the particular situation.

There is always a time and place to argue for business since the marketer, like *homo rhetoricus*, “accepts the present paradigm, and explores its resources” (Lanham 1976:4). If it is the *right* time is an open question given that “*every* moment along the continuum of *chronos* has its *kairos*” (Miller 1992:312).

I suggested earlier that there is no fixed place at which marketing work is, and is not, undertaken. Although there are several and contradictory ideas of timely issues represented in the discussion above it still make sense to add that there is no fixed time when marketing is, and is not, undertaken. Formulated with the rhetorical subject in mind, the unpredictable and provisional, which causes *homo seriusus* fear, is exactly what *homo rhetoricus* celebrates and embodies (Fish 1989:483), similar to the marketers in my study.

Lanham remarks that *homo rhetoricus* “hits the street already street-wise” (Lanham 1976:4), which implies that *homo rhetoricus* is provided with certain resources suitable for a life “on the move”. What are these resources? This will be the question to ask in the next section.

## 6.2 Marketers’ rhetorical resources

According to Quintilian, it is practice in speaking and writing that provides the orator with “eloquence ready at hand [---] prepared for any contingency” (Inst Or 10.1.2). Practice extends the orators’ experiences and expands their rhetorical resources. These resources are the orators’ major capital: “Capital here means a stock of ideas and a stock of words [---] ready for all Causes” (Inst Or 10.1.5-7). The word used by Quintilian when referring to this capital, or rhetorical resource, is *copia*, which according to Lanham could be understood as the “expansive richness of utterances” (Lanham 1991:42).

Although Lanham does not address *copia* explicitly in his treatise on *homo rhetoricus* it still seems that *homo rhetoricus* echoes the Quintilian orator insofar as both value easily accessible common-sense insights rather than disinterested statements that must answer to a universal standard. Again we see a fundamental difference between *homo rhetoricus* and *homo seriusus*. In

order to communicate effectively *homo seriusus* requires “facts” based on “knowledge”, whereas *homo rhetoricus* works with “proverbial wisdom” organized in “pre-digested units” (Lanham 1976:1-2).

This reasoning opens the door to an analysis of how marketers acquire and activate *copia* in their day-to-day work. Starting with Anders, this is what he told me when we talked about interaction with customers.

Anders: In sales meetings, or in customer meetings, or whatever we call them, I learn a lot of stuff I then use when arguing, logically, in the next meeting with new customers. [---] I visited [a customer], and talked to them for a long time. They had problems with their parking spaces. It might seem trivial, but this was their problem. Some weeks before I had a meeting with another [customer] who had the same problem but they had found a solution. [---] So I could bring that with me, as an argument – “You should do what they did there”. And then I got the feedback that I was well informed about the region, which was an argument I could use also.

2009-11-26

Anders finds arguments in one time and place, and transfers them to another time and place. In so doing he appears to have “practical wisdom”, which renders him a particular *ethos* that is helpful to him when arguing for business purposes.

However, this is a more complex process than merely moving arguments around. In the same discussion Carl told me he “picks up examples *one has heard*”, implying that the original source of information is of minor importance.

Carl: You start with the general, and then move to the specific: “I heard this week we had an assignment, and it was some sort of problem with the rescue equipment, and then our guys ran over to talk to the rescue team, and they solved it in five minutes, instead of calling an external consultant who would cost a lot of money”.

2009-11-26

This “concretization of what actually happened” is very useful when arguing for business, according Carl. Rhetorically speaking Carl argues by means of *evidentia*, which is explained by the author of *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* as “an event is so described in words that the business seems to be enacted and the subject to pass vividly before our eyes” (Ad Her 68). To speak “vividly”

Carl and Anders activated their “capital” of examples, their *copia*, to produce suitable anecdotes, expressions and words.

Using the words of Lanham and Quintilian, marketers seem to “play freely with language” (Lanham 1976:4), similar to wrestlers who have a stock of holds, tricks and throws from which they “apply one or two, as occasion offers” (Inst Or 12.2.12). The language used will vary “partly because of time or place, and partly because of the tastes and aims of each person” (Inst Or 12.10.2).

I have found that marketers employ an exceptionally wide range of jargons and idioms when arguing for business. Here are some informative examples to illustrate the variety of marketers’ talk.

Linus: It has to be a certain turnover, so they can see some form of ROI [return on investment] in it. [---] We almost always deal with what we call MCS, a management control system. We have a form of quality part [in our offering]. We have a form of productivity part. [---] Management control system is the same as MOS, or whatever you call it, that is, MIS – management information system, management system. [---] If we then look into productivity, how we might improve the lines of production [---] then we do it according to this Deming cycle.

2009-11-05

Erik: Then we have the project tactic, which is how we set up the curve of change with people and projects so they align. Then someone has to know operation as well, partly from a production technology micro and macro perspective, and at the same time we provide training, what we call change management, which is my passion.

2009-03-19

Considering that every marketer in this study was dealing with managerial aspects of professional services it would be odd if their talk did not embrace words and expressions from the field of management. However, the two extracts above are misleading. This sort of “high-tech” management jargon was not predominant in the marketers’ talk. Carl and Anders, for example, often argued in terms of sports.

Anders: This famous national team coach has a leadership style, incredibly soft, that makes everybody pull in the same direction, so everybody is with him. It is really the informal leaders [on the team] who make the decisions. [The coach] creates an atmosphere to make it happen. Then there is... a club coach in England, who won fifteen titles, who is... a pure dictator. He has rock-solid discipline. But he also gets success, although he is at the far extreme [compared to the soft leader]. [In sports] it is black or white. You sort of know “we are here to set up a common goal, and we will struggle to get there”. This is sometimes how it is within companies, and also in the world of business.

[---]

Carl: If we are a football team, and we are about to play a match, and you know you are in bad shape, then you have to do extra training by yourself. You have to do it for the team to be successful, right? That is why we put together team who will reach their objective together.

2009-08-21

In this particular conversation we were talking about the difficulty of getting the consultants to do more and better “sales work”. Anders and Carl’s solution was to put pressure on the consultants, to “win in the long run”. In an earlier conversation Carl argued differently.

Carl: What about being nice? Caring about the team [instead of yourself]. I am not a competitive person! I am a team player, but that has not worked [and being popular] for over fifteen years... You are supposed to like competition – “I am competitive... and I do everything to win”. It is even good to say so.

2009-04-19

Notice how Carl and Anders draw on the language of sport to argue in the spirit of contradiction. The team is important, *but* so is the individual. “Soft leadership” is effective, *but* so is “hard leadership”. Competition is good, *but* also bad. It appears that the language of sport provides Carl and Anders with a set of reusable themes and words that are elastic enough to argue both sides of basically any controversy.

Lars’ arguing for business in sales meetings is perhaps the best illustration of the eclectic style of marketers. Recall his condensed statement, “This is proven model, we have accomplished about 300 projects, being fairly successful, we are ordinary people, normally talented, as are our customers [---]”

everybody can kick the football, but some do it better”. After this he talked about ”the competitive threat from the East”, and then presented NOVO’s consulting services, with a heavy emphasis on analysing and measuring, and then mentioned a number of executives in large companies he knew personally. In so doing he managed to mix terms and expressions from a wide range of jargons, all within fifteen minutes.

Returning to the question of how marketers acquire and activate rhetorical resources, what appears to be trivial stuff in one conversation can be highly valuable in the next. Marketers do not seem to know beforehand what is useful or not. Hence they store up copious amounts of exceptionally diverse bits and pieces of information, as they go along. Subsequently, marketers’ accumulating of *copia* is not limited to certain situations or sources. They approach every situation, person and thing as a potentially useful source of *copia*, including me in my role as a researcher.

Much to my surprise I noticed again and again how the marketers picked up, rearranged and reused my questions, comments and anecdotes in various situations, as did Lars in one of the meetings with a potential customer. Lars told the customer: “We are focused on changing behaviour”. The customer then asked Lars if NOVO deals with “changes of organizational culture”.

Lars: Well, not culture. Rather [change of] ways of working. You have to be much more concrete when you talk to people on the floor. Get things in place, fast. Make people perform. Sit on the shoulders of leaders and help them. Tomas thinks you can send people to a course but that is not enough. The course is wasted. We do competence development in the everyday workplace.

2009-09-15

The customer looked at me. Although I was eager to argue that Lars had misunderstood what we talked about in the car before the meeting, I nodded and smiled to acknowledge our discussion, careful not to obstruct Lars’ arguing for business.

What I considered to be a self-reflexive “private” conversation with Lars in the car, aiming at a critical analysis of marketing work, was from his perspective yet another opportunity to acquire *copia*. There were several times when I was convinced the marketers in my study were not listening to me, typically when I asked some lengthy question using academic jargon. They looked away and mumbled as if they wanted to end the conversation, only to



imitate almost exactly what I had tried to say, in another situation when it was convenient for their purposes.

So, what can be learned from this? Based on my analysis I suggest that the proverbial wisdom that marketers possess has no fixed content, structure or boundary. Marketers play and experiment with language, which expands their rhetorical resources. As formulated by Vatz when discussing the rhetorical situation, “one never runs out of context [and] one never runs out of facts to describe a situation” (Vatz 1973:156).

Moreover, marketers are always “in service” in the sense they constantly, and most often unnoticed, work on their *copia*. The rhetorical resources are then used at an opportune moment, which means that *copia* is unpacked, extended and activated for persuasive purposes. As argued by Mendelson, *copia* is always *transformed* into something useful, taking time and space into consideration, which in turn requires the orator to “decenter” his own presuppositions and “examine the territory of the other” (Mendelson 2002:210-211). In other words, acquiring and activating *copia* is a complex self-reflexive practice far from just bringing out and communicating “facts” from a fixed space in memory.

### 6.3 Becoming a marketer for persuasive reasons

*Homo rhetoricus* has a “natural agility in changing orientations” (Lanham 1976:4). *Homo rhetoricus* has a range of characteristics at hands, much like a performing actor: “By exploring the available means of persuasion in a particular situation, he tries them on, and as they begin to suit him, he becomes them” (Fish 1989:483).

This analysis has already presented several empirical illustrations of how marketers “change orientation” when they argue for business purposes. We might begin with the term *ethos*, meaning character (Rhet 1356a), to analyse how and why marketers modify themselves for persuasive purposes.

The previous chapter ended with a comment on the difficulty of locating *ethos* when taking marketers’ impersonation and averted speech into account. As argued by Harris, when analysing speakers in action we should not approach them, their identity, or their *ethos*, as “designate autonomous, univocal entities”; what we study are “designate composites – collections of voices, some in harmony, some in conflict” (Harris 1998:168). Add to this my finding that *ethos* is a fragile construction. Even trivial and apparently harm-

less comments can change a conversation dramatically when they address the character of the participants. The example in which the customer suddenly asked Axel if he had taken a sales course is particularly telling. Axel was taken by surprise. He began to mumble and avoided eye contact with the customer, as he packed his things and left the meeting. I should point out that Axel's marketing work on this occasion was not excessive. To the best of my judgement he asked reasonable questions in a reasonable and unpretentious manner, as any respectable marketer would do. I thought he was doing rather well, and yet his performance was turned against him, by an indirect reference to the negative stereotype of business professionals that seems to be ever-present in the argumentative context of marketing work. Axel got "out of character" so to speak. Ironically this happened when the customer praised Axel's work.

Drawing on Billig, a social psychologist would be keen to investigate what Axel did to get *in* character again, and perhaps interpret Axel's questions to me afterwards as examples of "comfort seeking practices" aimed at re-establishing his professional role. However, a rhetorical analysis is different in two crucial aspects. For a start, from a rhetorical perspective "impression management" is not considered an end result of social interaction; rather, "the self is projected in order to increase persuasiveness" (Billig 1996:261-262). Secondly, *homo rhetoricus* has no fixed self or "authentic role" to which to return. The practice of impersonation makes *homo rhetoricus* a versatile performer at home in several and conflicting roles. In midst of rhetorical practice (*rhetorica utens*) he *is* himself; "the wider his range of impersonations, the fuller his self" (Lanham 1976:27).

Back to Axel. Unfortunately I never had the chance to involve Axel in a self-reflexive conversation about this intriguing meeting. On the other hand, when I later told Per, who does not know Axel, about this situation he gave an example how he deals with similar potentially awkward moments when arguing for business.

Per: "Of course I have taken that course" would be my reply. "How could I otherwise make a living? I focus on business matters, and how else could I maintain my family life and keep my company running if I weren't making money, so of course I am a salesperson, a consultant, and a doer. Do you have problem with that?" And then usually the person [who questions my professional behaviour] will be put off balance.

2012-03-15

Instead of hiding the marketing work he does, Per *becomes* a marketer, for persuasive reasons. Adding the question “Do you have problem with that?” transfers attention from the marketer’s *ethos* to the customer’s seemingly restricted common-sense understanding of how business is conducted, also powered by an appeal to *pathos* when Per referred to his family. Hence Per talked a *new* rhetorical situation into being, by recasting himself as a hard-working father, and in so doing he invited the audience to a new conversation about common sense in business rather than the marketer’s style of asking questions. Based on Lanham, Per did not confront the audience’s mind directly but invited the audience to a different play in which they would listen to him “spontaneously, hypnotically, by desire” (Lanham 1976:14).

Becoming a marketer is an *option* for the marketers in my study, not something inherent or unavoidable in the work they do. Practically every marketer claimed from time to time to be something different, “really”, than what he or she appeared to be.

Erik: Looking at myself, earlier I sold my self as a “specialist”. I have a background in logistics and production management. But that this is not what I do now [laughing]. Actual I am an expert on building management systems in different contexts. Of course, one is linked to the other, in a way. But how you sell yourself is another story.

2009-03-19

This is how Anna formulated it when we discussed her professional role.

Anna: I call myself a marketer and a salesperson when I want to accomplish change. No one knows what [these titles] mean. Then it is easier for me to talk about my role, as I understand [this role]. Actually I am an administrator of information.

2013-09-06

What connection Anna makes between “marketers” and “change” is unclear to me, but it might have something to do with the common-sense idea that marketing is closely related to growth. Thus, introducing yourself as a marketer might enact a situation in which the audience listens to the advice you give relating to growth, development and change.

The finding that marketers talk up different selves, or rhetorical subjects, for persuasive purposes can also explain why it is beneficial for a marketer to offer a potential customer a job if the project they are planning should fail for

some reason. In so doing the situation invites a conversation between potential colleagues rather than a discussion between a salesperson and a customer. The same goes for the occasion when I surprised an arrogant potential customer by asking if my company could buy services from him personally, “since you are such an expert”, instead of him buying from us. Again, the roles and the situation changed dramatically, and so did the prospect of a successful meeting. Suddenly the arrogant customer *wanted* to talk business, *of his own desire*.

My final example of becoming of rhetorical subjects is from a conversation with Erik, in which he described how he quite deliberately manipulates a meeting by telling other people who to be and what to say.

Erik: When you know you face a senior manager and a subordinate, with two completely opposite views, and [you know] they will clash in the meeting, then you simply sit down with each of them [before the meeting] and talk things through with them, to control the meeting. You say “if you do this and say this”, and “if he says something like this, then just do not pay attention”. In principle you make a script for this person, and then you do the same for the other person, so they click into each other so to speak. You are something of a marriage counsellor in these situations. You make them perform mechanically, and then afterwards you can praise both of them – “Your participation made it all work”.

2009-03-19

Not only is Erik casting and directing the conversation, he is also writing the manuscript *and* the subsequent review in which he finally institutes the reality of the situation. Here he has become a counsellor, a diplomat and a coach. In the next meeting, or in the same meeting, he might draw on his *copia* to present a different self, with a different multidimensional *ethos*, for business purposes. What he “is” and what organizational function he represents is always an open question.

To understand how this works in the first place we have to go beyond the conventional idea of argumentation, which outlines argumentation as a process with an explicit speaker and an explicit audience to which recognizable arguments are presented (cf. Wenzel 1992, Eemeren *et al.* 1996). With *homo rhetoricus* and the marketers in my study in mind we end up with a different outlook on arguing.

The marketers and *homo rhetoricus* could be understood as agonistic and dramatic role-players (Lanham 1976:4-5, 14, 32). This in turn connects to

White's understanding of a sophist whose life extends as a "loosely connected sequence of encounters with the world" in which the sophist risks the history "of the self [---] in an endless task of adaptive metamorphosis" (White 1987:39).

Consequently, and somewhat paradoxically, the closer we study marketers arguing for business the more elusive they become.

## 6.4 Self-reflexive marketers

So far I have discussed how marketers travel extensively in and through time, how they expand and enact *copia*, and how they transform themselves for persuasive purposes. The empirical illustrations have mostly related to more or less heated moments in marketing work when much seems to be at stake – for example, meetings with customers. The analysis below focuses instead on marketing work beyond these situations, largely in line with Billig's advice to follow in the orator's footsteps, from the intense moments of public performance back to his or her office, where the analyst will find a different orator, "a much quieter person [who] seems to resemble the deliberator, rather than the single-minded advocate" (Billig 1996:221).

What if we follow in, say, Lars' footsteps, away from one of these high-stakes meetings? Will his presence and concerns change?

The sales meeting was over. We had just said goodbye to the customer, and walked quietly to the car. The contrast was striking. Lars had talked constantly for over an hour, asking questions, telling anecdotes, displaying a wide range of emotions verbally and non-verbally. Within seconds he now became silent.

I observed him carefully but discretely as we entered the car. It was very difficult to tell whether or not he was pleased with the meeting. His face did not express any obvious emotions. After a while I broke the silence.

Tomas: What do you say about the meeting?

Lars: Well...I guess...it is always difficult when they already have a lot of things going on. [Even so] he indicated he was interesting in doing this pre-study.

Tomas: Can you point to...how did you see this interest in buying? What did you look for to find such signs? Or was it just a gut feeling?

Lars: Well, I asked him, and then he said so... that he would be interested in this, he said so... and his body language also... he listened a bit more actively.

2009-09-15

To me, the sales meeting was a complete failure. As far as I could tell, the customer did not show any noticeable signs of interest. I asked Lars new questions to learn more about his impression of the meeting. He answered politely but without the great enthusiasm he had showed only minutes before. He appeared tired and somewhat confused, as if his thoughts were still in the sales meeting, or more likely, in the sales meeting to come.

After a while our conversation in the car changed character. We began to talk about our experiences and feelings about living the life of a marketer. In so doing I met another Lars. When he talked, and listened, he appeared less confident, less optimistic, and much more self-reflexive, than did the professional that argued for business facing a customer.

About two years later I had lunch with Lars and tried to reconnect to my experience of the sales meetings we did together in 2009. Lars argued that it takes a certain psyche to work as a salesperson.

Lars: You are a lone wolf, [but] with great social skills. It takes immense personal integrity. You have to keep things apart, “Schnapps ist Schnapps, und Geschäft ist Geschäft”. A salesperson has to be able to deal with this paradox.

2011-06-20

In an earlier conversation he formulated it more bluntly.

Lars: You start by selling yourself first. It is a bit like prostitution.

2009-09-04

Doing business is not for the faint-hearted, Linus remarked in a conversation in which we discussed what marketers do when pursuing new customer.

Linus: When you are in that role you get “No” 99 times and “Yes” once. You have to be like that. There are a lot of theories about how to create need and so on, but you still have the feeling, when you sit down [with a customer] that “that person does not want to talk to me”.

2009-11-05

Marketers are seldom deliberately sought out, according to practically every person I talked to about these matters. This is “how it is” – like a law of nature that you have to cope with, Carl said.

Hostile or dubious business relationships cause frustration for the marketers in my study. At least that was a common theme as they considered their experiences of business meetings and customer relationships. Here is an example, from Anna.

Anna: [Bad customer relationships] are a stigma. You sit and wonder “what did I do wrong”... You lose your focus on business. [---] You turn away from the common objectives [set up with customers]. You lose your focus on the whole thing, and just sit there and wonder “What did I do wrong?”.

2009-04-19

Talking about a similar experience of a frustrating meeting with a customer, Erik argued for the importance of talking about it with someone afterwards.

Erik: It is almost as if it takes two [people], and also rather strong people, so you can sit down afterwards and ask yourself “What the hell happened? What did we do?”.

2009-03-19

Marketers usually face the customer alone, and must therefore deal with the possibility of frustration alone. This was something that was addressed frequently in the formal sales training arranged for the TERRA consultants. The trainer, “Oskar” from EFFECTIVE, used a particular metaphor when instructing the consultants on how to cope with the distress of everyday marketing work.

Oskar: I talk to a little monkey on my shoulder. He talks to himself, often and a lot. It can be a nice monkey, or a big hairy gorilla. You decide yourself [the voice of the monkey, and how you cope with everyday frustration related to marketing work].

2009-09-14

At the same time there are several accounts of positive feelings related to marketing work, such as when a marketer gets committed to an assignment. I asked Per how it feels.

Per: [Talking about] my feelings. Sometimes I am so involved in a project I do not want to end it, it is impossible. [laughing] Then I need to... sort of, be professional, and finish the project I actually want to continue with [if] I am not paid for it. It is hard.

2011-08-16

In another conversation I asked him to elaborate on how he feels in the moment of success.

Per: [I am very pleased] when a project you have been working on for a long time is about to end, or when a new contract is signed. Then it is a temporary... stimulus. [---] You are pleased with yourself [smiling], and I would like to share the feeling with someone, people close to me, at home, in my organization. It is this... that motivates me to do business, to talk to customers, because I want to feel the stimulus... But of course, it only lasts a short time...

Tomas: How long?

Per: Well... not longer than the day after. When I have shared it. Then it is new projects again. Well not new, you work on the relationships you have in different contexts, to see where you can find the next stimulus project. [laughing]

2009-11-28

My intention with the above empirical illustrations goes no further than to add facets to marketing work by indicating some of the marketers' concerns beyond their public performances. What sort of emotions these concerns involve is not as interesting as what they might say about marketers' self-reflexive inner dialogues, in the spirit of contradiction. Indeed, when talking to marketers about their experiences of marketing work I was drawn into self-reflexive conversations full of contradictory positions – for example, “I must think, act and be a marketer, *and* it should not appear so”, “I must be true to myself, *and* always adapt to circumstances”, and “I must nurture honourable relationships, *and* do whatever is necessary to accomplish my business goals”. This self-reflexive inner dialogue is not observable in the light of Lanham's *homo rhetoricus*, but it is in the light of the ancient sophist.



[The sophists'] geographical and intellectual itinerary suggests that they often thought both about where they were and where they were not, who they were and who they were not [---] they thought in doubles [leading to] profound ambiguity of their ways of being in the world (Poulakos 1995:25).

Following this reasoning, marketers' arguing does not end after an encounter with a customer. It just changes and becomes internal and many-sided, as for example when dealing with troublesome emotions related to being and not being a marketer. Notably, "internal" does not relate to the *origin* of an argument, only to its location (Nienkamp 2001:x). Moreover, if marketers argue with themselves basically about the same issues about which they argue with others, then it is highly problematic to make a well-defined separation between internal and external arguing. In any case I suggest that arguing for business should not be understood as an entirely external argumentative process. From a rhetorical perspective marketers seem to argue with themselves as much as with their customer.

## 6.5 Marketing work in a sophistic perspective

This chapter has been an attempt to do a close-up analysis of the acting subjects of marketing, understood as rhetorical subjects. Lanham's (1976) *homo rhetoricus* was used as a conceptual tool to think with. This in turn paved the way for a sophistic understanding of marketers, given the intimate bonds between *homo rhetoricus* and the sophists (Fish 1989:480-483). Let me continue this analogy to write up some of the significant findings rendered in this chapter.

The sophists, and marketers, travel from place to place, from idea to idea, much like a nomad who never moves *into* a territory but passes *through* it (Poulakos 1995:24-25, 31). A sophist (in this case referring specifically to Gorgias) "migrates nomadically among discourses, never presenting any as 'primary' or privileged in its claim to articulate the truth" (Consigny 1992:49). Employing this perspective denies marketing work a fixed context, time and place. Marketing work becomes characterized by occasionality, presenting a sophistic marketer who is "both a hunter and a maker of unique opportunities, always ready to address improvisationally and confer meaning on new and emerging situations [without a] ready-made audience" (Poulakos 1995:61). Moreover, arguing will be a practice where rationality and irrationality blur, as do internal and external conversations. People do not argue be-

cause they have inner thoughts to be expressed, people have inner thoughts because they have the capacity to argue (Billig 1996:141).

Let me return to the overall question to be answered by this book. What do marketers do when they do marketing?

By analysing the rhetorical subject in terms of *homo rhetoricus* I have been reminded of the difficulty of telling one grand story about marketers and the work they are involved in. This chapter has brought new insights into why it is so difficult to portray marketers and the work they do. Formulated briefly, marketers are in all respects moving targets. They move to change *ethos*, and change *ethos* to move. It is practically impossible to tie them to a single fixed rhetorical situation because they are, in their minds, also elsewhere searching for new commonplaces that might be useful at the right moment. Time is a controversial matter in marketing work. Drawing on the idea of *kairos* I suggested that marketing work embraces both a particular attitude towards time, and a particular capacity to make the “right time” in and through the moment.

Thereafter I turned to the idea of *copia*, defined roughly as the stock of words and ideas an orator draws on when arguing. *Copia* was understood as a capacity rather than an artless accumulation of information. The marketers in my study use this capacity to transform and rearrange a multitude of anecdotes, expressions, words and ideas into something new and potentially advantageous when arguing for business purposes. Marketers play with language, and in so doing transform themselves so as to enact practical wisdom, virtue and goodwill.

Finally, when following in the marketers’ footsteps, away from their public performances, I found examples of a rich two-sided inner dialogue that was different from, but closely connected to, the one-sided arguing carried out in public performances. This suggests that external and internal arguing are so intimately interconnected that it would not make sense to approach them separately when studying everyday marketing work.

In so saying I have reached the end of the rhetorical analysis.

# Chapter 7.

## Persuasive marketing talk

The analysis of marketing work in chapters 4, 5 and 6 was carried out in the light of the rhetorical tradition. The next two chapters draw mainly, but not exclusively, on scholars who have studied marketing practice, and in particular scholars who have been attentive to marketers' everyday use of language in various situations. Some of these scholars were introduced in the first chapter of this book when I discussed the significance of a study of marketing work.

In chapters 7 and 8 I shall discuss and elaborate on the findings from the rhetorical analysis to provide an answer to the overall research question *What do marketers do when they do marketing work?* This answer will then provide the starting point for chapter 9, in which I shall return to the purposes of this book and discuss how it provides a multifaceted account of marketing work, how it establishes the significance of rhetorical theory for marketing research, and how it may encourage self-reflexivity among practitioners of marketing.

Chapters 7 and 8 each focus on a particular theme, which is not to say they deal with practices that should or could be understood independently. On the contrary, the two themes – *persuasive marketing talk* (chapter 7) and *marketing work “in-between”* (chapter 8) – are indeed closely interconnect-

ed, and are as such essential to my rhetorically informed contribution to research on marketing-as-practice, as called for by Hackley *et al.* (2009) and Skålén and Hackley (2011).

## 7.1 Problematizing marketing talk

The understanding of marketing as it is practiced is burdened by the one-dimensional portrayals of marketers found in most conventional conceptualizations of marketing. To avoid these one-dimensional accounts of marketers and marketing practice we need to go beyond marketing management discourse because it focuses on a predefined content of marketing work (Brownlie and Saren 1997). However, going beyond marketing management discourse does not mean we deny the significance of it.

I have found, unsurprisingly, that the marketers in my study use conventional marketing vocabulary when arguing for business purposes, at least occasionally. As a telling example, in my analysis of rhetorical situations I found they often referred to “satisfaction of customer need”, both when talking about the essence of their work, and when arguing for business in various situations. In so doing they affirmed one of the most fundamental elements of the “marketing concept”, here formulated by Kotler and Levy (1969) with reference to Levitt (1960).

The marketing concept holds that the problem of all business firms in an age of abundance is to develop customer loyalties and satisfaction, and the key to this problem is to focus on the customer's needs. (Kotler and Levy 1969:15)

Customer need is *given* in the world of marketing management. Needs are believed to exist whether marketers act upon them or not (Hackley 2003b, Marion 2006). This relates to Svensson's notion of a “repertoire of responsiveness”. Repertoires are “rhetorical or discursive resources employed by the marketing practitioners”, which both facilitate and restrict the work they do (Svensson 2003:99), with wide implications for our understanding of marketing at large.

First, marketing scene repertoires frame marketing work in different ways as they carve out and focus upon specific aspects of the work while obscuring others. Second, the repertoires conceptualise marketing work in various ways in that they attire the aspects of marketing work in different “concepts”, in different nomenclatures. Third, the repertoires are more or less specific ways to talk and write about the work of marketing; they constitute, as aforementioned, the discursive resources by means of which marketing work is made talkable and writeable as well as listenable and readable. (Svensson 2006:352)

The repertoire of responsivity is a particular discursive resource that constructs marketing as a *re*-active practice in which marketers respond to given external forces, guided by the mission to serve and satisfy customers (Svensson 2003:104-106). This repertoire was certainly present in the marketers’ talk, but always mixed with talk in terms of “relationship marketing”. The marketers argued that “good business relationships” are both a *necessity* and a *result* of the successful satisfaction of customer need. As found in my analysis of rhetorical strategies, relationship marketing is seen as more “respectable and honest” than is “just doing business”. Relationship marketing presumes honesty and goodwill similar to private non-business relationships.

Then again, the talk about satisfaction of need and good relationships stands in contrast with the marketers’ comments that they “in fact” do whatever it takes to secure business, because “this is what marketing is all about”, which the customers know, “so customers are always suspicious”, the marketers said.

The marketers in my study see themselves as unwanted by customers, and to some extent by their co-workers as well, which is in line with my own professional experience. This in turn supports Enright (2006), who suggests that marketing as a profession has low status. The low status of marketers is unexpected, Hackley remarks, considering that in marketing management texts marketing managers are indirectly portrayed as potent heroes, and yet, drawing on Willmott (1999), at the same time in many organizations they are marginalized actors (Hackley 2003b:1326). This relates particularly to the quite drastic comment, made by one of the marketers, that “we are like prostitutes”.

The idea of marketing work as prostitution might be provocative but it is not totally unexpected. As Brown argues, contemporary marketing discourse is obsessed by relationships and steeped in romantic and sexual metaphors and allusions that carry ideas of dating, courting, intimacy, marriage, divorce,

and so forth, into a business context (Brown 1998:174-175). Still, given the marketers inclination to prioritize “good relationships” it seems contradictory that their feeling of being engaged in dodgy and dubious work would be so prevalent.

Drawing on Ardley and Quinn, the clash between “relational marketing discourse” and the marketers’ self-interest creates tension, which is largely ignored in marketing research “despite the fact that such tensions form a significant feature of the marketing manager’s multifaceted role” (Ardley and Quinn 2014:110). It should be noted that this is not a comment on the image of marketers in the abstract. It is their talk that interests me. My point is if we want to understand this talk we have to be sensitive to the marketers’ self-reflexive ideas of who they are. In this case they seem to indicate an argumentative context marked by suspicion and tension, which could in turn influence how they talk when presenting themselves in these contexts. Or more accurately formulated, how they talk in an effort to provide *contradictory* images of themselves.

From Oakes’ perspective, based on his study of the “soul of the salesman”, it seems as if marketers are caught between two contradictory idioms – a *commercial idiom* and a *service idiom*. The most obvious representation of the commercial idiom, Oakes explains, can be found in sales-training discourse. Salespeople are taught to talk about customers as detached objects that should be “prospected” and “approached” and then persuaded to buy, so that a deal can be “closed” (Oakes 1990:18). The service idiom is entirely different. This idiom constructs salespeople as experts who put the expertise at the customers’ disposal, with a cognitive, normative and status dimension (Oakes 1990:53), like a respected physician who investigates the patient and then prescribes cures based on an indisputable ethic of care and trust.

Interpreted in the spirit of contradiction we have a two-sided marketing professional. One side portrays responsive marketers engaged in relationships, which requires honesty and trustfulness – “You should treat your customer like a friend, and if this friend expresses a need you are obliged and justified to satisfy that need, *because this is what good marketers do.*” The other side portrays marketers as predestined to produce commercial results. They have to engage in business and bring in money, *because this is what good marketers do.* From one perspective the customer is seen as a trusted partner with whom you have a sincere relationship, and the other, a walking bag of money.

The way the marketers in my study talk about the essence of their work is full of contradictions, much like the sales discourse analysed by Oakes. Oakes argues that these inconsistencies, “the antinomies of personal sales”, are the direct consequence of the two-sided definition of the sales process in both a commercial idiom and a service idiom (1990:69). Moreover, these antinomies cannot be overcome, which means that salespeople “need to know how to ignore the antinomies of the sales process” (Oakes 1990:87). Svensson suggests that marketing scene repertoires, such as the repertoire of responsiveness, are discursive resources used by marketers to accomplish their work. They also make up boundaries for the marketers because they regulate what is “speakable and writeable” in everyday marketing work (Svensson 2003:195-197).

What is missing in Oakes’ analysis of contradictory idioms and Svensson’s analysis of marketing scene repertoires is the rhetorical dimension of marketers’ day-to-day talk. To illustrate this dimension I intend to elaborate the marketers’ talk about “relationship marketing” and “satisfaction of customer need”. The question to pursue is what this talk might accomplish, from the marketers’ perspective, when they argue for business purposes.

## 7.2 The rhetoric of relationship marketing and customer need

### **Talk that expands the domain of marketing**

The marketers in my study bring in business by promoting professional services. This is what they get paid for, and thus what their work is all about, and this is also what marketing is all about, they claimed.

The idea that marketing and business are closely associated is not new. It can be found, for example, in Drucker’s well-known conceptualization of business. The purpose of business is “to create a customer”, which makes marketing an indispensable and omnipresent function of every business enterprise (Drucker 1974:61). Formulated somewhat differently by McKenna but arguing along the same line, marketing is “all-pervasive [and] part of everyone’s job description, from the receptionists to the board of directors” (McKenna 1991:69).

The idea of “all-pervasive” marketing work relates to my finding that marketers move constantly from location to location, from organization to organization, from function to function. This does not mean they argue for business *and then move*. They argue *while on the move*, preferably by phone, by email or by talking face to face with people who move with them. I will discuss the implications of this finding in depth in the next chapter, and maintain my focus on relationship issues in this section.

To make sense of work “on the move” marketers need to construct a marketing strategy that transcends functional and territorial boundaries, which “relationship marketing” does, according to Brown. Whereas the original marketing management concept is temporal in orientation, the relationship marketing paradigm is *spatial* (Brown 1998:174). Marketing management emphasizes strategic planning in a certain chronological order: first you do an analysis, *then* create marketing plans, *then* engage in action and *then* control the effects of the actions (Kotler *et al.* 2008:7, 128-130). Relationship marketing, on the other hand, emphasizes relationships and networks that transcend organizational and departmental boundaries, to become “an aspect of the total management of the firm – not limited to a marketing or sales department” (Gummesson 1997:267). Moreover, the ideology of relationship marketing, Skålén explains, proclaims that marketing is embedded in interactions. Marketers are obliged to manage the employees who participate in these interactions, which is accomplished by treating them as customers and engaging in “internal marketing” (Skålén 2010:119-121).

Consequently, by talking up a relationship-oriented marketing strategy marketers are able to *rhetorically justify their presence and their work in every imaginable setting inside and outside an organization*. The more marketers talk about relationship marketing, the more it makes sense for scholars to study relationships, given that marketing discourse is “mobilized and normalized through the field’s rhetorical strategies” (Hackley 2003b:1332). Indeed, my study demonstrates that relationship marketing is common sense for marketers, which is *not* the same as saying it has lost meaning, as claimed by O’Malley *et al.* They argue that the relationship metaphor no longer has explanatory value because it “has become simply a rhetorical device in the professional lexis of marketing academics [---] with little meaning or relevance to the bulk of marketing activities” (O’ Malley *et al.* 2008:168). A similar claim is presented by Jaakkola, who maintains that “the discourses produced by service marketing research are not helping [professional service firm managers] in some key aspects of their marketing and management work”



(Jaakkola 2011:229). Oakes brings in an ethical perspective when arguing that a relationship strategy is inconsistent with the ethics of friendship; doing business by means of relationships is “self-defeating” (Oakes 1990:107).

I come to a different conclusion. For a start, since the language of service and relationship marketing is full of words like “relationship”, “care”, “honesty”, “interaction” and other non-technical terms, it is more accessible and elastic than conventional marketing management jargon. Furthermore, regardless of the exact formulations and level of abstraction, the *strategic intent* of relationship marketing was never questioned among the marketers’ audiences.

Strategic intent is a useful rhetorical device when one is struggling to establish coherence between multiple intentions, because sharing the intent of a particular strategy is to share an “obsession” (Mantere and Sillince 2007:419). I argue that talk about business relationships in general, and relationship marketing in particular, is a beneficial rhetorical strategy precisely because it will never be disputed. As my analysis of rhetorical strategies suggested, it is usually enough for the marketers to say “I am a person who cares about relationships” to establish a favourable *ethos* infused by practical wisdom, virtue and goodwill.

Another illustration how relationship talk can be used for persuasive purposes was given in the analysis of rhetorical situations, in which I found that talking about business relationships in a highly personal and confessional manner could provoke feelings of guilt in the audience for not being proactive enough to contact customers. This line of argument has also been acknowledged by von Koskull and Fougère, in their study of service development practices. They found that managers “appeal to a sense of guilt for not doing things in a properly customer oriented way” (von Koskull and Fougère 2011:211).

Finally, in my analysis of rhetorical subjects I gave examples in support of Darr’s finding that professionals involved in marketing and sales experience a constant tension between the desire and need to close a deal, and the significant disappointments they face in day-to-day work (Darr 2006:2). Indeed, as the marketers in my study told me, should they fail to obtain business they end up in deep trouble. In other words they are destined to talk and think self-reflexively about what they accomplish, much like the salespeople Oakes studied, who “subject themselves to a constant daily regimen of self-scrutiny in order to produce a comprehensive and systematic self-assessment of their performance” (Oakes 1989:238). This ends up in a three-dimensional rhetori-

cal dilemma. Not only must the marketers argue for business purposes, as marketers do, they must also argue to construct a causal connection between what they do and the specific results they achieve, and at the same time deal with the prevailing suspicion towards themselves and their work. Talking in terms of “good relationships” could be seen as a rhetorical strategy for dealing with this dilemma. Once they assessed the result of their work in terms of business relationships, as they generally did, it became virtually impossible to argue they did a bad job. Indeed, I tried. But then they would tell me, convincingly, “it was a good meeting – it improved our relationship”. Was it a good meeting? Who knows?

In conclusion, my study suggests that the relationship metaphor, and relationship talk, are far from artless rhetorical devices irrelevant to investigation of everyday marketing activities. My study supports Handford’s finding that “relational language can be employed to address an instrumental goal” in business meetings (Handford 2007:345), and it supports the findings of Ellis *et al.* and Harding, formulated as follows:

Our analysis suggests that managers’ talk “about” management illustrates the recursive relationship between the discourses of participants and theories such as those of “relationship marketing”. These theories construct the discursive space “into which managers climb to perform and thus construct themselves as managers” (Harding 2003:199). In turn, these constructions then inform actors’ network theories and help to generate the atmosphere(s) of the relationships into which they act. (Ellis *et al.* 2006:14)

My study has illustrated specifically how relationship talk can be used to justify an expanded domain of marketing work, to establish a favourable *ethos*, or to overcome the difficulty presented by multiple strategic intents or the blurring of the results of marketing work.

To answer the question raised by Low and Huat (1996) – Are long-term relationships in industrial marketing “rhetoric or reality”? – the answer is *both*. The rhetoric of relationship marketing creates a reality in which relationship issues matter, to the potential benefit of the marketers who engage in it.

## Talk that narrows the domain of marketing

In the analysis of rhetorical situations I found that marketers argue for business purposes in a context in which they are justified in addressing the needs of a customer in order to respond to them. The customer *confirms* the need addressed by the marketers, and encourages the conversation, or *dismisses it*, which then forces the marketers to increase the apparent urgency of the particular need, or probe for another need. In the analysis of rhetorical situations, I suggested customer need is *the* controlling exigence of marketing talk. If a customer expresses a need then marketers are obliged to respond to it, and as the marketers in my study argued, the services they provide *must* satisfy a specific, explicit and urgent need. In this respect we might understand marketers as the link between a particular need and a particular solution, and then “marketing justifies its role as a medium of communication between a product and a customer” (Laufer and Paradeise 1990:16).

In marketing management terminology customer need is defined as “a state of felt deprivation” (Kotler *et al.* 2008:8). The idea is that a company can bring forward an accurate mix of product, price, place and promotion only when customer need has been identified and carefully investigated (Kotler *et al.* 2008:24). Companies that fail to respond to changes in the micro- and macro-environment will not be successful. Therefore, it is every marketing manager’s duty to use “disciplined methods [---] for collecting information about the marketing environment” (Kotler *et al.* 2008:179). As this illustrates, customer need has something of the privileged position in marketing management that exigence and imperfection have in Bitzer’s (1968) understanding of a rhetorical situation.

As formulated by Hackley, “the rhetoric of need satisfaction is invoked to render benign all done in the name of marketing” (Hackley 2003b:1340). Accordingly, addressing explicit or latent customer need is an effective rhetorical strategy by which to justify marketing activities (Marion 2006), much as is talk about business relationships, I would argue. Yet, there is a major difference. Relationship talk addresses a wider social domain, whereas need-oriented marketing management discourse has its “locus of power” in the material world of products (Skålen 2010:119). My interpretation is that the language of relationships can be used to *expand* the domain of marketing, whereas the language of customer need can *narrow* it. Let me explain.

When the marketers in my study probed for customer need they asked specific questions related to the particular services they offered, typically addressing the customers’ material world. As it seemed, this was exactly

what was expected of them. As long as the marketers demonstrated an attempt to narrow the focus of attention, the conversation proceeded. General, vague or unconnected questions shortened conversations. Furthermore, when analysing rhetorical situations I found that marketers distinguished themselves from *non*-marketers by claiming that their work “as a marketer” is to identify urgent needs, make the customer see them, and then satisfy them together with the customer. Dealing with customer need is *not* everybody’s business, they argued indirectly. It takes a certain capacity to find customer need; moreover, “no need, no business”. Compare this with the marketers’ claim that relationship marketing, on the other hand, is everybody’s business, in the broadest possible sense.

As explained by Laufer and Paradeise, the discourse of need is rooted in science, which is the domain of specialists; and it is only the specialist who knows how to satisfy a need (Laufer and Paradeise 1990:145). It would seem that customer need *creates* the marketer, which delimits the domain of marketing in the same way that Bitzer delimits the scope of rhetoric when arguing that there can only be a rhetorical situation if there is given imperfection to start with (Bitzer 1968).

To sum up, the language of marketing management in general, and talk in terms of customer need in particular, is helpful to marketers – for example, when they are trying to extend a conversation with a customer, or narrow the field of marketing, or argue that marketing work is only for professionals who know how to find and satisfy customer need.

With this summation, I have demonstrated how two well-documented pieces of marketing discourse can be used by marketers for persuasive purposes. I am not arguing that they constitute *the* two dominant repertoires of marketing. The argument I make is that marketing talk, seen through the lens of rhetoric, is one of the keys to a multidimensional portrayal of marketers and a multifaceted account of marketing work.

### 7.3 The proliferation of marketing talk

In the beginning of this chapter I referred to Oakes (1990) to indicate the potential tension between a service idiom and a commercial idiom. I also referred to Svensson (2003), who argues that marketing scene repertoires are both a resource by which marketers accomplish their work, and a constraint that obligates marketers to talk in certain ways. Then I gave two examples of

what marketers might accomplish rhetorically by talking about relationships and customer need. My point is that a rhetorical perspective changes the understanding of marketing talk dramatically, and in the end the understanding of what marketers do when they do marketing work.

In the analyses of rhetorical situations and rhetorical strategies I found that marketers ask questions to tell stories, they tell stories to ask questions, they talk about private matters in seemingly formal settings, they talk about formal matters in seemingly private settings, and they mix idioms, repertoires and jargons beyond recognition sometimes even in a single sentence. Then, in the analysis of rhetorical subject, I suggested that the rhetorical resources of marketers could be understood as a form of proverbial wisdom without fixed content or distinct structure. I came to the conclusion that in their everyday work marketers encounter, reinterpret and reformulate expressions, anecdotes and words as they go along, which makes their *copia*, their “stock of ideas [and] words” (Inst Or 10.1.5-7), exceptionally elastic and expansive. Altogether, this downplays the constraints of repertoires, and emphasizes the proliferation of marketing talk, and exemplifies the explorative and creative aspects of marketing work. This calls for elaboration.

Whittle has found that contradictory interpretive repertoires employed by management consultants could be used successfully when interacting “without necessarily reflecting any underlying or stable stance, attitude or approach” (Whittle 2006:433-434). Whittle argues that the existence of conflicting repertoires is an important resource – for practitioners, to facilitate action, and for researchers, to understand how action is accomplished. As a telling example, relationship marketing might well be described by marketing scholars as a clear-cut “paradigm shift” compared to product-oriented marketing management (Grönroos 1997, Gummesson 1997). And still, marketers can combine the language of relationships and the language of customer need in infinite ways when arguing for business purposes, regardless of the incommensurability of the two paradigms proclaimed by scholars. This connects to Cornelissen’s finding that marketing scholars endeavour to formalize and define theoretical concepts, whereas marketing managers favour conceptual ambivalence because it offers scope for interpretation (Cornelissen 2002). Ellis *et al.* underscore that these are not two isolated practices because there is “intertextual exchange occurring between manager’s talk and academic theorising” (Ellis *et al.* 2006:13), which reasonably expands the language of marketing, to the benefit of marketers who argue for business purposes by means of a rich and elastic *copia*.

Moreover, when studying marketing practice we should acknowledge that when trying to persuade others, marketers themselves are targets for others' persuasive activities, and could thus be persuaded to change their own views (von Koskull and Fougère 2011). This is not as trivial a comment as it might appear.

In most studies of marketing work I find that marketers are depicted as users of discourse rather than as participants in ongoing and dynamic controversies (cf. Lien 1997, Hackley 2000, Svensson 2003, 2006, 2007, Lenney 2009, Ardley and Quinn 2014), which is remarkable given my finding that marketers' everyday work is full of encounters with customers, co-workers, friends and researchers who *always talk back* in one way or another. Indeed, the marketers in my study were never undisputed for long in any conversation. Based on Willard's understanding of argumentation (Willard 1989:67), marketers are destined to improvise, act and react while meeting others' argumentative actions. In so doing, their arguments interact with other's arguments, with the argumentative context, with the conclusion they suggest, and with the very discourse used to articulate the arguments (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1971:460). This is yet an illustration of how the marketers' arguing for business purposes leads to a proliferation of marketing talk.

Ardley and Quinn maintain that marketing activities are undertaken by "diverse breadth of language, diverse ways of enacting tasks and accomplishing goals, set within increasingly diverse contexts" and for this reason we should not underestimate the "importance and significance of individual local practices that construct the everyday organizing activities of marketers" (Ardley and Quinn 2014:112). These claims by Ardley and Quinn echo the empirically well-grounded portrayal of heterogenous marketing work full of ambiguities and uncertainties brought forward by Prus (1989a, 1989b), Lien (1997), Svensson (2003, 2006, 2007) and Lenney (2009). My study suggests that the marketers' individual way of talking, their *style*, adds to heterogeneity. As was illustrated in the analysis, marketers accumulate words and ideas, and they twist and bend them beyond recognition when putting them to use. To use Quintilian's words, marketers are like wrestlers who have a rich supply of holds, tricks and throws from which they "apply one or two, as [the] occasion offers" (Inst Or 12.2.12). The result is exceptionally diverse talk "partly because [of the] time or place, and partly because of the tastes and aims of each person" (Inst Or 12.10.2).

In the next and final section of this chapter I shall discuss how prolific marketing talk has its own logic, or rather, denies logical assessments, to the benefit of marketers' day-to-day arguing for business purposes.

## 7.4 Marketing talk in new perspective

As reported frequently in the rhetorical analysis, marketers are seen by others and themselves as dubious figures who talk persuasively for profit. It seems that marketers find themselves in the same situation as the eloquent orator who must avoid *lingua suspecta*, that is, talking with a “clever tongue”, because this talk is met with suspicion (Or 145). For orators and marketers to do their work successfully they conceal their intent to persuade. Indeed, as I found in the analysis, marketers have a range of rhetorical strategies at hand to hide their commercial intent – for example, by talking about mutually beneficial relationships.

Then again, my study also actualizes other aspects of the *lingua suspecta* of marketing. Referring to Cicero, Andersen remarks that orators do not always hide their art of persuasion. Orators could also be successful by “showing off” their art because a speaker who does so seems, ironically enough, to be very honest (Andersen 1996). I found examples of this form of meta-arguing in the rhetorical analysis. When marketers were directly or indirectly accused of being marketers engaged in *lingua suspecta*, they could respond “of course, but you cannot blame me for trying to do business. I am a marketer and I try to do my work well”, and then show off their skill in, say, asking questions in terms of customer need.

Furthermore, self-criticism and confessions of shortcomings are an effective rhetorical strategy to “foster honesty-laden images” of business professionals (Beason 1991:335). Mahere pushes this reasoning to the edge when advising salespeople to “speak the truth”, because “truth is the ultimate sales tool” (Maher 2004:vii). This echoes Brown’s suggestion that marketers can benefit from being open with their “fake sincerity” (Brown 1998:177). “I am a marketer and I manipulate people for a living” is an unambiguous confession of dishonesty; however, it is also very honest to speak out about this dishonesty.

Analysing “fake sincerity” and “sincere fakes” by a logical standard would get us nowhere. As explained by Garver, in dialogue with Aristotle, rationality and *logos* do not constitute a persuasive force *per se*. An argument

becomes intelligent when we trust the speaker; “we infer from *ethos* to *logos*” (Garver 1995:192). Logically, fake sincerity is a paradox. Rhetorically, it is an example of a marketer who talks as if he or she has “resisted the temptation of the system and is working against his own self-interest in order to serve the customer” (Blumberg 1989:41).

This reasoning puts another paradox in a different light. The marketers in my study claimed to *be* and *not be* marketers depending on the situation at hand. Sometimes they did so with reference to the knowledge they had or did not have. However, as I found, knowledge in the abstract is not as significant for the marketers as is the audience’s experience of the marketers’ practical wisdom, virtue and goodwill. This connects to Alvesson’s study of employees of knowledge-intensive firms. He found that these employees struggled with their professional identity, on several levels. The ambiguity of the services they offered, the organizations they represented, and who they were in the eyes of others, called for persuasive talk to convince others they could be trusted. This has rather little to do with knowledge, as we usually understand it in a professional context, and more to do with flexibility, empathy and being nice. Unfortunately, Alvesson concludes, the skills and orientations needed for employees of knowledge-intensive firms to accomplish their work are poorly apprehended in the common use of the word “knowledge” (Alvesson 1993b, 2001). I suggest that *copia* might be the concept Alvesson is in need of.

I found that the marketers in my study could possess a rich, dynamic and highly useful “business *copia*” without a formal education or systematic training in marketing. By means of this versatile *copia* they could avoid conventional marketing discourse (and *lingua suspecta*) and thus avoid the *ethos* of a marketer. Or, they could draw on this *copia* to appear as if having knowledge in marketing. My point is that is a matter of choice. In other words, becoming a marketer in the eyes of managers, co-workers, customers or researchers is an *option*, not a necessity. Consequently, the marketers in my study are not “full-time” professional marketers or “part-time” non-professional marketers, to use Gummesson’s (1991a) terminology. They have the rhetorical capacity to become both, and in some meetings with contradictory audiences I have seen them become both *at the same time*. This indicates the ability to arrange “provisional selves”, which are transitory solutions to overcome the gap between existing and future role-expectations (Ibarra 1999:765). It is a form of identity play “to explore possible selves rather than to claim and be granted, desired or ought selves” (Ibarra and Petriglieri



2010:11). Let me give an example based on the conversations with the marketers in my study.

If a customer addresses the marketer as if she or he is an expert on “operational management”, and the marketer finds it more profitable to be an expert on “relationship issues”, then the marketer might talk (drawing on *copia*) to enact a character that appears out of place in the context of “operational management” but relates to “relationship issues”. In so doing the marketer does not work on the mind of the customer directly. The marketer does what *homo rhetoricus* does, that is, begs the customer to move into another frame or another play (Lanham 1976:14), which might lead to a new physical meeting, or to the experience that the current meeting suddenly becomes a new meeting with new actors. This in turn problematizes the whole idea of marketing meetings, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

It could be argued that professionals cope with the problem of ambiguous identity, as it is addressed by Alvesson (1993b, 2001), by switching between different discursive repertoires with different boundaries (Svensson 2003:99-111, 2010). However, as is suggested by Andersson Cederholm, although in a completely different service context (entrepreneurship among horse farmers), “ambiguity work” calls for a wide and delicate balancing act between lifestyle and business, and between emotional closeness and distance (Andersson Cederholm 2015). Despite the different empirical settings, this understanding of “ambiguity work” highlights an important aspect of the marketers’ talk. When marketers argue for business purposes they talk about business as much as they talk about their life and their emotions – sometimes in subtle terms, sometimes bluntly and outspokenly. This aspect of marketers’ talk is not clearly articulated in the analyses of discursive repertoires conducted by Svensson (2003, 2006, 2007), Ellis and Ybema (2010), Ellis and Rod (2014) and Ardley and Quinn (2014), which I means is unfortunate when trying to answer the call for a multidimensional account of marketers in the light of their practice (Brownlie and Saren 1997).



# Chapter 8.

## Marketing work “in-between”

Throughout this study I have had a particular interest in what goes on in all these meetings marketers attend. When doing fieldwork I tried hard to obtain access to a wide range of meetings, on the assumption these are the most significant locations of marketing work, especially meetings with customers. Accordingly, when interpreting the empirical material I spent considerable time, at least initially, trying to figure out what marketers did in the meetings I participated in and heard reports about.

My obsession with meetings is by no means unexpected or controversial. Mintzberg (1971, 1973) found that meetings (scheduled and unscheduled) occupied a major part of managers’ fragmented daily work. As argued by Boden (1994), it is through talk in meetings that everyday business of organizations is accomplished. Considering everyday marketing work specifically, Hackley and Skálén suggest, referring to Lien (1997) and Prus (1989b), that marketers “write reports, advertising copy, strategy documents, marketing research briefs, presentations, sales analyses, emails, and sales pitches [and when] not writing, [the] marketing manager is usually in meetings, discussing the things they have written” (Skálén and Hackley 2011:191).

Indeed, investigations into the work of marketers have often focused on meetings (cf. Hackley 2000, Svensson 2003, 2006, 2007, Ots 2010, von

Koskull and Fougère 2011, Lowe *et al.* 2012). There are good reasons to claim that meetings play a significant role in marketers' everyday activities. However, contemplating the result of my rhetorical analysis I also find reason to problematize my and others' preoccupation with all these meetings. This is done initially in this chapter, and followed by a critical discussion of the prevailing metaphor of *drama*. The chapter ends with a proposal for a rhetorical understanding of marketing work as a matter of *kairotic* encounters.

## 8.1 The (in)significance of meetings

The marketers in my study seemed to have a very relaxed attitude towards meetings, confirming Ravn's "folk theory" of organizational meetings: meetings are unexciting events "for discussing things" – either you "put up with them or try to stay away" (Ravn 2013:165). This came as a surprise to me. I thought pre-arranged and rather formal meetings with customers and co-workers would be *the* most significant components of marketing work from the marketers' perspective. They were not. Things were much more complex.

Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1997:205-208) makes a theoretical distinction between external and internal "meetings" on one hand, and "service encounters" on the other. All corporate meetings involve decision-making processes with organizational effects, which service encounters do not, they argue. Moreover, meetings are less ritualized, less constrained and less defined than are service encounters. Corporate meetings are *either* external meetings involving actors detached from the organization, *or* internal meetings that gather participants from the same organization in which internal power positions more important, according to Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris.

I find it troublesome to uphold a clear distinction between meetings and service encounters in marketing work. When analysing the context of marketing work in the light of Bitzer (1968) I concluded that marketing work was undertaken in loosely structured and weak rhetorical situations, which is consistent with Lenney's finding that marketing managers do their work in "weak situations [characterized by] fundamental indeterminacy" (Lenney 2009:151).

I also found it highly problematic to separate one rhetorical situation from another, particularly because marketers engaged in the immediate context to talk a favourable situation into existence. Seen through the perspective of

Vatz (1973), “external circumstances” were used as stuff, means, props or bridges (pick your metaphor) when constructing the context to which they seemed to belong. The initial representation of a meeting is itself part of an argument. For example, arranging a “sales meeting” compared to a “workshop” would produce entirely different expectations, although the purpose and content could be the same. Then again, a meeting seldom remained intact, “in character” so to speak, from start to end. As Holmes (in Handford 2007:58) explains, meetings typically embrace parallel characters because people skilfully and very subtly depart from “core business” discourse to “social” talk, and back again, which makes it problematic to uphold a clear distinction between formal and informal meetings. Likewise it is difficult to distinguish between planned and unplanned meetings, as Boden (1994:84) does, since I found that marketers *explore*, *invent* and *exploit* the time, place and circumstances in which every marketing activity is embedded. Hence it is impossible to distinguish interpretation from creation when marketers’ account for the external circumstances of their work. In this respect marketers may be understood as something of “ontological sculptors” (Lenney 2009:153).

Meetings from the marketers’ perspective seemed to emerge as an “ongoing parade of situations marked by opportunity” (Hoffman and Ford 2010:59); that is, a parade of meetings within meetings within meetings, with vague boundaries in time and space, which relates to Ardley’s study of the life-world of marketers; “[the market environment] was not found to be a fixed objective entity, but embedded in the local rationality of marketing managers worlds” (Ardley 2005:122).

When analysing rhetorical strategies I found that marketers have a capacity for multivocal arguing. By means of impersonation they include and exclude a multitude of actors and voices in a single conversation. The result is overlapping conversations, within conversations and between conversations. Such networks of conversations produce polyphonic, pluralistic and highly fluid organizational realities (Hazen 1993, Ford 1999). In this perspective it is understandable I came to the conclusion that marketing meetings have no easy detectable beginning or end, and they are exceptionally volatile.

Furthermore, there are no clear borders between external and internal meetings because the marketers constantly change their *ethos* from seller, co-worker, employer, counsellor, friend, and so on, in an ongoing encounter. Drawing on Gómez Arias and Bello Acebrón, this is a case of simultaneous opposites. In a complex business environment it is often impossible to keep

customers, suppliers, partners and competitors apart because the same actors typically “are all at the same time” (Gómez Arias and Bello Acebrón 2001:11). As remarked by Lowe *et al*, boundaries between actors in business become “an imagined distinction, context specific and evoked through narratives” (Lowe *et al*. 2012:423).

Apparently, audiences blur, rhetorical challenges blur, and so do the boundaries between meetings that are believed to constitute marketing work. This conclusion connects to Ellis and Ybema’s suggestion that professionals involved in interorganizational relationships could be described as “boundary bricoleurs” engaged simultaneously in boundary *setting* and boundary *transcendence*. In so doing they “discursively mark different self/other boundaries that varyingly position themselves, and their colleagues, competitors, customers and suppliers, as ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the organization, the market, the relationship or their field of expertise” (Ellis and Ybema 2010:279).

My point is that meetings blur for persuasive purposes. In the analysis of rhetorical subjects I argued that marketers could be understood as *homo rhetoricus* who plays with cultural stereotypes to rearrange the interlocutor’s self. If it fails, they offer another frame, they cast the audience “in another play” (Lanham 1976:14), which is an informative description of a commonly used rhetorical strategy used by the marketers when arguing for business purposes. When they fail to argue convincingly they change topic but continue to talk about business matters related to some form of customer need, or they might talk about sport, careers, friends, politics, etc. or they might declare that the meeting is over and then continue to talk, and thus change the meeting altogether with the aim of putting themselves in a better argumentative position.

Consequently, and of great importance, if we limit the investigation of marketing work to predefined meetings, with given integrity and constraints – for example a “customer meeting” – then we will have severe difficulty accounting for the marketers’ argumentative practices that allow them to address and rearrange the situations in which their work is embedded.

This conclusion invites a critical discussion about the “scene of marketing”, touched upon in the discussion of marketing scene repertoires in the previous chapter. There I claimed that marketers accomplish their work by means of elastic, expansive and copious language. Add to this that marketing work seems to happen in meetings within meetings within meetings.

As I will argue in the next section, these rhetorically informed insights make a new understanding of the marketing scene possible. Or rather, they can be used to problematize the very idea of a scene of marketing.

## 8.2 Problematizing the scene of marketing

This section deals with the theoretical framing of marketing work. More precisely, it extends the last sections' reasoning on meetings within meetings, in dialogue with scholars who favour a dramaturgical approach to marketing. This approach is used frequently to analyse experiences of services (Grove and Fisk 1992, Grove *et al.* 1992, Goodwin 1996, Pine and Gilmore 1999), personal selling (Prus 1989a, Grove *et al.* 1990, Darr and Pinch 2013), business networks (Lowe *et al.* 2012), the nature of marketing (Fisk and Grove 1996), and marketing work (Prus 1989b, Svensson 2003, 2006, 2007).

A dramaturgical approach assumes that human interaction can be investigated as if actors are performing on a scene. The "marketing scene" is defined by Svensson as "more or less collectively shared conceptions, worldviews and everyday knowledge about the marketing world" (Svensson 2003:23). Svensson assumes, with reference to Goffman (1974) and Burke (1969a), that "every act needs a scene and every scene is contingent upon an act" (Svensson 2003:22). The marketing scene defines which of the marketers' activities are meaningful and appropriate, which in turn influences the marketers' self-conception, their professional legitimacy and the discourse they employ when marketing their services (Svensson 2006:351). Prus formulates it slightly differently, as he, in similarity with Lowe *et al.* (2012), makes a direct reference to world of theatre, also drawing on Goffman (1959):

The marketplace is [---] an interactive theatre [where] buyers and sellers assume roles as tacticians and targets as the scenes unfold [which] involves considerable planning, scripting, and orderliness, but it contains much ambiguity, and allows for much creativity, persuasion, and resistance. (Prus 1989b:21)

What unites scholars who favour a dramaturgical approach when analysing marketing practices is an interest in what *regulates and structures* the performance of various roles on various scenes. This is not to say they ignore disruption and improvisation. On the contrary, to understand marketing and

sales practices we need to study how human encounters are “worked out by the people involved”, and how resistances are neutralized and disruptions managed (Prus 1989a:24-25).

There is of course much more to say about how metaphors of drama, scene and theatre have been used to study marketing practices. Even so, let me pause here and discuss some of the aspects just mentioned.

If we assume for analytic purposes there is a scene or stage on which marketing work is located and made meaningful, then we might ask what marketing work is carried out *offstage* or *backstage*.

According to Lowe *et al.*, marketing researchers tend to focus on the “front stage” of marketing where “actors play given roles to establish and maintain acceptable impressions”, which is unfortunate since “backstage interactions” influence the performance of front stage roles (Lowe *et al.* 2012:423). Although Lowe *et al.* acknowledge that the distinction between front and back is troublesome, particularly since actors sometimes abandon their “scripts” and improvise, they still hold on to the idea that impression management is what the marketers are after, typically to “avoid embarrassment” (Lowe *et al.* 2012:427). As Goffman argues, people “tend to maintain the line that they are what they claim to be; they tend to stay in character” (Goffman 1959:167).

This calls for two remarks. From a rhetorical perspective it is problematic to distinguish between *on-* and *offstage*. In the analysis of rhetorical situations, in the light of Vatz (1973), I assumed marketers invent the situations in which they do their work (“A meeting is not a meeting until someone defines it as a meeting”), and in so doing they make certain types of talk, emotions and activities more meaningful than others, which seems to be in line with the dramaturgical approach. However, my study suggests that marketers set and *re-set* the marketing scene *continuously*. Moreover, they do not struggle to stay “*in character*”: they move *between* characters and scenes *for persuasive purposes*. The character, or *ethos*, talked up in one rhetorical situation moves them into other rhetorical situations. This is what could be called marketing work “*in-between*”.

In the analysis of rhetorical subject I found telling examples in which marketers literally casted a meeting, wrote manuscripts for the participants, urged them to interact and then made a review afterwards in which the reality of the situation was reaffirmed. Picking up an illustration from Billig, a theatrical performance would be ruined if someone unexpectedly were to shout from backstage that the actor did a bad job, whereas celebrations and flowers



after a performance are interpreted as success. From a rhetorical perspective interruptions from backstage are part of the play. More precisely, *the play, the scene and the backstage voices are elements of an argument* (Billig 1996:45).

Every metaphor inspired by theatre and drama carries the risk of treating offstage activities as less significant or as preparatory activities for what will be presented later onstage. In this respect I see no reason to disagree with Billig. He maintains that the theatrical metaphor emphasizes “social regularities” and the “coordination of scripted performances” rather than the controversies of social life (Billig 1996:45), which is particularly unfortunate if we want to learn more about marketers’ work “in-between” meetings, which is a fundamental part of everyday marketing work according to my findings. This is my first remark.

My second remark is as follows: Impression management is often seen as a primary human activity in marketing (Fisk and Grove 1996, Lowe *et al.* 2012). From a rhetorical perspective impression management is not considered a final result of social interaction; rather, “the self is projected in order to increase persuasiveness” (Billig 1996:261-262) and in this projection “scripts” are interchangeably followed and broken on the spur of the moment. The scripts or “rules” that control business talk are *transformational*: once they are written they can be “*un-written* by present actors for both immediate and future purposes” (Boden 1994:205). As I illustrated in the analysis, marketers follow the unspoken rules of customer meetings and ask questions in terms of customer need, but they also break these rules by suddenly offering the customer a job, in the spirit of “good relationships”, to secure a business contract with that customer. They also face others who break implicit rules of meetings, such as when they face a customer who suddenly calls attention to their talk, to joke about marketers’ *lingua suspecta*, which becomes a meta-argument that obstructs the marketer’s possibility to argue in favour of their services. From a rhetorical perspective this is not impression management, but rather projection of selves – and “making of presence” and “deliberate suppression of presence” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1971:116-118) – for persuasive purposes.

Given my findings that marketers accomplish their work by means of copious and verbally rich language, in ambiguous meetings within meetings, I find it problematic to adhere to the idea of a marketing scene set at meetings upon which marketers enact their work. Altogether, the prevailing drama metaphor is not sensitive enough to the controversies of everyday marketing

work in which arguments and counterarguments constitute the context, which is itself argumentative.

The argumentative practices of marketers benefit from a different framing, beyond the drama metaphor, and beyond the talk marketers produce in predefined meetings. To suggest such a framing will be the task of the final section of this chapter.

### 8.3 From meetings to *kairotic* encounters

In the analysis of rhetorical subjects I gave several examples of marketers' extensive travelling. As commented by Prus, travelling adds a "very significant element to the lives of [marketers]" (Prus 1989b:271). My rhetorical analysis also included an empirical illustration of marketing work at an airport, which in turn supports Breure and van Meel's finding that airports in particular can be seen as important facilitators of contemporary "footloose" business work (Breure and van Meel 2003:178). This is not said to highlight the physical location *per se* but rather to place the nomadic aspects of marketing work in the foreground.

When observing managerial work in the 1970s, Mintzberg (1971, 1973) found that managers' workdays were exceptionally fragmented by a large number of short meetings. When Tengblad (2006) repeated Mintzberg's studies thirty years later he found that managers' meetings had become fewer but longer. Tengblad also found a substantial increase in workload, time spent on transportation and meetings with many participants. This in turn relates to Lien's finding about marketing work. In order to learn more about everyday life in a marketing department she planned fieldwork with a particular focus on meetings in the department. As it turned out she faced major difficulties because there were very few regular meetings at the department. The marketers were constantly on the move, and apparently extremely busy, so she decided to focus on the wider "flow of events" that various projects entailed, rather than studying what happened during prearranged marketing meetings (Lien 1997:30).

Indeed, the marketers in my study were always on the move. It was not necessarily a move between planned (or unplanned) meetings at which they argued for business purposes. I found they argued for business everywhere; if not face to face with people, then by phone or email. They were always

available, which was very important for them. This is what “good service” is all about, they told me. Let me elaborate.

As I maintained in the analysis of rhetorical subjects, in which I used the idea of *homo rhetoricus* (Lanham 1976, Fish 1989) to think with, marketers are like sophists. Sophists and marketers travel physically from place to place. But more importantly, when arguing they travel also from idea to idea, from discourse to discourse, from truth to truth, from internal to external persuasion. No idea, discourse or truth is primary, at least not for long. This noted, marketing work is infused with *occasionality*, in which *time* and *timing* become greatly significant.

My study has provided illustrations of how marketers’ conversations can be formal *and* informal, present *and* distant, cooperative *and* competitive, etc., literally at the same time. Trying to qualify a meeting in terms of formal *or* informal is not particularly meaningful if the persuasive power resides in the movement between formal and informal. Drawing on Hawhee, it is in the *in-between* (invention-in-the-middle) that the rhetorical subject does its job; exploring the features *in* a present situation but only to arrange a provisional *ethos* that can be used to move *through* the situation to a *new* situation (Hawhee 2002:18). As formulated by Miller, “*every* moment along the continuum of *chronos* has its *kairos*” (Miller 1992:312).

This is not as abstract as it may appear. Think of a marketer who encounters a suspicious audience and (thus) decides to become their “friend” by saying “I understand your situation and want to share some honest thoughts about how I personally deal with relationships”, which may enact an intimate friend-to-friend situation in which the marketer can make the audience feel guilty for not dealing with business relationships properly, and in that new situation then give them “friendly” advice on relationship marketing. Is this a formal or informal meeting? Wrong question. Ask instead how the marketers change their *ethos* and change their selves – and change the audience’s self-understanding – in and through the opportune moment, given that there is no fixed time or space in which marketing work is, and is not, undertaken.

When doing business “it is a matter of time before a decision considered right becomes wrong, and vice versa” (Gómez Arias and Bello Acebrón 2001:11). Gómez Arias and Bello Acebrón refer to Holmer-Nadesan who argues that time cannot be understood as a stable component of an external business environment because time can be condensed, stretched and worked on much like other components of business processes (Holmer-Nadesan

1997). This is a significant part of marketing work, done literally and figuratively on the move and everywhere.

If marketing work is nomadic, who then are the nomads doing the work? It is time to take a closer look at the marketers themselves, drawing mainly on the analysis of the rhetorical subject and the idea of a *homo rhetoricus* (Lanham 1976, Fish 1989).

As argued in the analysis, marketers have no authentic self. When marketers talk various characters into existence, they *are* themselves. The wider the scope of their impersonation, the fuller a self it is. Consequently, and somewhat paradoxically, the closer we study marketers arguing for business purposes, in meetings within meetings, the more elusive they become. Or rather, as I suggested at the end of the analysis of the rhetorical subject, the more *sophist-like* they become.

The idea of associating various business practices with the work of sophists is not new. Plato declared that sophists engage in “expertise-selling” and “money-making” (Sophist 224), with the apparent intention of defaming the sophists. The claim that sophists and business people are marked by the same vicious practices has travelled into the contemporary understanding of marketing. As maintained by Laufer and Paradeise, modern marketers and ancient sophists share the same accusations on point after point: the work they do is based on manipulation, they are uninterested in “the ends for which their services are bought”, their success is measured in the loyalty of their customers, they promote knowledge without “inherent quality” accessible to “anyone who wishes to take the trouble, time and money to learn it”, and they are both considered aliens in the situations in which they do their work (Laufer and Paradeise 1990:2-6).

Moreover, when marketers and sophists do their work, they use all empirical means available to learn more about their audiences, with the ultimate objective of winning their approval. They are experts in the use of everyday language, proverbs and cultural stereotypes. They exploit *doxa*, the general opinion of the particular audience they have before them, without calling the foundation of the *doxa* to question. Finally, marketers and sophists hold efficiency as the only criterion possible for the work they do. From their perspective there are no transcendental criteria by which their work might be legitimized. (Laufer and Paradeise 1990:7-8)

It is important to note that the above reasoning is not brought forward as a contribution to the history of marketing thought and practice. Nor am I claiming that marketers are sophists in an essentialist sense. I make the argument

that an investigation of marketers *as if* they are contemporary sophists inspires new analytic questions and answers – drawing, for example, on Laufer and Paradeise (1990).

The marketer I have studied is like a sophist who “migrates nomadically among discourses, never presenting any as ‘primary’ or privileged in its claim to articulate the truth” (Consigny 1992:49). Sophists’ and marketers’ work is marked by “occasionality”, featuring a *homo rhetoricus* who is “both a hunter and a maker of unique opportunities, always ready to address improvisationally and confer meaning on new and emerging situations [without a] ready-made audience” (Poulakos 1995:61). Drawing on White’s discussion of the sophists we might describe the marketers’ in-between-work as a “loosely connected sequence of encounters with the world”, in which the marketers risk the history “of the self [---] in an endless task of adaptive metamorphosis” (White 1987:39).

Based on Reynolds (1993) and LeFevre (in Reynolds 1993) *ethos* is a socially created location, marked by presence, in-between various actors. To understand the power of *ethos* “we must examine the places where our practices, language, and attitudes come together or collide with the subjects of these practices” (Reynolds 1993:335). This is how I understand the mechanism of invention-in-the-middle, and how it can be applied to analyse marketing work as *kairotic* encounters by sophist-like marketers. This connects to Ellis and Ybema who have argued that managers involved in interorganizational relationships use “betweenness [as] their operating base from where they build allegiances, dynamically switching between a rhetoric of exclusion and a rhetoric of inclusion and, ultimately, managing simultaneously to ‘be-long’ and be different” (Ellis and Ybema 2010:300).

My study has demonstrated in detail how “discursive boundary-setting” is accomplished rhetorically by marketers. Given the insights into *kairotic* encounters, I find again reason to accentuate the volatility and instability of these rhetorically constructed boundaries.

Finally, I referred earlier to Andersson Cederholm and her understanding of “ambiguity work” to draw attention to how the marketers in my study talk about business as much as they talk about their lives when arguing for business purposes. To this I would now add her suggestion that “the in-between relationships of commercial and professional friendship emerge as specific social forms, characterized by its inherent ambiguity” (Andersson Cederholm 2015:329).

As I have argued in this chapter, the “social forms” of day-to-day marketing work – understood as *kairotic* encounters – are *made* ambiguous for persuasive purposes.

# Chapter 9.

## Sophistic marketers and their rhetorical business

This book has investigated marketers' argumentative practices (*rhetorica utens*) by means of rhetorical theory (*rhetorica docens*) rooted in the idea that everyday human interaction and thinking is permeated by controversy. The aim of the investigation has been to learn more about marketing work as it is carried out in professional service organizations. The research question, *What do marketers do when they do marketing work?*, was explored empirically through conversations, observations and daily interaction and arguing with professionals involved in marketing of consulting services. The rhetorically informed analysis of their work was structured by means of three themes: *situation*, *strategy* and *subject*. The following questions were asked: *Where and when do marketers argue for business purposes? What rhetorical strategies are used? How can the subjects of marketing work be portrayed?* Thereafter followed a discussion of the analysis under the two headings *persuasive marketing talk* and *marketing work "in-between"*.

I have now reached the final chapter of this book. This is where I discuss the overall accomplishment of my study, given the purposes 1) to provide a multifaceted account of marketing work that is sensitive to marketers' own

ideas about the work they do, 2) to establish the significance of rhetorical theory for marketing research, and 3) to encourage self-reflexivity among practitioners of marketing.

## 9.1 A multifaceted account of marketing work

As was established in the first chapter, this book about marketing work seeks to contribute to “marketing-as-practice” research as outlined by Hackley *et al.* (2009) and Skåln and Hackley (2011). Within the wider field of marketing practice I have studied what marketers do at work, following the assumption that everyday organizational business is accomplished through the practice of talk (Boden 1994), which is steeped in argumentation, as is every human activity (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1971, Billig 1996). Unlike von Koskull and Fougère (2011), which is one of very few studies of the rhetorical aspects of marketing practice, I have investigated the process of arguing rather than the use of specific arguments.

So, what do marketers do when they do marketing work? Based on the rhetorical analysis in chapters 4, 5 and 6, and the discussion of the analysis in chapter 7 and 8, the following short answer could be formulated:

Marketing work is rhetorical business accomplished by sophistic and self-reflexive marketers who argue in, through and in-between volatile *kairotic* encounters commonly known as “marketing meetings”, in which they employ versatile and expansive language, and enact contradictory selves, for persuasive purposes.

This is the core insight achieved by my study in its most condensed form, and also what I consider to be a multifaceted account of marketing work. Turning to scholars with a particular interest in the everyday activities of marketers, how could my rhetorically informed insights contribute to a new understanding of marketing work and marketing practice?

My study connects to the growing stream of research in which marketers’ talk in everyday situations is taken seriously (Brownlie and Saren 1997, Lien 1997, Svensson 2003, Ellis *et al.* 2006, Svensson 2006, Lowe *et al.* 2008, Lenney 2009, Jaakkola 2011, von Koskull and Fougère 2011, Ardley and Quinn 2014). My contribution to this research is an account of marketing work that emphasizes controversy and free play with language in the spirit of



contradiction. This in turn puts the widely believed discursive “gap” between marketing theory and marketing practice into a new perspective.

Jaakkola (2011) argues that discourse generated by service marketing research is largely irrelevant for practitioners dealing with professional services. In the light of my study, this suggests a myopic view of both relevance and language use. Brownlie *et al.* (2007) remark that the idea of “relevance” is itself irrelevant to marketing research because there is no such thing as an authentic representation of marketing work that might serve as template for “relevant” normative marketing research.

The output of marketing management research – the writings – are full of textual clichés, shaped by scholars’ use of literary means whether they recognize it or not (Brown 2005). Still, a marketing concept, such as “relationship marketing”, does not lose its relevance simply because it becomes a commonsense element of marketing discourse, as O’Malley *et al.* (2008) claim. Rather, as Hackley (2003b) argues, and my study demonstrates, it is an example of how a marketing axiom has become a slogan, and thus accessible and useful to marketers in a wide range of organizational settings. As formulated by Hackley, “the rhetoric of need satisfaction is invoked to render benign all done in the name of marketing” (Hackley 2003b:1340). Accordingly, addressing explicit or latent customer need is an effective rhetorical strategy to justify marketing activities (Marion 2006), much like talk about relationship marketing, which justifies marketers’ presence in every imaginable setting inside and outside an organization. Although it is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to stress that marketers’ and marketing scholars’ use of marketing concepts are not two isolated practices. According to Ellis *et al.* (2006), concepts travel back and forth in a two-way “intertextual” exchange between marketer’s talk and scholars’ theorizing. I am content to have illustrated how marketers obtain and employ versatile rhetorical resources (*copia*).

In discourse-oriented analyses of marketing, attempts are often made to expose *the* available repertoires that regulate what marketers can talk about, and thus what their practice might entail in general (Svensson 2003, 2006, Ellis and Hopkinson 2010, Ellis and Ybema 2010, Ellis and Rod 2014). I have had a different aim, and a different understanding of agency.

Instead of assuming that repertoires make up limits on what marketers can talk about I focused on marketers’ use of controversy and *copia*, which led to the suggestion that the marketer could be seen as a *homo rhetoricus* who plays freely with language for business purposes. This made it possible for

me not only to support what Ellis *et al.* (2006) found, that marketers consistently and comfortably employ paradoxes when they talk, but also to contribute a new understanding of the elastic, creative and expansive characteristics of marketers' talk.

In addition, this book has paid close attention to meetings, initially presuming that marketing work is primarily carried out in meetings. However, gradually I came to question my one-sided interest in meetings as distinct entities. I began investigating the argumentative context of meetings and found that marketing work is an *in-between* activity. The work carried out in-between meetings entails both arguing on the move, which marketers do when travelling physically, and a form of *kairotic* arguing they do *through* meetings (within meetings within meetings).

This conclusion contributes to research on marketing work because it provides reasons why marketing scholars should problematize their understanding of meetings. We know from Mintzberg (1971, 1973) and Tengblad (2006) that managers in general participate in a multitude of meetings, which makes their work fragmented. Drawing on Lien (1997) and Prus (1989a, 1989b), and indeed my own findings, this seems also to be the case with professionals involved in marketing. The problem is, as I see it, that the analysis of meetings often ends here, typically with an additional comment that meetings are complex events involving coordination by participants in various roles (Svensson 2003, 2006, Lowe *et al.* 2008, Lenney 2009, Darr and Pinch 2013). This is a great simplification of course, but still, as was discussed in the previous chapter, researchers who study everyday marketing often do so to explain how social order is accomplished, framed theoretically by some version of a drama metaphor. Ambiguity, tension and controversy are seen as obstacles to be overcome by marketers – for example, by means of “impression management”.

My contribution is an account of marketing work that acknowledges ambiguity, tension and controversy as *resources* by which to enact arguments and counterarguments present in the argumentative context. For example, in every formal meeting there is an informal meeting lurking in the context, and marketers might switch between them within seconds. And, in every meeting there is a *non-meeting*. Pushing it one step further, the idea of meetings and non-meetings is misleading. Building on my findings, marketing work *only* takes place in-between meetings.

According to Willard (1989), a meeting is an improvised argumentative happening. It is therefore not meaningful to investigate the essential differ-

ence between a marketing meeting, a sales meeting, a business meeting, a workshop, a meeting with friends and so on. These are happenings that might be present within the same conversation, which makes the meetings as multi-dimensional as the marketers themselves.

Who then are the marketers? In conventional marketing textbooks marketers are either nonexistent or one-dimensional caricatures of professionals entirely devoted to the principles of marketing management (Brownlie and Saren 1997, Hackley 2001, 2003b). Marketing is here a convenient occupational label to put on a certain type of managerial work to distinguish it from a broad set of other organizational processes and practices. The problem is that this label draws attention to a defined content of the job, rather than to the humans doing the job. For this reason self-reflexive inquiries are very rare in marketing textbooks, as if marketers were free of doubts and anxiety when they do their work.

Although we have seen a growing stream of research on marketing practice we still need to know more about the life-worlds of marketers (Ardley 2005, Hackley *et al.* 2009, Skålen and Hackley 2011, Woodall 2012, Ardley and Quinn 2014). We need greater sensitivity to the minds and behaviours of those we study; we need to put the people back into marketing research (Zaltman 1997).

My contribution to greater knowledge about the people in marketing is a portrayal of *sophistic marketers* who are detectable only through their use of rhetorical resources (*rhetorica utens*). It is a portrayal that makes the playful aspects of marketing practice explicit, as is often accentuated in postmodern marketing research (Brown 1993, 1998, Gómez Arias and Bello Acebrón 2001) but less noticeable in other domains of marketing research. It is also a portrayal of the creative aspects of marketing work, which are highlighted in Lenney's representation of marketers as "bricoleurs" – pragmatic language-users unhindered by, and uninterested in, the "proper" or "logical" aspects of discourse (Lenney 2009:145).

Then again, the portrayal of playful and creative marketers can be contradicted by the portrayal of insecure and anxious marketers, doing unwanted and disliked work, which I found when I turned my attention away from the marketers' heated moments of public performances. I found marketers to be full of emotional concerns. Who am I in the eyes of my co-workers, my supervisors, my customers and others I depend on? Do they like me, or despise me? Can I trust them? Would it be a good idea to invite their family to meet my family? What if we become too good friends? What if I fail to land a deal

with them? Bear in mind that these questions surfaced in conversations in which we discussed how business deals worth several millions of SEK might be accomplished.

My contribution to our understanding of marketers is a contradictory portrayal of them and their practices. It is a representation of concerned marketers with a fluid *ethos*, as contemporary sophists and examples of *homo rhetoricus* who are involved in nomadic multifaceted rhetorical business. This representation extends the one-dimensional marketing managers found in marketing textbooks, but comes very close to the representation of ordinary, greedy, compassionate, strange, troubled and self-reflexive marketing people found in Brown's fictional and hilarious story of marketing work, *The Marketing Code*, in which the secret to marketing success turns out to be failure: "hanging on in the face of repeated failure is the trait that distinguishes winners from losers" (Brown 2006:366) – an advice on marketing work, in the spirit of contradiction, as true and useful as any other.

## 9.2 Marketing work in a rhetorical perspective

In the first chapter of this book I argued that a rhetorical approach is conducive to a multifaceted account of marketing work. The subsequent literature review indicated a growing interest in the rhetorical issues of marketing (Laufer and Paradeise 1990, Tonks 2002, Norén 2007, von Koskull and Fougère 2011, Miles 2013, 2014). However, upon closer scrutiny of this growing interest I found few empirical studies that acknowledged the rhetorical tradition, and even fewer studies of everyday marketing practice. This brought me to the conclusion that rhetorical theory, with few exceptions, is yet to enter research on marketing practice despite the arguments in favour of a rhetorical analysis of marketing, and despite the interest in rhetoric in human sciences generally, often referred to as the "rhetorical turn" (Simons 1989, 1990).

The analysis of marketing work I have conducted has been influenced by Protagoras' doctrine of *antilogic*, meaning to argue both sides, in the spirit of contradiction. When humans argue they are involved in conversations in which there can be no last word since claims and counterclaims can be made indefinitely (Billig 1996, Mendelson 2002). Following this doctrine warranted a close investigation of the practice of arguing rather than the individual arguments brought forth in a conversation.

That said, how does rhetorical theory (*rhetorica docens*) contribute to research on marketing practice in general, and research on marketing work in particular?

The answer is to be found in the analysis in chapters 4-6 and the discussion in chapter 7-8. In these chapters I have employed a number of well-established rhetorical concepts (rhetorical situation, *ethos*, *kairos*, *copia*, *homo rhetoricus*, *antilogic*, etc.) to identify, analyse and discuss facets of marketing work that would otherwise have been poorly accounted for. This ensured that I was not overly burdened by the discourse of marketing textbooks that “regularly fail to capture the complexities and ambiguities [of] socially constructed, multifaceted realities” (Ardley and Quinn 2014:100).

The contemporary research on marketing practice, to which I seek to contribute, seems to be dominated by discourse analysis in various forms (Svensson 2003, 2006, 2007, Jaakkola 2011, Ardley and Quinn 2014, Ellis and Rod 2014). As Billig (1996) remarks, the discourse analyst does not examine arguing, and thus cannot easily account for controversy in conversations. If it is our intention to include controversy, lies, dishonesty, corruption, inconsistent storytelling and other argumentative practices, which might inform us of everyday organizational life, we should chose a rhetorical perspective rather than a discursive perspective, according to Conrad (2004). This in turn relates to Brownlie and Saren’s (1997) call for multidimensional portrayals of marketers in which they are allowed to share their experiences, concerns and feelings. Brownlie and Saren suggest that we should encourage marketers “to speak for themselves” beyond conventional marketing jargon, thus permitting them to “speak of the multiplicity of dimensions in which they are engaged, many of which they may be unaware of, or unable to comment upon” (Brownlie and Saren 1997:158-159). The problem, which Brownlie and Saren also acknowledge, is that marketers are good storytellers who are keen to draw on marketing jargon to justify their decisions and actions. Consequently, having marketers speak for themselves might still lead to rather one-dimensional accounts of the work they do. My take on this problem was to engage the marketers in controversy when doing fieldwork. I *argued* with them, and observed them argue with others and themselves. This arguing took place at their offices, at customers’ offices, in cafés and bars, at airports, in the car, in between meetings, etc., leading to the conclusion that “naturally occurring settings” for marketing work are... everywhere and any-time.

Typically, whenever someone told me “how marketing works, and why” I contradicted them, based on my own experience of marketing. This provoked new accounts of “how marketing works”, which I also refuted, leading to new accounts, and so on. In one case, after a long and heated conversation about what marketers do when they do marketing work, one of the marketers drove me to the railway station for my train home. The second I jumped into the car – with the audio recorder turned off, since the “research interview” was officially over – the person said to me “Well, you know, what we were talking about earlier, this is what *really* happened”.

Indeed, as Billig (1996) claims, arguing encourages dynamic, many-sided, self-reflexive and never-ending conversations between participants who are active in the process of research. In my study I found that marketers, when invited to argue, articulated a multitude of anecdotes powered with proverbial wisdom. Furthermore, when they argued, their accounts of everyday activities expanded and added new controversial facets to my understanding of their work. I am not suggesting this led to a more authentic portrayal of their work. How could it? There will always be another anecdote supposedly showing what *really* happened. My point is that the multifaceted empirical account of marketing work I bring forward relies both on rhetoric as analytic perspective (*rhetorica docens*) and rhetoric as practice (*rhetorica utens*). This if anything indicates the significance of a rhetorical approach to marketing practice in general and marketing work in particular.

### 9.3 Talking to self-reflexive marketers

In the analysis of rhetorical subjects I gave examples in support of Darr’s finding that marketing and sales professionals experience a constant tension between the hope and necessity of closing a deal, and the significant disappointments that meet them in their day-to-day work (Darr 2006:2). Indeed, as the marketers in my study told me, should they fail to bring in business they would end up in deep trouble. In other words they are destined to talk and think self-reflexively about what they accomplish, much like the salespeople Oakes studied, who “subject themselves to a constant daily regimen of self-scrutiny in order to produce a comprehensive and systematic self-assessment of their performance” (Oakes 1989:238). This leads me to the third and final purpose of this book.

I want this book to contribute to a constructive self-reflexive dialogue among marketers as a group and as individuals. I know I have already accomplished this with the marketers in my study. They knew I approached them for research purposes, which by no means stopped them from asking for advice on various matters, or begging me to confirm they did a good job, or referring to me when they argued with others. At the same time they were engaged in my research. They recommended people I should talk to, they arranged meetings, they suggested books for me to read, they gave me advice on how to analyse the work they did and they encouraged me in moments of despair. What I now give back to them is a multifaceted account of their everyday rhetorical business, interpreted by someone with long experience of marketing work.

Marketing managers believe that consultants understand business realities better than do marketing scholars (Ankers and Brennan 2002), which seems reasonable given the one-dimensional portrayals of marketers that dominate the writings in marketing management (Brownlie and Saren 1997, Hackley 2003b). A researcher with prior access to the life-world of marketers, like me, will give voice to an empirical account of what “goes on” that will be different from that of the marketers of interest, and certainly different from that of researchers with no prior experience of marketing. That is not to say that any of these voices is better or worse than any other. They are just different. This is an insight that emerged gradually during the research process.

Finally, this book does not close gaps between marketing theory and marketing practice. It does not claim to be relevant in the sense that I give hands-on advice on how to improve marketing work. Moreover, I have had no intention of writing up marketers as heroes or villains of contemporary society. If anything, I have tried to write a “confessional tale” of marketing work, in the spirit of contradiction, which enables and provokes self-reflexive inquires among marketers. This, I hope, may lead to better understanding of marketing work, and, why not, new insights into how to do business successfully.





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# Rhetorical business

## A STUDY OF MARKETING WORK IN THE SPIRIT OF CONTRADICTION

This book investigates marketing work in professional service organizations from a rhetorical perspective. It comes to the conclusion that this work is accomplished by self-reflexive marketers who are reminiscent of the ancient sophists – a diverse group of itinerant advisors whom came to Athens around the fourth century BCE for business reasons. Marketers travel – as did the sophists – from place to place, from idea to idea, much like a nomad who never moves into a territory but passes through it. Employing this perspective denies marketing work a fixed context, time and place. Marketing work is driven by occasionality, carried out by a marketer who is both a hunter and a maker of business opportunities. Marketers also share with sophists a playful attitude to language as they accumulate words and ideas, and then twist and bend them beyond recognition when arguing for business purposes. Overall this book contributes a multifaceted account of marketing work beyond the framework of conventional marketing ideas. It also shows how rhetorical theory can be used in marketing research to analyse aspects of marketing practice that would otherwise have been poorly accounted for.



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