

## Rhetoric in Scandinavia Retoryka w Skandynawii

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### **Rhetoric in Scandinavia – a foreword**

### **Retoryka w Skandynawii – wprowadzenie do tematu numeru**

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## Rhetoric in Scandinavia – a foreword

### 1. Intro: About this issue

Rhetoric is, by now, an established academic discipline in Scandinavia. From its beginnings as a side interest and field of study for scholars in literature and metrics in poetry, philology and linguistics, rhetoric has grown and expanded as a field of study throughout the last fifty years. Today, one finds rhetoric sections at eight universities across Denmark, Sweden and Norway, the journal *Rhetorica Scandinavica* is in its 26th year of circulation (now online and open access), students can earn BA, MA, and Ph.D. degrees in rhetoric, scholars meet at the bi-annual *Nordic Conference for Rhetoric Studies* (NKRF), numerous scholarly publications and textbooks in the Scandinavian languages are published, and a Nordic Rhetoric Society has been formed. It is fair to say that a Scandinavian rhetoric community exists.

The connections between rhetoricians in these three countries are not purely due to geographical proximity. Scandinavia, and the entirety of the Nordic countries (including Iceland, Finland and the Faroe Islands), can be considered a cultural region due to a long, shared history. The countries' political systems follow the so-called Nordic model, and there are countless examples of transnational cooperation in governance, business, academia, culture, and social movements. At a more pragmatic level the fact that three Scandinavian languages are mutually intelligible means that the journal and conferences are multilingual, allowing scholars to publish research in their native tongue. At the same time, as rhetoric departments across the region are growing more international the presence of English as a language of instruction and research is growing, thus making the milieu increasingly international.

The title of this special issue, “Rhetoric in Scandinavia”, is a play on its several possible meanings. Recognizing the possible implications of the region’s interconnectedness raises the questions: Is there a qualitatively distinct rhetorical scholarly tradition in Scandinavia beyond institutional and interpersonal connections? Is it possible to speak of a Scandinavian rhetorical culture for rhetoricians to study, and what would be its features? And more broadly, how is rhetoric perceived and conceptualized in a Scandinavian context?

In this issue, we make no pretense of answering these questions in any exhaustive manner. Rather, we have included scholarly articles, book reviews, a workshop report and a collection of Ph.D. project presentations to illustrate the diversity of current research in, and on, Scandinavian rhetoric. In this fashion, we hope to contribute not only to wider knowledge about Scandinavian rhetoric research but also to the fostering of stronger ties between European rhetoricians and beyond – an important effort that *Res Rhetorica* is taking a leading role in.

## 2. Rhetoric in Scandinavia: A short history<sup>1</sup>

The roots of the contemporary discipline of rhetoric in Scandinavia can be traced to the 1960s, when scholars from other disciplines began to take an interest in the rhetorical tradition as a resource for studying both historical and contemporary discourse forms. In Denmark the subject was introduced through the department of Nordic philology in Copenhagen. In Sweden, interest in rhetoric sprouted from early modern literature studies in Uppsala in the 1970s. In Norway the roots are more diffuse, but the discipline had a definitive breakthrough with the publication of Georg Johannesen’s *Rhetorica Norvegica* in 1987. Since these beginnings, the discipline has grown progressively through publications, the establishment of courses and study programmes, academic networks, and a growing number of university positions in rhetoric. Currently, the institutional setting of the subject is typically as a section in cross-disciplinary departments such as media studies, education, and literature.

The growth of the discipline and the development of inter-Scandinavian research connections happened in tandem, but really consolidated from the late 1990s. 1997 saw the landmark first issue of *Rhetorica Scandinavica*, a journal publishing scholarly work on rhetoric in the Scandinavian languages and founded as a private initiative by three rhetoric graduates. With it came the start of Retorikförlaget, an independent publisher of rhetorical research and literature. In 1999, the first tri-annual Nordic Rhetoric Conference (NKRF) was held in Örebro, Sweden. In the first decade of the new millennium, rhetoric continued to grow, with new

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1. This historical account is based on the comprehensive account in (Kjeldsen and Grue 2011).

study programmes established in Aarhus, Denmark; Örebro, Lund and Södertörn in Sweden; and Oslo and Bergen, Norway. With these developments an increasing number of Scandinavians with an education in rhetoric, counting students who have taken single courses, BA- and MA degrees, and Ph.D.'s has meant that universities are now able to hire teachers and researchers with a solid rhetoric education, and on the general job market a professional profile as rhetorician is becoming increasingly recognized – and occasionally even sought after.

Scandinavian rhetoric has thus been growing steadily throughout the last 50 years. It has done so in both a centrifugal and centripetal manner, as rhetoric studies in Scandinavia now comprise a wide range of research interests, theoretical influences, methods and networks. As with other regions around the world, it is fruitful to think of Scandinavian rhetoric emerging as a research field out of a range of interacting foundations, and still currently undergoing a process of consolidation into a discipline in its own right. Yet the intra-Scandinavian connection may be considered as enjoying a unique status as a regional and international scholarly community. 2021 marks a special year in this process, as this was when the Nordic Rhetoric Association (Nordisk retorikförening) was founded as a conscious effort to formalize the existing interpersonal and intra-institutional connections and organize rhetorical scholars in the Nordic countries, to ensure the continuation of established collaborations, to promote more integration and collaboration in research and teaching, and to provide a stronger voice in Nordic academia.

### **3. Is there a distinct Scandinavian Rhetoric?**

Given the wide range of research interests and fields engaged by Scandinavian scholars, it is difficult to give a unifying account of any typically Scandinavian strand of rhetorical studies. The Scandinavian research community produces scholarly contributions in such a wide range of areas as classicism, history of rhetoric, pedagogy and didactics, argumentation, historical and contemporary literature, political rhetoric, legal rhetoric, spatial rhetoric, non-literary prose, public rhetoric, popular culture, social movements, and the rhetoric of science. Theoretical orientations include materialist rhetoric, ontology, epistemology, political theory, and of course, classical and contemporary rhetorical theory. A decidedly more uniting factor is the local empirical focus: Scandinavian rhetoricians unsurprisingly tend to study rhetorical phenomena in their national contexts. While this would be the case in most rhetorical scholarship internationally, there is something to be said about the entangled national histories, shared language and cultural similarities among the countries. There are institutional, cultural and political differences between Denmark, Norway and Sweden, but it is often the

case that a case study in one country will have clear parallels in other countries. Underlying these connections are the similarities in language. While there are grammatical, lexical and idiomatic differences, more often than not communication practices rest on a set of assumptions that are similar enough between the countries to be not only mutually intelligible but also relevant for understanding one's own societal context. These assumptions also underlie the many cultural and political exchanges within the Scandinavian countries that provide ample cases for rhetorical studies. This interconnectedness is not only evident from a range of international and comparative studies. There are several examples of research projects across borders where a case is selected from one of the neighboring countries.

A trend in the diversification of methods is visible over the last two decades. While still firmly rooted in interpretative academic traditions, what was earlier a strong common core in methods of textual criticism has been increasingly supplemented by other methods. Notable examples are interview and audience studies, “think-aloud” and protocol studies, ethnographic methods, quantitative analysis, experiments, and different kinds of computer assisted big data analysis. Several of the contributions to this issue reflect this development.

Another locus of commonalities is in rhetoric instruction. In general, contemporary study programs in Scandinavia place an emphasis on the interplay of theory and practice. A student attaining a BA or MA in rhetoric in Scandinavia will have taken courses in the history and theory of rhetoric, and rhetorical criticism, as well as practical speech and writing training, and in some cases speech and writing pedagogy. Many courses offered as electives to students in other programs offer a mix of theoretical learning and practical training. While course literature varies, the core textbooks are typically in the national language, typically with local examples. It is however common to see texts in a different Scandinavian language included in the course curriculum, alongside English language texts—at least partially explainable by the common source of academic literature that is *Rhetorica Scandinavica*.

Comparing Scandinavian rhetorical scholarship with other national or regional research environments, one might say that one thing that characterizes much of the research done is a slightly different undertone. Although there is no dearth of criticism of politically and institutionally problematic rhetorical practices, Scandinavian rhetoric scholars often write from an orientation that does not construe society or the political structure as inaccessible, incorrigible or fundamentally flawed. This may in part be a function of the high level of trust characterizing the Nordic countries and also be considered a function of the relative smallness of the national communities; scholars' access to public media and official records (in Sweden a right enshrined in the constitution in 1766), and even individual

politicians or their offices is perhaps better than in many other places in the world. The prevalence of social corporatism in the Scandinavian countries' political systems, often called 'the Nordic model' likely plays a part in this. Academic institutions in Scandinavia are typically (though not exclusively) public, and only in exceptional cases charge student fees. So, it is reasonable to believe that the Scandinavian scholarly *ethos* has, in some capacities, important notes of a public servant understanding of academics. This finds somewhat different tangible expressions across the national systems and institutional practices. So, while most research formulates criticism on various levels, one may often detect a melioristic undertone: There is often a suggestion of what might be changed for the better, a cooperative or dialogic rather than agonistic normative orientation, or a recognition of the potential reasonability of even deeply problematized views and utterances. In this sense, one might consider Scandinavian rhetoric research as partaking in what Kenneth Burke would call a comic frame: an approach ready to identify and critique shortcomings and problems, but also consider them more a result of human fallibility than ill will.

These characteristics are by necessity painted with a very broad brush, and they apply to rhetoric as a field of study. One could wonder whether the characteristics sketched here also apply in some way to rhetorical culture, i.e. public speaking and other forms of rhetorical praxis, in Scandinavia. That, however, is a decidedly more complex question, and a discussion perhaps best had through careful rhetorical analysis of cases. The contributions to this issue can be seen as a selection of such cases that is in no way comprehensive, but still showcases a number of interesting examples of different rhetorical practices in Scandinavia.

#### 4. In this issue

This special issue presents a collection of texts that all, in some way, approach the question of a Scandinavian rhetoric: 3 articles, a report from the first of three symposia on ethos and trust in the Scandinavian countries, 10 presentations of Ph.D. projects, and two reviews of recently published books in English by Scandinavian scholars. One additional article, also included in this introduction, will be published in a later issue of *Res Rhetorica*.

In the first article, **Jens E. Kjeldsen** gives an introduction to a key part of what he sees as the recent "turn" of Scandinavian rhetoricians toward new methods, namely, the increased interest in audience studies in Scandinavian rhetoric. The article connects this interest to a wider scholarly ethos in Scandinavian humanities and social sciences and argues for its value as a perspective in contemporary rhetorical studies.

In the second article, **Mika Hietanen** contributes with a study of an (in)famous event in recent Swedish political history connected to the rise of the populist far right. In a fantasy-theme analysis of social media posts over 36 hours, from the initiation of a provocative poster campaign by the anti-immigration Sweden democrats party in the Stockholm subway until activists tore down the posters, he shows how the responses to the provocative campaign tapped in to and amplified pre-existing narratives about migration, begging and the SD, which in turn motivated direct action.

**Rebecca Kiderlen**, a researcher based in Germany but with command of Swedish, contributes an analysis of what is often regarded as a key element of Scandinavian political rhetoric: what can be described as a consensus orientation in parliamentary argumentation. Through a comparative topos study of Swedish and German parliamentary debate on migration policy during the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015-16, she illustrates how differences in rhetorical culture between the two parliaments find expression in policy debate and shows how this connects to the Swedish tradition of minority government.

**Kristine Marie Berg's** contribution (to be published in a forthcoming issue of *Res Rhetorica*) also analyzes Scandinavian social movement rhetoric, while exemplifying the turn toward ethnographic methods and new materialist perspectives. Applying mixed methods of rhetorical ethnography, she traces the roots, development and circulation of the Danish anti-nuclear *Smiling sun* logo, widely disseminated through its message “Nuclear power? No thanks!” She analyzes how this malleable logo now carries cultural resonance and has been reappropriated and paraphrased for several other purposes—including pro-nuclear movements.

**Marie Lund** and **Hanne Roer** report on an exploratory workshop held in Aarhus, Denmark in Sept. 2023 under the theme “Forging Trusting Nordic Nations” – the first in a series of three workshops in the topic of trust in the Nordic countries and its rhetorical basis and discursive and symbolic manifestations. On the prompt of questions such as how those groups formerly thought of as “others” (workers, women) are now rendered as “one of us”, how Nordic citizens were persuaded to trust not only each other, but also the state, how the new Nordic rhetors (such as women, peasants, members of the working class) established themselves as competent citizens worthy of trust and responsibility; and how public communication ensured that previously opposed classes and groups came to see each other as citizens in the same public sphere, the two day event featured seven prepared talks and a full day of discussion.

In the *Reaction* section we present **10 emerging Scandinavian scholars and their Ph.D. projects**. Taken as a whole, these projects suggest that rhetorical

studies have taken a clear turn toward the vernacular and what might broadly be conceived of as rhetorical citizenship, i.e., with a clear focus on rhetoric's role in citizens' everyday lives and contact with society. This increased attention to rhetoric's multimodal significance in societal life is matched by an appetite for developing research methods appropriate for the current moment, and interestingly they seem to follow two overall trajectories: One that centers the body (understood as a topic, as rhetor, and as audiences) and one that turns to digitality to understand and take advantage of the affordances of modern digital technology in similar ways: as object of study and as key to understanding new modes of interaction between and among rhetors and audiences. Judging from these projects, merging Scandinavian rhetoric scholars seem well under way in expanding the range of rhetorical studies, while questioning and reinterpreting the tradition. And equally importantly, they all display a keen sense of the potential of rhetorical studies for critical, societally engaged scholarship and constructive criticism.

Finally, this special issue offers a sense of the scope of Scandinavian rhetoric research through two book reviews; one on an anthology on argumentation studies, and one on a monograph about green marketing. **John Magnus R. Dahl** reviews *Rhetorical Argumentation: The Copenhagen School*, edited by Christian Kock and Marcus Lantz. **Frederik Appel Olsen** provides a review of Erik Bengtson and Oskar Mossberg's book, *The Virtues of Green Marketing: A Constructive Take on Corporate Rhetoric*.

In addition to the introduction to current rhetoric research in Scandinavia, the issue also includes the *Varia* sections. Among three papers in Polish, **Aneta Tylak** delves into ancient perspectives on soul health in Plato and the *Corpus Hermeticum*, exploring ethical teachings and rhetorical comparisons to illustrate the importance of soul care and its correlation to physical health.

**Joanna Partyka** examines the confessor's role as a spiritual physician. Her research focuses on penitentials as guides for Catholic priests, analyzing rhetorical tools used to argue believers to heed their guidance.

**Anna Wileczek**'s study examines short utterances, termed "sayings/maxims/teachers' texts,". They serve to persuade and influence students, utilizing specific speech acts and eristic devices. As the author argues, they contribute to teachers' control in interactions, fostering a power dynamic in educational settings characterized by a rhetoric of dominance.

The last *Varia*'s paper by **Joanna Szylo-Kwas** (in English) scrutinizes the Polish media's role in framing the refugee crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border in 2021. The study reveals how media coverage, amidst polarization, exploited the crisis to reinforce ideological divisions, fostering hostile attitudes and echo chambers.



Finally, we would like to mention two additional reports, namely: a summary of the Polish Media Education Congress, held at the University of Warsaw in November 2023, where representatives from the Polish Rhetoric Society gave their talks (written by **Elżbieta Pawlak-Hejno**) and the report by **Anna M. Kielbiewska** who summarizes the academic lectures and discussions that took place during the 11<sup>th</sup> Mediolingistic Seminar of The Polish Communication Association in December, at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw.

This issue marks the conclusion of an editorial collaboration that was inspired by the APPLY Training School on Deliberation, Dissent, and Norms of Argumentative Engagement. It was organized by the Department of Communication at the University of Copenhagen in October 2021. The organizers of the training school were: Christian Kock, Mette Bengtsson, Pamela Pietrucci, and Lisa S. Villadsen.

The editorial board of *Res Rhetorica*, represented by Ewa Modrzejewska, a participant in the training school, came up with the idea of dedicating an issue to Scandinavian rhetoric as the Scandinavian scholars are a significant focal point on the map of not only European but also global contemporary rhetorical research.

Following this issue, another joint endeavor is planned for the spring of 2024. Professor Lisa S. Villadsen, the co-editor of this issue, will serve as a keynote speaker at the Rhetorical Congress organized by the Polish Rhetorical Society, the publisher of *Res Rhetorica*. The Congress aims to showcase the contemporary contributions of Polish rhetorical research.

The coming spring will be rhetorically Polish, whereas in the autumn, on **October 9-11, 2024**, the ninth **Nordic Conference for Rhetoric Research (NKRF9)** will be held in Copenhagen. The theme of the conference is “Rhetoric in digital and technological transition,” and papers in the Scandinavian languages and English are accepted. For more information, visit <https://comm.ku.dk/research/rhetoric/calendar/nkrf9/>.

As we enter the new year, we look forward to coming initiatives with the hope that they will bring our regions of Europe closer through joint rhetorical explorations and scholarly exchange.

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