

# RHETORICAL VERSUS DIALOGIC STAGING: “OUR MOMENT IS NOW”, OR THE DISCOURSE THAT MADE A PRESIDENT<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

As Barack Obama’s two terms of office draw to a close, this study returns to a decisive speech of the 2008 campaign, one that has received relatively little attention but begs examination because of the decisive role it played. The speech was delivered at the Jefferson Jackson fundraising dinner, during the Democratic primaries, in November 2007. It coincided with a turnaround in the polls in favour of Obama, who until then had been lagging well behind Hillary Clinton. In this study, which draws on enunciative pragmatic theory (cf. Angermuller, 2004), I compare Obama’s speech with Clinton’s in order to highlight the specificity of the former. Clinton’s speech conforms to the expected format of the event: it exemplifies *Dialogic Staging*, which construes the speech as a dialogic event, and is informed by markers typical of interaction, notably a series of questions and answers in which the audience participates via the chanting of a slogan. In contrast, Obama’s speech engages with *Rhetorical Staging*, in which the roles of speaker and addressee are shifted to another plane: the speaker rises to the status of *superspeaker* to address a wide-reaching community that transcends the direct addressees and the immediate here-and-now of the delivery; this setup is informed by a staging of the Word, based notably on a high rate of rhetorical figures of speech as opposed to interactive forms, which produces a sublimated form of dialogism. While these two setups are transverse to different types of genres, they prove particularly useful in the analysis of oratory: they represent two distinct approaches to the way the speaker invests the public speaking podium, and also the way the orator negotiates his/her status as a speaker who is called to represent a community in the context of a campaign speech.

**Keywords:** dialogic staging – enunciative pragmatics – rhetorical staging – superaddressee – superspeaker.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. THE SPEECH THAT MADE A PRESIDENT

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the journal’s reviewers for comments on an earlier version of this paper.

On November 10, 2007, at a time when the polls show him lagging behind Hillary Clinton, Obama is the last of six Democratic candidates to take the floor at the Jefferson-Jackson (J-J) fundraising dinner in Des Moines, Iowa. “Part of political lore”, which “has made or broken candidates in the past” (Berry and Gottheimer, 2010: 117), the dinner is a tradition during the Democratic primaries. A fortnight before the speech, Obama had given a disappointing performance during a debate between Democratic candidates. According to political analysts, he had “fallen into ‘professor mode’” and his staff was placing great importance on the dinner speech, hoping that it would give the candidate “a new, tightly scripted stump speech to use going forward –one with real spark” (Berry and Gottheimer, 2010: 118).

After the event, a turnaround in the polls indeed took place, with commentators identifying Obama’s performance on this occasion as one of his most decisive. *Financial Times* correspondent Chrystia Freeland noted how “genuine” Obama appeared, while NBC’s political correspondent David Shuster declared “Obama gave the sharpest and most effective speech he’s delivered in the campaign”.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, *Time Magazine*’s correspondent wrote:

The excitement generated by Obama's fiery but disciplined speech is a reminder of what it means to convince someone. The speech mixed inspiration and contempt, passion and outrage, autobiography and attack. It balanced language that both harkened back to the rich, poetic phrases of Martin Luther King (...) and the less subtle patois of contemporary politics (...).<sup>3</sup>

The performance therefore occupies a special position in Obama’s oratorical canon. If he fronts the event as somewhat of an outsider, it can be posited that by the time he ends his peroration, he has somehow managed to win the support of the audience –the live audience, but, more importantly, the audience at large, the American people. The speech presents a marked case of political discourse as “a form of political action, and as part of the political process”, an instantiation of discourse as social action and interaction (Van Dijk, 1997: 20), and therefore begs examination as a game-changer, a quasi-performative speech act.

The purpose of this study is to trace the status of the speech to specific rhetorical devices and to highlight some of the subtle discursive properties at play in the political process. To achieve this, I will compare Obama’s speech with that delivered at the same

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<sup>2</sup> Both speaking on the NBC program “Hardball”, November 12, 2007. Transcription available at: [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/21771593/ns/msnbc-hardball\\_with\\_chris\\_matthews/t/hardball-chris-matthews-nov/#.Vv-ifNL5ddg](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/21771593/ns/msnbc-hardball_with_chris_matthews/t/hardball-chris-matthews-nov/#.Vv-ifNL5ddg)

<sup>3</sup> “Can Obama Rock the Nomination?” by Ana Marie Cox, Sunday, November 11, 2007. <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1682827,00.html>

event by Hillary Clinton. Reference will also be made to the speech of John Edwards, the other forerunning candidate at the time. The three speeches have some things in common. For example, each conforms to a general problem-solution format, with the candidate beginning by underlining the problems of the current administration and then declaring the political action s/he would take as President (e.g. “As President, I will...”), without forgetting to appeal to the ideals and values of the American community. However, notable distinctions can be made.

Obama’s speech can be understood through the lens of “inspirational discourse pragmatics” (e.g. Cooper, 1989) and as an instance of “charismatic speech” (Rosenberg and Hirshberg, 2005). This said, if Obama’s charisma is generally considered to have weighed positively in the campaign, in the run-up to the J-J Dinner he had been accused of being “all charisma” and of “transcending” politics all too easily:

Perhaps, some theorized, [Obama] was somehow suffering from his ability to “transcend politics”. He was a rock star without an anthem, all charisma but no courage. (...) His speech at the dinner was the performance of a politician, not a rock star. *But he has found his voice.* (*Time Magazine*, 11/11/2007) (my emphasis)

This remark points to an ambivalent transcending force in the case of Obama: the verb “transcend” used transitively with the direct complement “politics” is connoted negatively to refer to a curtailing of policy issues, associated with a superficial “rock star” status and lack of courage. However, these ingredients are not completely absent from the personal voice that comes together in the J-J speech, as suggested by the adversative conjunction “but” (“*But he has found his voice*”). The issue of voice is to be related to work done on “voicing” (Lauerbach, 2006; Capone, 2010), “footing” (Goffman, 1981; 2007; Goodwin, 2007), speaker positioning and speaker-addressee relations (e.g. Horton and Wohl, 1956; Debras and l’Hôte, 2015; Wilson, 2015: 201). More specifically, Obama’s speech will be examined here from the point of view of interactional descriptions (Duranti, 1991; Giora, 1994) in combination with an enunciative pragmatic approach, as developed within the French context (Angermuller, 2014). Indeed, I will argue that a key factor is indeed the transcending dimension of the speech, not in terms of content but in terms of the discursive setup itself, as evidenced by speaker-positioning: Obama transcends the position of (simple) speaker and truly invests that of “orator”.

## 1.2. DIALOGIC VERSUS RHETORICAL STAGING

Importantly, Obama finds his own voice during an event which is highly constrained in terms of genre. The American political context has fostered the development of an intricate categorisation of speech sub-genres (e.g. Inaugural address, State of the Union, etc.) (Benoît à la Guillaume, 2012; Wilson, 2015) which can be extended to include the ritual of the J-J Dinner speeches. The dinner imposes a set format, whereby candidates speak one after the other on a stage set amidst the dinner tables, without pulpit or prompter. It therefore sets the scene for rare examples of political speeches delivered completely by heart, in the classical rhetorical tradition of *memoria*. In Obama's case, for example, it is said to be the only speech he has committed entirely to memory.<sup>4</sup> In addition, cheering and chanting are an essential part of the performance, with cues built into the scripts. The specific dynamics of the event are summed up below:

The J-J dinner is governed by a strict and –to many candidates– irksome set of rules. All major candidates are invited to speak, and they have to attend the entire dinner, which often drags on late into the night. The campaigns purchase tables for guests and cordon off sections of bleachers for their supporters; these guests are allowed, and to some degree expected, to participate in elaborate cheers. The cheers are often developed way in advance of the dinner, in part, because the candidates are required to memorize their speeches. There's neither a teleprompter, nor a podium (the event is in the round, with the audience on all sides), and candidates aren't allowed to bring a script or note cards onto stage. (Berry and Gottheimer, 2010: 117)

The J-J format therefore fosters what I have chosen to term *Dialogic Staging*. Dialogic Staging can be regarded as a specific type of enunciative/discursive setup. The phenomenon is described for example by Debras and L'Hôte (2015: 189) in a study of British party conference speeches, which are founded upon on a “meta-discursive representation of the speech itself as a dialogical event (...) highlighting [the speaker's] relation with the discourse's immediate addressees”. The setup exemplifies the modern trend towards “conversationalisation” in monologic, public and political discourse (Fairclough, 1994; Crystal, 2001) which particularly comes into its own in the public speaking arena. This can be traced to a greater frequency of language choices that bear a resemblance with conversation (Biber *et al.*, 1999) and are essentially dialogic in nature, notably dialogic and discursive markers (Schriffin, 1988; Schriffin, 2006; Tannen, 2007) as well as forms of appraisal (Martin and White, 2005).

As I will demonstrate in the qualitative and quantitative analyses that follow, Clinton conforms to the expected J-J format. Her speech provides a particularly striking

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<sup>4</sup> According to Jon Favreau, Director of Speechwriting for Barack Obama from 2005 to 2013, speaking at the Kennedy School of Government Institute of Politics, Harvard University, 2013.

example of Dialogic Staging, which is crystallised by a passage based on a series of questions and answers in which the audience participates via the chanting of a slogan.

The same observations can be made regarding the other speakers at the event, including John Edwards ...with the exception of Obama. Obama takes a risk in his J-J speech, a risk that perhaps only an “outsider” who is lagging behind in the opinion polls, can afford to take. His speech deviates from the norms imposed by the speaking event, a deviation which, paradoxically, works to legitimate his discourse and, in so doing, project him as a credible presidential candidate.

Indeed, as opposed to *Dialogic Staging*, Obama’s speech provides an archetype of *Rhetorical Staging* (Maingueneau, 2016). Rhetorical Staging denotes an enunciative setup transverse to different genres whereby participant roles are transcended. It plays on the intrinsically *asymmetrical* speaker-addressee relation inherent to oratory, which brings together *one* speaker and *multiple* addressees, and an alterity associated with the speaker’s position, materialized by the podium: physically, he is set apart from the audience, and is conferred an elevated status (Rossette, 2017). Compared to the speaker engaged in conversation, the prototype of interaction, the orator represents an essentially solitary figure, a position that gives him the power to both rise above and “embody” the community. Hence, Rhetorical Staging negotiates the ambivalent status of the speaker who is both a member of the community and at the same time rises above it, proving an essential tool in the legitimation of the political leader.

Rhetorical Staging contrasts with typical dialogic interaction in that the scope of the roles associated with both speaker and addressee are shifted to another level. The speaker does not enter into a dialogue with his audience, albeit a simulated one, due to the position he occupies. According to Maingueneau (2016), Rhetorical Staging involves a “superspeaker” (“surlocuteur”) and a “superaddressee” (“surdestinataire”). The latter term is adapted from Bakhtin –i.e. “he who *transcends* the verbal interaction” (Bakhtin, 1984: 337) (my emphasis)– with the difference that in Rhetorical Staging, the superaddressee includes the immediate audience. The orator addresses not only the live audience, but also one that is not physically present, and both are incorporated into a higher entity, a community united by shared values that are generally made explicit within the discourse. The speaker is also incorporated into this community. His status undergoes an upward thrust. Inhabited as it were by a higher voice, he becomes the spokesperson of a greater, noble cause. He *rises to* the status of a true orator, a term which in fact suffices to denote the role of a “superspeaker” within the context of public

address. The movements associated with speaker and addressee are hence interdependent: the speaker rises to the status of orator both in order to address and by addressing the wider community. Figure 1 sums up this participant structure, which will be substantiated below (cf. 3.2.–3.4.) with regard to Obama’s performance.

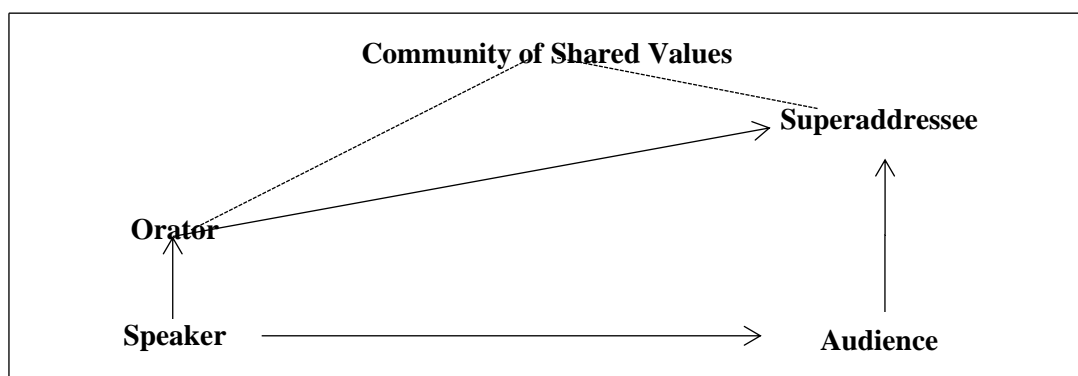


Figure 1: The participant structure inherent to Rhetorical Staging.

Such a participant structure informs a *sublimated* form of dialogism, which goes hand in hand with a staging of the Word. Part of the speech’s persuasive force rests upon its status as an aesthetic object, which mirrors the good and the beautiful of the higher cause being voiced (Maingueneau, 2016). Linguistic choices do not duplicate those of (dialogic) conversation, but foster to a far greater extent the formality and artistry of classical rhetoric, notably in the form of rhetorical figures of speech, echoing the contrast established for example by Capone (2010: 114) in political speeches between what he qualifies as “casual” and “elevated” style. I will now examine more closely Clinton’s and Obama’s speeches, both in the way they respectively exemplify each setup, and in terms of their ensuing legitimation strategies.

## 2. A COMPARISON WITH HILLARY CLINTON’S SPEECH

### 2.1. DIALOGIC STAGING

Clinton’s speech presents the epitome of Dialogic Staging, in accordance with the expected J-J format. It is built around a call to action in the form of a series of questions and answers. The audience is enjoined to repeat the slogan “Turn up the heat” in response to the questions “what are we going to do?” / “what do we do?”:

(1) Clinton: (...) So, when the Republicans stand by and watch rising gas prices and rising health care costs and increase in college tuition and falling housing prices, and struggling families, and they have turned China into our banker, what are we going to do?

Audience: Turn up the heat.

Clinton: And we Democrats, we believe that every child has a God-given potential that we want to help unlock. So, when the Republicans cut Head Start, and refuse to fix No Child Left Behind? What do we do?

Audience: Turn up the heat.

Clinton: And when we Democrats fight for universal health care and the Republicans veto health care for children and then let the insurance companies and the drug companies undermine health care for the rest of us, what do we do?

Audience: Turn up the heat (...) (Clinton)

As the audience chants the slogan “turn up the heat”, that takes on quasi-mantra status under the effect of the repetition, they brandish banners on which it appears (see visuals).<sup>5</sup> Such chanting enhances the role of the audience. In addition, use of the direct interrogative followed by the audience’s response simulates an interactive participant framework whereby speaker and addressee enter into a type of dialogue that places them on a relatively equal footing, a hallmark of Dialogic Staging.

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<sup>5</sup> Images taken from videos viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k35vOREtkVo> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tydfsfSQiYc> consulted July 20 2015.



This passage partly explains the high frequency of direct interrogatives in Clinton’s speech (thirteen instances overall) which provide the backbone to the “dialogic template”. The template is prominent from the very beginning. The speech opens with “you know”, belonging to the category of discourse markers that manage turn-taking in conversation (Schriffin, 1988):

(2) You know, on January 20th, 2009, someone will stand on the steps of the Capitol and raise his or her hand to take the oath of office as the 44th President of the United States of America. And we are here tonight to make sure that that next president is a Democrat. (Clinton)

In utterance-initial position, “and” also assumes discourse-marker status (Schriffin, 2006). Moreover, as will be discussed further below, the coordinator “and” instantiates paratactic clause-linkage typical of oral language, creating an “oral” coloring that works hand in hand with the dialogic markers. Clinton’s speech contains a high frequency of the coordinator “and” whatever the position (both within and between utterances) –125 instances, compared to 71 in Obama’s speech–, as exemplified in the following passage:

(3) I have fought against the privatizing of Social Security and against the failed policies of George W. Bush at home and around the world. And, when I am



President, I will work to reverse the damage of the eight years of George Bush and I will restore the pride and progress in America that should be our birthright. That is who America is. We want to be proud again. We want to be progressive again and we will, when I am president.

We can also look specifically at utterance-initial linkage, where coordination takes on discourse-marker status. Table 1 presents the frequency of various discourse markers in the speeches by Clinton and Obama, including coordinating conjunctions “and” and “but” in utterance-initial position. Disparities can be noted. The way Obama uses utterance-initial “and” often bears a close resemblance to sentence-initial “And” in written discourse, notably to signal final position of a logical development, or to create cohesion in association with other fronted items (Rossette, 2013).<sup>6</sup> In contrast, “and” is pronounced by Clinton not only over consecutive utterances, but also as an utterance-launcher, similar to its use in turn-taking: in the series of question and answers, “and” appears each time Clinton resumes her speech after the audience chants the slogan (“Turn up the heat” > “And we Democrats...”).

|                 | Clinton (n° of words = 1918): | Obama (n° of words = 1825): |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Now</i>      | 3                             | 1                           |
| <i>Well</i>     | 7                             | 0                           |
| <i>you know</i> | 6                             | 0                           |
| <i>So</i>       | 9                             | 0                           |
| <i>But</i>      | 7                             | 1                           |
| <i>And</i>      | 27                            | 25                          |

Table 1: Frequency of discourse markers in Clinton and Obama’s speeches.

Another main characteristic of oral discourse, deictic reference (“we”, “here”, “tonight”), is also prominent. Inscribing the speech in the here-and-now functions as an attention-getter. It legitimates the communicative act which is presented as informing a

<sup>6</sup> An example in final position: “I’m in this race because I want to stop talking about the outrage of 47 million Americans without health care and start actually doing something about it. I expanded health care in Illinois by bringing Democrats and Republicans together. By taking on the insurance industry. And that is how I will make certain that every single American in this country has health care they can count on and I won’t do it twenty years from now, I won’t do it ten years from now, I will do it by the end of my first term as President of the United States of America”. An example of “and” in conjunction with other fronted items: “And because that somebody stood up, a few more stood up. And then a few thousand stood up. And then a few million stood up. And standing up, with courage and clear purpose, they somehow managed to change the world”.

decisive moment. This proves a particularly useful strategy in the case of electoral speeches. In extract 2 quoted above, Clinton begins by locating the speech event with respect to the forthcoming election, itself part of an historical chronology (cf. “the forty-fourth President of the United States of America”). Unsurprisingly, Obama and Edwards begin in the same way, with utterances that also combine dialogic/oral markers. Edwards begins with the exact same discourse marker as Clinton, “you know”, followed by deictics (“now”, “we”) and a direct interrogative: (4) “You know, a little over a year from now, we will no longer have George Bush and Dick Cheney to kick around. Is that a great day for America?” (Edwards). Importantly, Obama’s opening lines contain the only direct interrogative of his speech. Discourse markers “now” and “but” appear in the same context:

(5) A little less than one year from today, you will go into the voting booth and you will select the President of the United States of America. Now, here’s the good news –the name George W. Bush will not be on the ballot. (...) But the question you’re going to have to ask yourself when you caucus in January and you vote in November is, “What’s next for America?” (Obama)

This opening provides a rare instance in Obama’s J-J speech of a dialogic peak, that can be explained due to the interactive “warming up” function performed by speech openings (Goffman, 1981). However, unlike Clinton and Edwards’ first utterances that are introduced by “you know”, Obama begins directly here with an (unmodalised) affirmation, fronted by a time adverbial (“a little less than one year from today”) which echoes narrative written mode.

In contrast, dialogic forms are present throughout Clinton’s speech. Let us examine the build-up to the question-answer sequence that introduces the slogan, borrowed from a quote attributed to former American President Harry Truman:

(6) Now, we are getting closer to the Iowa caucuses. They are going to be earlier than ever before. I know as the campaign goes on, that it’s going to get a little hotter out there. But that is fine with me. Because, you know, as Harry Truman said, if you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen. And I’ll tell you what, I feel really comfortable in the kitchen.

So, we have to ask ourselves, what is this election going to be focused on? Well, I will tell you what I want to do. I am not interested in attacking my opponents. I am interested in attacking the problems of America, and I believe we should be turning up the heat on the Republicans; they deserve all the heat we can give them. (Clinton)

This extract abounds with discourse markers –“now”, “but”, “you know”, “and”, “so”, “well”– to which can be added “because” to introduce a postposed justification (“Because, you know, as Harry Truman said...”). Moreover, construal of adversative,

causal and conditional relations (“but”, “because”, “if”, “so”) highlight the argumentative bent of the discourse. This is enhanced by emphatic forms of “meta performative comments” that “comment directly on one’s actions” and constitute in the context of public address “pragmatic acts” (Wilson, 2015: 201) (e.g. “And I will tell you what”; “Well, I will tell you what I want to do”). They also feature in Edwards’ speech (e.g. “And I say to all of you”; “And I’ll tell you, I’ll tell you exactly what I want to do”; “I spoke earlier about...”) Similarly, reference to the speaker’s own feelings and beliefs (“I feel really comfortable...”; “I believe we should be...”) construe an intimate tone, just like other forms of appraisal (Martin and White, 2005) located elsewhere in the speech, be they references to cognitive processes, or personal evaluations (e.g. “I know as the campaign goes on, that it’s going to get a little hotter out there. But that is fine with me.”). The Harry Truman quote takes the form of direct speech, and contains use of the second person pronoun “you” and the imperative form (“if you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen”). This is followed soon after by the direct interrogative (“So, we have to ask ourselves, what is this election going to be focused on?”).

The same devices appear in the passage immediately afterwards, leading up to the first question-answer pair:

(7) You know, you listen to the Republicans who are running this year, they see eight more years of George Bush. They see a nine trillion dollar debt and say let’s spend trillions more. They see that we had one rush to war and then say, wait, wait, why not have one more? Well, I think we are going to tell them, in the course of this campaign, that they don’t have any more time. America is done with the Republicans and their failed policies and their refusal to give America back the future that we deserve. But we Democrats, we have to decide what we are for. We Democrats believe that the middle class is the backbone of our country and the guarantor of the American dream. So, when the Republicans stand by and watch rising gas prices and rising health care costs and increase in college tuition and falling housing prices, and struggling families, and they have turned China into our banker, what are we going to do? (Clinton)

In addition to the use of discourse markers (“you know”, “well”, “but”, “so”), Dialogic Staging can be traced to the choice to adopt direct speech, which moreover contains a direct interrogative (“They [the Republicans]... say let’s spend trillions more”; “They... then say, wait, wait, why not have one more?”) as well as use of the second person pronoun in subject position (“you know, you listen to...”). The passage also contains four instances of the first person plural “we”, associated twice with “Democrats”.

Dialogic Staging is brought into sharp focus in Clinton’s peroration, which contains paratactic clause linkage (“and”), a direct appeal to the audience via the imperative form

(“let’s do it”; “let’s make sure...”), forms of appraisal (e.g. “I am so grateful”; “I absolutely appreciate”), and explicit argumentation (“if”, “because”):

(8) I am so grateful to all of the Iowans who are supporting me and I absolutely appreciate everything you have done for me and for all of the candidates throughout the campaign. I ask all of you to join my campaign. I ask you to go and stand for me in the caucus on January 3. If you will stand for me for a night, I will stand and fight for you every day in this campaign and every day in the White House. Because together, we are going to restore America's leadership, rebuild a strong and prosperous middle-class, reform the government and reclaim the future for our children. Let's do it, Iowa Democrats. Let's make sure that we turn up the heat and turn America around. Thank you and God bless you. (Clinton)

While space prevents me from presenting a detailed comparison with John Edward’s speech, it is significant that his speech also reflects a similar degree of dialogism, as typified by the following extract, which switches back and forth between personal pronouns (“we” > “I” > “you” > “we” – “you” having a generic usage here, but adding to the dialogic feel) within the context of discourse markers (“but”, “because”) and verbs of opinion (“I think”):

(9) We can meet our responsibility to our children, to our grandchildren, to ensure that in fact they have a better life. But I don’t believe you can bring about this change by taking money from these people, these lobbyists from Washington DC, I think you have to stand up for what’s right, you have to stand up for this system, and if you don’t believe it needs to be changed, then you’d better be willing to look your children in the eye and tell them that you’re going to turn this mess over to them. Because I don’t think we’re going to do that. (Edwards)

In both Clinton’s and Edward’s speeches, the association and the frequency of these different markers make for a predominantly dialogic tone, despite some examples of figures of speech, associated not with Dialogic but Rhetorical Staging (cf. 3.3). For example, accumulation, or the heaping up of words of the same category, that Greek rhetoricians named *synathroismos*<sup>7</sup> (“when the Republicans stand by and watch rising gas prices and rising health care costs and increase in college tuition and falling housing prices, and struggling families...” –extract 7). Similarly, example 6 contains a parallelism based on a contrast between negation followed immediately by affirmation typical of rhetorical style (“I am not interested in attacking my opponents. I am interested in attacking the problems of America”). While these rhetorical devices are exploited by Clinton, they are not nearly as frequent as in Obama’s speech (cf. 3.3).

Dialogic and Rhetorical Staging are also different in the way they each construe the figure of the speaker as spokesperson for the community, in order to legitimate the

<sup>7</sup> Traditionally, *synathroismos* typically involves the heaping up of adjectives. However, English oratory plays a great deal on the accumulation of nouns or noun phrases.

speaker as political leader. Indeed, the politician must negotiate the ambivalence of both belonging to the community and at the same time occupying a distinct status, a negotiation that lies at the centre of the participant framework of Rhetorical Staging. Clinton will exploit other legitimating strategies, as we will now observe.

## 2.2. LEGITIMATING STRATEGIES

Clinton legitimates her candidacy in two main ways: (i) by reference to her track record; (ii) by the construal of a community that is composite and hinges on the Democrat-Republican divide. In the first part of her speech, Clinton pushes home her political experience (e.g. “I have spent 35 years making a difference and fighting for what I believe matters to people.”). She enumerates her past action in her various capacities (“As a young lawyer...”; “as first lady”; “as Senator”). To introduce this, she indirectly presents herself as “a nominee who has been tested”. The extract also contains the most quoted line of her speech, “Change is just a word”, a reference to, and therefore a dig at, Obama’s play on the term “change” (e.g. the slogan “change we can believe in” that will become central in the campaign):

(10) But, you know what? Change, change is just a word if you do not have the strength and experience to make it happen. We must nominate a nominee who has been tested, and elect a president who is ready to lead on day one. Well, I know what it is going to take to win. I know it's going to take all of us and millions more and a candidate who will work and fight every single day for the next year and then will go into the White House determined to bring about that change that we care so much about. Well, fortunately, I have a little experience standing up and fighting for what I believe is right and what I think America needs and how we can get there together. (Clinton)

Secondly, according to the requirement of electoral discourse to construe the community that the candidate is called to represent (Capone, 2010), Clinton insists that such representation needs to be comprehensive, and implies that she will fulfil the role of standard bearer for all Americans: (11) “We will have a president again who gets up every day, worries about, thinks about, and fights for every single one of us.” (Clinton). Similarly, just after her opening lines, she immediately criticises the current administration for only representing a small portion of the community:

(12) Because, we know, after seven years of George W. Bush, seven years of incompetence, cronyism, and corruption, seven years of a government of the few by the few and for the few. We, as a nation cannot afford any other choice. We have to have a Democratic president because we have big challenges to meet. We have a war to end. We have an economy to revive. We have 47 million Americans to insure. We have an energy crisis to solve. We have a homeland to protect, we

have alliances to rebuild and we have a world to lead. So, we are ready for change.  
(Clinton)

She adapts the famous line from Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, "government of the people, by the people, for the people". The intertextual link between Clinton and the former president, albeit a Republican president, serves to place her within a long-standing tradition, and to project herself as the legitimate heir to such a legacy. However, at the same time, this extract insists upon the marked divide between Democrats and Republicans which forms a main argumentative thread of the speech. The term "Democrats" is used thirteen times in Clinton's speech, compared to the five instances found in Obama's. The sequence based on the slogan "turn up the heat" is intrinsically divisive: the entity "we Democrats" fills the role of agent who turns up the heat ...on the Republicans. Criticism of the latter is particularly prevalent in the following excerpt, and is accentuated by the devices of repetition and paratactic clause linkage ("and"):

(13) Clinton: You know, you listen to the Republicans who are running this year, they see eight more years of George Bush. They see a nine-trillion-dollar debt and say let's spend trillions more. They see that we had one rush to war and then say, wait, wait, why not have one more? Well, I think we are going to tell them, in the course of this campaign, that they don't have any more time. America is done with the Republicans and their failed policies and their refusal to give America back the future that we deserve. But we Democrats, we have to decide what we are for. We Democrats believe that the middle class is the backbone of our country and the guarantor of the American dream. So, when the Republicans stand by and watch rising gas prices and rising health care costs and increase in college tuition and falling housing prices, and struggling families, and they have turned China into our banker, what are we going to do?

Audience: Turn up the heat! (Clinton)

Interestingly, "America" and "we Democrats" appear as grammatical subjects of two consecutive utterances linked by the adversative coordinator "but", which suggests a distinction between the two entities, and even a relation of non-inclusion of the latter with respect to the former. At the end of this sequence of staged dialogue, and just before her closing remarks, Clinton refers to the concept of unity (cf. "united and together"). However, the aim is to unite in the fight against the Republicans, and the discourse itself is not unifying:

(14) Well, that is what it's going to take. We are going to turn up the heat on the Republicans and we are going to turn America around. But, we cannot do it if we are not united and together; not only Democrats, but Independents, and even Republicans who reject this radical experiment in extremism. I know we can win this election and I know we don't have a choice. I am proud to have the support of so many Democrats and Democratic leaders from across America. And I am especially proud to have the support of so many Democratic leaders from the so-

called red states to know that I can win. Leaders like the governor Beebe of Arkansas and Senator Bayh of Indiana and Governor Ted Strickland of Ohio, who is here with me tonight. Because, Democrats know, when we win Ohio, we win the White House. (Clinton)

Forms of appraisal heighten the sense of antagonism towards the Republicans (“even Republicans”, “so-called red states”). If the enumeration of the different components of the Democrat support base aims to bring them together, it in fact creates the opposite effect, as it reflects a very heterogeneous entity.

Similarly, the community is construed as a relatively composite entity. Clinton exploits the “storytelling” device, *exempla* based on reference to real-life individuals, a staple of the American political tradition (Benoît à la Guillaume, 2012), and forming the basis of inductive argumentation:

(15) This election is about the woman I met in LeClair. She and her husband both work really hard, but they had to sell half the family farm to pay their medical expenses. This election is about a veteran I met in Sioux Center, who bravely fought in Iraq and came home and had to keep fighting to get the health care that he needed. This election is about the mother from Greenville, whose daughter got sick and they did not have insurance, and she died. (Clinton)

The same technique is used by Edwards, whose speech focuses on the plight of one man born with a cleft palate, in order to criticise current health care policy. While such individual case studies serve as tokens for the community at large, their generic value hinges on a move from specific to general rather than the opposite. Importantly, Obama exploits storytelling in association with a collaborative dimension in many of his key campaign speeches, such as in his South Carolina victory speech delivered two months later (Capone, 2010). However, it is absent in his J-J speech, in which construal and incorporation into the community is instead underpinned by the Rhetorical Staging setup.

### **3. OBAMA’S SPEECH**



Obama is the last speaker to take the floor at the J-J Dinner. He speaks for just over twenty minutes. His speech is markedly different in terms of his rhetoric and his language, which reflect the underlying participant structure constitutive of Rhetorical Staging. The latter allows him to negotiate his status as leader. Through his speech, Obama forges a specific status for himself, drawing on his “outsider” status. I will begin with this aspect of his speech.

### 3.1 ENDORSING “OUTSIDER” STATUS

While Clinton refers to her experience, Obama plays on his status as an outsider.<sup>8</sup> This contrast in positioning characterises the rhetoric of the two candidates throughout the primaries, but it comes to a head at the J-J Dinner, where Obama’s team particularly

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<sup>8</sup> The isolated position adopted by Obama also contrasts with that adopted by John Edwards, who labours the point that he is not running on his own but as part of a double ticket with his wife: “A few months ago, Elizabeth and I had a decision to make. (...) And the decision we made is that we’re going to speak out for the voiceless in this country (...)”.



exploits the figure of the outsider with respect to the powers-that-be concentrated in Washington:

Obama's advisers argued for a speech that introduced a "new politics", in sharp contrast to the Washington status quo, where the average American had little voice in the political process. They wanted Obama to stress his opposition to the special interests, even if it wasn't what polls indicated people wanted to hear. All of these points provided a sharp contrast with Clinton, who would have a more difficult time portraying herself as a Washington outsider who stood up to the special interests. (Berry and Gottheimer, 2010: 118)

Playing to outsider status is not rare during election campaigns (for example, it formed the cornerstone of Bill Bradley's rhetoric in the 2000 presidential campaign against outgoing Vice President Al Gore), and is carried out by all three candidates at the J-J Dinner. Clinton's line "government of the few by the few and for the few" finds an uncanny echo in Edwards' "government for the lobbyists, by the lobbyists". However, it is Obama's exploitation of the theme that will attract the attention of the media. Next to Clinton's one-liner "change is just a word if you do not have the strength and the experience (...)", the media pick up on Obama's coining of the phrase "Washington textbook campaigns":

(16) And that is why the same old Washington textbook campaigns just won't do in this election. That's why not answering questions, because we are afraid our answers won't be popular just won't do. That's why telling the American people what we think they want to hear instead of telling the American people what they need to hear just won't do. Triangulating and poll-driven positions because we're worried about what Mitt or Rudy might say about us just won't do. If we are really serious about winning this election Democrats, we can't live in fear of losing it. (Obama)

Obama presents himself in contrast to Clinton by virtue of the anti-establishment status that he chooses to endorse, and by placing himself above political calculations, distancing himself from "triangulating and poll-driven positions" embodied by the two Republicans Mitt Romney and Rudy Giuliani, referred to by their first names to underline the very friendly relationship Clinton shares with them.

Of course, Obama's endorsement of outsider status is made all the more credible by his Afro-American origins. However, it can also be argued that it proves particularly powerful thanks to the way it finds a metalinguistic echo in the figure of the orator, according to a strategy exploited by Obama since the very beginning of his oratorical career. For example, we recall the way he first made his mark in 2004 during the Democratic National Convention in a speech in support of John Kerry, the Presidential candidate at the time. Obama begins in the following way:

(17) On behalf of the great state of Illinois, crossroads of a nation, land of Lincoln, let me express my deep gratitude for the privilege of addressing this convention. Tonight is a particular honor for me because, let's face it, *my presence on this stage is pretty unlikely*. (Obama, DNC Speech, 2004) (my emphasis)

Through these words, which foreground his personal story and the identity of his parents, Obama is not just evoking his legitimacy as a politician, but also his legitimacy as speaker, as agent of the oratorical act. In fact, the latter functions as a metaphor for the former. Obama engages with a reflexion on legitimacy, both with respect to his position on stage and his career path. The speech act *stages* outsider status. From an enunciative-pragmatic point of view, this explicating works, paradoxically, to legitimate his discourse and his position on stage, cancelling out or at least resolving the issue: the declaration proves an effective attention-getter, and the audience is more inclined to listen to what he has to say. The same device is used in the J-J speech, where Obama appropriates a series of “improbable” journeys: (18) “I am not in this race to fulfill some long-held ambitions or because I believe it’s somehow owed to me. I never expected to be here, I always knew this journey was improbable. I’ve never been on a journey that wasn’t.” (Obama). The indexical “here” (“I never expected to be here”) can be taken to denote both the stage/speaking event and, more generally, the speaker’s status as Democratic candidate running in the primaries. The oratorical and the political acts conflate. If the J-J speech allows Obama to truly “find his voice”, part and parcel of the process is the way outsider status stands the speaker in perfect stead to *embody* both his discourse and the community he represents. Symbolically, he adopts a separate, elevated but nevertheless central position, which allows him to bring together the community.

### 3.2. A SUPERSPEAKER WHO BRINGS TOGETHER THE FAR-REACHING COMMUNITY

Construing a sense of belonging is essential to electoral speeches, which often refer directly to the process of bringing the community together:

(19) This is not just politics, this is not just an election, this is the great moral test of our generation, and together, together, we are going to meet that test (Edwards)

(20) We have the chance to finally bring the country together. (Obama)

According to David Axelrod, Chief Strategist during the campaign, the aim of Obama’s J-J speech was to “rekindle the sense that we can actually organize ourselves as the

American people”.<sup>9</sup> The speech rises to this challenge thanks notably to the shift in the status of the speaker-turned-orator, as defined by Rhetorical Staging. Such a status cannot be perceived of in terms of “power” or “control”. The process is more subtle than that, and offers a contrast with legitimation construed in a “top-down” manner (i.e. through the voices of the elites and the institutions themselves) or, conversely, in a “bottom-up” direction (i.e. through the voices of the citizens or “the masses”) (Van Dijk, 1998: 257), via story-telling for example. Instead, Rhetorical Staging provides a model of legitimation which is not unidirectional but multidimensional and dynamic.

In addition, the community construed by Obama’s discourse does not stop at the country’s borders, but extends to the world at large. He announces his intention to address a message “beyond our shores” (in a key passage discussed below). At another point, he suggests that the scope of his action extends to the world at large:

(21) I, I’m in this race for the same reason I fought for jobs (in Chicago)...for the same reason (series repetition) because someone stood up...then a few thousand stood up (series end repetition “stood up”)...they somehow managed to change the world. (Obama)

It can therefore be argued that there is no potential limit to the community, both in terms of the scope of action (the ability to instigate change), and the shared values which such action both presupposes and promotes. This constitutes a high point of Obama’s rhetoric throughout the campaign –contrasting for example with the parochial partisan divide that is a recurrent *motif* in Clinton’s discourse: “Obama points to the pluralism among the American electorate and in American political discourse so as to provide a model for global progress; [he] rhetorically conflates American values with those held by people around the world” (Ferrera, 2013: 143).

The projection of shared values is a defining feature of epideictic oratory (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969; Dominicy & Frédéric, 2001) and is part and parcel of the sense of communion which draws speaker and addressee closer. Defined as “socially shared opinions” that are “abstract and general” (Van Dijk, 1998: 244-245) and are presupposed within the context of legitimating discourses (Van Dijk, 1998: 256), values are underpinned by a belief system that is explicitly construed by the verb “believe”. This verb is used in all three J-J speeches, but not in the same way. Clinton’s speech contains thirteen instances, Obama’s seven. Both use “believe” followed by a *-that*

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<sup>9</sup> Speaking on NBC, quoted supra (note n° 2).

clause as a verb of opinion, as well as the phrase “believe in” to refer to an act of faith. In both contexts, the verb is associated with “I” and “we” as grammatical subjects, however, in Clinton’s “we believe”, the personal pronoun refers to the Democrats, while in Obama’s discourse it correlates with “America”, which appears in the same context (“change that America/we can believe in”):

(22) A party that doesn’t just offer change as a slogan, but real, meaningful change –change that America can believe in.

(23) That’s why I’m in this race. That’s why I am running for the Presidency of the United States of America –to offer change that we can believe in.

Obama’s discourse also contains an intransitive use that is absent from Clinton’s and takes on a religious/transcending colouring. His speech ends with the words “An America that believes again”, echoing an earlier passage which explicitly refers to a rallying that crosses the partisan divide:

(24) It is because of these failures that America is listening, intently, to what we say here today –not just Democrats, but Republicans and Independents who’ve lost trust in their government, but want to believe again.

The interpersonal dynamics of Obama’s speech come to a head in the build-up to the peroration (at minute thirteen of Obama’s twenty-minute elocution):

(25) As President, I will end the war in Iraq. We will have our troops home in sixteen months. I will close Guantanamo, I will restore habeas corpus, I will finish the fight against Al Qaeda and I will lead the world to combat the common threats of the twenty-first century: nuclear weapons and terrorism, climate change and poverty, genocide and disease.

And I will send, I will send once more a message to those yearning faces beyond our shores that says: “You matter to us. Your future is our future. And our moment is now”.

America, our moment is now. Our moment is now.

The excerpt begins with “As President, I will...”. While Clinton makes one-off use of the same phrase to refer back to previous discourse (“As President, I will continue those fights”) Obama uses it to launch a series of anaphora “I/we will...”, ending with the message to be addressed “beyond our shores”. Creating another level in the structure of potential addressees of the discourse, this segment of embedded, direct speech is composed of three short utterances and offers a brief example of dialogic staging (cf. the markers “you”, “your”, “us”, “our”, “and”). However, at the same time, by the fact that it broadens the participant framework and shifts the discourse to another plane, it also introduces a transcending dynamic, particularly in conjunction with the phrase “our

moment is now” (to be examined in 3.5), repeated twice outside the segment of reported speech.

If Obama addresses a message outside the country, he does not forget his direct audience, and there is not the sense that he is speaking “over their heads”: use of the demonstrative (“those yearning faces”) presents the message’s benefactors as recognizable individuals rather than as a collective mass, the iteration (“I will send once again...”) points to essentially presupposed content, and the second utterance of the message realizes a coinciding of the destinies of the two communities (“your future is our future”). In terms of delivery, Obama slows down and lowers his voice to suggest complicity for the segment of reported speech.

After the reported speech, he repeats the line “our moment is now”, preceded by “America”. Without this apposed element, the iconicity produced by the repetition could suggest a transfer from the denotative to the interpersonal level, potentially blurring the distinction between the addressees “beyond our shores” and those on home soil. Thanks to “America”, it is clear that Obama has redirected his message back “onto home shores”. “America” therefore operates as a bridge between voices, and proves necessary to engage directly again with the live audience. What is interesting here is that “America” includes but does not stop at the direct audience. It qualifies as a specific type of apostrophe which, as a figure (from the Greek *apostrophos*: “turn away”) allows the speaker to turn away from the immediate addressee in order to appeal to a third party who is intrinsically absent. This is not the case here, as it participates in the construal of a mass community, *in which the direct addressee is included*, triggering the participant framework specific to Rhetorical Staging. Indeed, the direct audience is not made to feel that they are being pushed to the sidelines: they meet with instant cheers the utterance introduced by “America” –in combination with the repetition, which acts as an applause cue (Atkinson, 1984). The immediate audience constitutes a necessary mediator in order to reach the wider community. At the same time, they are “swept up” into this wider community.

Obama is the only candidate at the J-J Dinner to use “America” as a term of address in this way.<sup>10</sup> Clinton’s “Let’s do it, Iowa Democrats” is less far-sweeping, and more restrictive than “Democrats”, that Obama also uses several times, as well as “Iowa”:

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<sup>10</sup> Moreover, it contrasts with the inherently dialogic tone of the famous “Hello Chicago” with which Obama begins his victory speech on the night of his election as President.

(26) If we are really serious about winning this election Democrats, we can't live in fear of losing it. (Obama)

(27) That's why I'm running, Iowa, to give our children and grandchildren the same chances somebody gave me. That's why I'm running, Democrats, to keep the American dream alive for those who still hunger for opportunity, who still thirst for equality. (Obama)

These examples contrast with Edwards' more fraternal "brothers and sisters": (28) "And the question, brothers and sisters, is why? Because there is incompetence, there is extraordinary incompetence in this administration." (Edwards). As a term of address, it can be argued that "brothers and sisters" also functions to construe a community in which both speaker and addressee are associated. However, such a community proves more restrictive than the appeal to "America", which includes all Americans, both alive and dead. There is the sense that the dead are looking down on the assembly, who therefore feel the weight of the legacy, and are summoned to pursue it. The dead are as if they were invited to be a direct witness, a device that legitimates the speaker as leader of the community. He appropriates a genealogy, just as he explicitly refers to the lineage of previous Democrat presidents, in association with the values that found the community ("when we lead not by polls, but by principle, not by calculation, but by conviction"). This contrasts with Clinton's unique reference to a former president, Truman, via the quote that introduces the somewhat mundane image of a kitchen when compared to Obama's reference to "a common purpose, a higher purpose":

(29) This party, the party of Jefferson and Jackson, of Roosevelt and Kennedy, has always made the biggest difference in the lives of American people when we lead not by polls, but by principle, not by calculation, but by conviction, when we summoned the entire nation to a common purpose, a higher purpose. And I run for the presidency of the United States of America, because that is the party that America needs us to be right now. (Obama)

Reference to the emblematic American figure of Martin Luther King works in a similar vein –during a rare instance of a more intimate tone, the only moment when Obama "descends from his oratory pedestal" to evoke his personal motivations behind his candidacy:

(30) (...) I am not in this race to fulfil some long-held ambitions or because I believe it's somehow owed to me. I, I never expected to be here. I always knew this journey was improbable. I've never been on a journey that wasn't. I am running in this race because of what Dr. King called "the fierce urgency of now" (...) (Obama)

We can hence identify the different participant roles that institute Rhetorical Staging, as represented in Figure 1 (cf. section 1.2.): Obama, the speaker, rises to the status of

“orator” by addressing not just the direct audience (those present at the J-J Dinner) but the extended audience, the entire nation of Americans, who constitute the “superaddressee”. All participants, including the speaker himself, are incorporated into an overarching community, founded on the values that are made explicit and are presented as timeless. Indeed, in the extract above, reference to the past –just like reference to the future (cf. “our children and grandchildren”)– mark a departure from the immediate here-and-now of the delivery, which is also transcended.

### 3.3. “OUR MOMENT IS NOW”: AMPLIFICATION OF TIME AND PLACE

The quote in extract 30 from Dr. King’s 1963 “I have a dream” speech contains the adverbial “now” which also features in the one-liner of Obama’s speech, “Our moment is now”. This phrase underscores the contingency on the here-and-now which, according to the hypothesis developed here, results in a saturation and therefore an amplification on the spatial and temporal planes, contributing to the same transcending dynamic engendered by the appeal to “America”.

As noted in 2.1., investing the moment of delivery, notably via deictic reference, serves to gain the audience’s attention and to legitimate the speech act (e.g. “I stand here today before you...” –Edwards). It corresponds to an enactment of *kairos*, that sense of the opportune revered by and theorised in rhetoric –the importance of grasping the right moment which nevertheless rests on chance, the result of a delicate balancing act. All three speeches multiply reference to the here-and-now, as exemplified in Clinton’s opening lines:

(31) Thank you. Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you Iowa Democrats. Thank you all. Thank you. What a night. What a great, great night. Thank you all. You know, there's no better place to be than right here in Iowa with the great elected officials that you have: your governor, your lieutenant governor, your congressional delegation, our wonderful friend, Senator Tom Harkin and his wife Ruth. And isn't it a special treat to have the Speaker of the House, Madam Speaker here tonight? (Clinton)

Clinton plays on deictic reference just as much, if not more than Obama. For example, her speech contains four instances of the adverbial “here” (Obama’s contains three instances), seven instances of “this election” (Obama: four), and three instances of “tonight” (Obama: zero). However, Clinton favours “tonight”, which is more restrictive than “today”, preferred by Obama, who uses it three times (Clinton: zero). In the same way, Clinton lays much emphasis on the state of Iowa, as demonstrated by her opening

lines, and the focus on the state where the J-J Dinner takes place, along with its citizens, continues throughout her speech (“This election is about those Iowans and those Americans who...”; “Now, we are getting closer to the Iowa caucuses. They are going to be earlier than ever before”). Her speech remains heavily embedded in the local context, and it lacks the more universal feel of Obama’s.

What is interesting in Obama’s J-J speech and is specific to Rhetorical as opposed to Dialogic Staging is the tension that results from the universal message addressed “beyond home shores” and the line “Our moment is now”, which brings into sharp focus the conditions of delivery of the speech event itself. The line, which boasts the trappings of a catch phrase (e.g. concision, present tense, relational clause), has entered posterity, alongside others coined during Obama’s campaign to convey a similar message: “With the now-iconic phrases, ‘Yes we can’, ‘Choose hope over fear’, and ‘Our moment is now’, Obama delivered an uplifting message of unity, change, responsibility and faith” (Dorff, 2009: 9). The phrase is framed by the repetition of the diphthong /əʊ/, a euphonic chiasmus which creates a tight association between all-inclusive personal reference –“*our*”– and the immediate temporality of the speech event –“*now*”. By bringing together participants and time reference which coincide with the moment of delivery, the line operates a dramatic staging of the speech itself, which indeed takes “centre stage”, and is hence legitimated.

At the same time, the lexical item “moment” enters into an intricate intra- and inter-textual network. Another speech, delivered late in the campaign, combines it with the same apostrophe, “America”, where I would argue that the demonstrative determiner “those” functions both intratextually (referring back to “defining moments”, two utterances earlier in the same speech) and intertextually, reaching out to the network established over the previous months:

(32) You have shown what history teaches us –that at defining moments like this one, the change we need doesn’t come from Washington. Change comes to Washington. Change happens because the American people demand it –because they rise up and insist on new ideas and new leadership, a new politics for a new time. America, this is one of those moments. (Obama, August 28, 2008) (example quoted in Maingueneau, 2016)

Returning to the J-J dinner, the noun “moment” serves to frame the speech. It features in the opening lines (“We, we are in a defining moment in our history”) as well as at the very end (“In this election, in this moment...”) with, importantly, a move from rhematic to thematic position, and from indefinite to definite reference (“a defining



moment” > “this moment”). The term “defining moment” also appears at the beginning of the Chicago victory speech, where, significantly, it immediately takes a definite determiner in thematic position: (33) It's been a long time coming, but tonight, because of what we did on this day, in this election, at this defining moment, change has come to America. (Obama, Chicago, 4/11/2008). “A/this defining moment” presents the speech event as *the* reference point towards which all forces converge (cf. *momentum*), an amplified *moment* of enunciation which informs an important moment of history. Hence the stocktaking that immediately follows in the J-J speech, constructed around a series of anaphora (“We were promised... and instead we have...”) ending by reiterating the fact that the country has arrived at a decisive moment (“We have the chance to finally bring the country together”).

Obama projects himself as a determining figure in the American narrative. If this type of staging of the discourse is a typical strategy of election speeches (e.g. “It is time for America to stand up. It is time... It is time...” –Edwards), he exploits it to a particularly high degree, to the extent that it is inextricably linked with his “rhetoric of hope” whereby he “portends the arrival of a moment pregnant with meaning, a pivotal intersection of historical trends that will lead to the creation of a new order from out of the ruins of the status quo” (Ferrera, 2013: 142). Once President, Obama will continue to play on the word “moment”,<sup>11</sup> sometimes in novel associations, such as “Sputnik moment” in an attempt to liken current economic challenges to the space race of the past:

- (34) So 50 years later, our generation's Sputnik moment is back. This is our moment.  
(...) We can do what we've been doing. Or we can do what this moment demands, and focus on what's necessary for America to win the future.  
(...) We will meet that Sputnik moment, but we're going to all have to do it together. (Obama, 6/12/2010)

The lexical item “moment” forms a network that constitutes a cornerstone of Obama’s rhetorical repertoire. The recurrent insistence on a here-and-now of the speech act

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<sup>11</sup> Unlike “instant”, “moment” points to a stretch of time that can be invested (cf. “we are in a defining moment”), in order to play host for example to emotion –hence its potential to receive be qualified (“Sputnik moment”). However, “moment” proves narrower than “time”, with which it appears in a recurrent couplet: e.g. “America, we have come so far. We have seen so much. But there is so much more to do. (...) This is our chance to answer that call. This is our moment. This is our time.” (Chicago Victory speech, 4/11/2008). The couplet articulates a movement of expansion, mirroring, in another speech, the extension realized at the level of participant structure in the apposed terms of address in “People of Berlin, people of the world, this is our moment. This is our time.” (Berlin, 24/7/2008).

which is restricted and concentrated leads to a saturation of the moment of delivery, which is therefore transcended.

### 3.4. A STAGING OF THE SIGNIFIER

Finally, Obama's speech contains no pseudo interactive sequence via the chanting of a slogan by the audience. Instead, in accordance with Rhetorical Staging, it reflects a staging of the signifier, realised typically by rhetorical figures of speech. Compared to Clinton's discourse, that of Obama reflects a wider range and a higher density of figures, namely repetition (anaphora), syntactic parallelism and accumulation. The cohesion of Obama's speech is founded on a number of series of anaphora: "We were promised" (three instances); "that is why" (two series: three instances + five instances); "I will" (seven); "I don't want to" (eight); "that's why I'm running" (twice), "that's why I'm asking" (three). Accumulation is also exploited, notably pairings of nominal phrases: "the same fear-mongering and swift-boating" –sometimes integrated into an overarching ternary unit ("nuclear weapons and terrorism, climate change and poverty, genocide and disease"). Nouns taking pre-modifiers hark back to formulaic literary oral style (Lord, 1960) (e.g. "those yearning faces"; "some long-held ambitions").

The following sequence contains anaphora in a series of nominal phrases –that is, utterances that are not founded on a (non-embedded) finite verb form ("A party that..."):

(35) And I run for the Presidency of the United States of America because that's the party America needs us to be right now. A party that offers not just a difference in policies, but a difference in leadership. A party that doesn't just focus on how to win but why we should. A party that doesn't just offer change as a slogan, but real, meaningful change –change that America can believe in.

Utterances lacking a non-embedded finite verb mark a relatively recent development in public speaking style in English: they are absent in speeches by orators such as Lincoln, Churchill, Kennedy and King, but appear for example in many of Obama's speeches, as well as in contexts outside political discourse (e.g. Ted talks, Steve Jobs' keynotes) (Rossette, 2015). Such nominals are rare in prototypical spoken language, which hinges on finite verbs that engender grammatical complexity (Halliday, 1989), but are also rare in written English. Their use here participates in a staging of the signifier: they confer a high degree of information focus and are generally enhanced by pausing and a play on change in rhythm.

The minor clauses in the excerpt above also echo the syntactic parallelism of an antithetical structure, whereby a negative clause is followed by a positive clause introduced by “but” (“A party that doesn’t just... but...”). These are characteristic of public address (e.g. J.F. Kennedy’s “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country”<sup>12</sup>) and are exploited by Obama elsewhere in the speech (e.g. “I don’t want to pit Red America against Blue America, I want to be the President of the United States of America”; “We can make this election not about fear, but about the future. And that won’t just be a Democratic victory, that will be an American victory”). Syntactic parallelism together with repetition and accumulation provide the linguistic template for the rhythmic variation introduced during the oral performance. Indeed, play on rhythm (including pausing) emphasises the materiality of the message, and produces a declamatory delivery style which, again, can be contrasted with the prosody of conversation.

The distinction between Dialogic and Rhetorical Staging is also shaped by the types of speech acts that govern the discourse. Obama’s speech contains only one example of a direct interrogative, itself embedded in prospective reported speech, located in his opening lines:

(36) [A little less than one year from today, you will go into the voting booth and you will select the President of the United States of America. (...)] But the question you’re going to ask yourself when you caucus in January and you vote in November is, “What’s next for America?” (Obama)

The argumentation is not the same as Clinton’s. In terms of classical rhetorical categories, it can be argued that its persuasive weight has less to do with *logos* than with *ethos* and *pathos*, which are realized precisely through the figures of speech. For Cockcroft and Cockcroft (2005: 187), figures of speech qualify as “instruments of thought *and feeling*” (my emphasis). In the case of anaphora, for example, the function is “more expressive and inciting than informative” (Magri-Mourges, 2015: §10) –a description that can be extended to the other rhetorical figures and linguistic forms which stage the signifier and contribute to the process of uplifting the audience, who are integrated into a community.

The full repertoire inherent to the staging of the signifier is exploited in Obama’s peroration:

(37) That’s why I’m running, Iowa, to give our children and grandchildren the same chances somebody gave me. That’s why I’m running, Democrats, to keep the

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<sup>12</sup> Inaugural address, January 20, 1961.

American Dream alive for those who still hunger for opportunity, who still thirst for equality. That's why I'm asking you to stand with me, that's why I'm asking you to caucus for me, that's why I am asking you to stop settling for what the cynics say we have to accept. In this election –in this moment– let us reach for what we know is possible. A nation healed. A world repaired. An America that believes again. Thank you very much everybody. (Obama)

This excerpt is built on several examples of anaphora (“that’s why I’m running”; “that’s why I’m asking” –with the progressive tense suggesting presupposed content, unlike Clinton’s “I ask you”), as well as syntactic parallelism (“those who still hunger for opportunity, who still thirst for equality”). It ends with the ternary series of utterances formed by independent nominal phrases (“A nation healed. A world repaired. An America that believes again”). These last lines also inscribe reference to a far-reaching community that includes future generations (“our children and grandchildren”) and the values that found the community (“keep the American Dream alive”), which create a contrast with the insistence on the here-and-now, that is therefore saturated (“in this election, in this moment”) –echoing the key line of the speech, “our moment is now”.

## CONCLUSION

The J-J speeches provide a prototypical example of the way discourse “accomplishes political action”, part of the process of “simply ‘doing politics’ by text and talk” (Van Dijk, 1997: 20). This is amplified in the case of Obama, as his speech orchestrates a discursive shift, moving away from lofty, “professor” mode, towards the appropriation of a transcending voice which plays a part in the turnaround in the polls in his favour.

According to the hypothesis defended here, Obama does not choose to go down the beaten discursive track of the expected J-J Dinner format and instead successfully engages with Rhetorical Staging –a choice that echoes at the discursive level his fostering of “outsider” status within the political landscape, in contrast to Clinton, whose argument is heavily founded on her political experience. At the J-J Dinner, the norm is to get the audience to interact by chanting a slogan, a particularly marked case of Dialogic Staging. Clinton’s speech conforms to this norm, and reflects the other defining features of Dialogic Staging: that is, frequent use of discourse markers, deictics, direct interrogatives, meta-performative comments, forms of appraisal and reported speech.

Conversely, Obama's speech does not call on the audience to participate by the chanting of a slogan. Instead, Obama invests the extraordinary speaker status that is inherent to the oratorical act, rising to the status of orator, or *superspeaker* who addresses a wide-reaching community that transcends the direct addressees and the immediate here-and-now of the delivery. This contrasts with the intrinsically composite and more restricted community, as well as the divisive rhetoric, that underpin Clinton's speech. Rhetorical Staging is also informed by a staging of the signifier in which a high rate of rhetorical figures come into play, making for a sublimated form of dialogism.

Finally, the coming together of the far-reaching community is intensified by the focus placed on time and place of delivery, as summed up in the emblematic catchphrase "our moment is now" –the hallmark of the speech that made a President, and a metaphor for the oratorical act itself.

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