

Review Essay: Local Communication Studies

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Frank Bryan, *Real Democracy: The New England Town Meeting and How It Works* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), xviii + 320 pp. \$49.00 (cloth), \$19.00 (paper).

Nina Eliasoph, *Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), x + 341 pp. \$55.00 (cloth), \$19.99 (paper).

Frank Fischer, *Citizens, Experts, and the Environment: The Politics of Local Knowledge* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), xiv + 352 pp. \$79.95 (cloth), \$22.95 (paper).

Bent Flyvbjerg, *Rationality and Power: Democracy in Practice*, trans. Steven Sampson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), xiv + 304 pp. \$55.00 (cloth), \$18.00 (paper).

Kevin Howley, *Community Media: People, Places, and Communication Technologies* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), xiii + 324 pp. \$75.00 (cloth), \$34.99 (paper).

Wal-Mart plans to come to your city. Or, as is more likely, Wal-Mart is there already and it approaches your municipal authority for permission to expand its operations. Local government and activist community responses will play a key part in the ensuing drama. Planning Boards, Zoning Boards, Conservation Commissions, and a host of other legislative, executive, administrative, and judicial branches of local government start to work alongside, or in varying degrees of opposition to, commerce or community activists. Consider, as well, the involvement of other

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agents: organizations like Neighbors for Sensible Development, an organization that seeks “democratic solutions to difficult development issues in the fertile Connecticut River Valley,”¹ or Portland, Oregon’s City Repair which “began its work with the idea that *localization* (of culture, of economy, of decision-making) is a necessary foundation of sustainability.” Its discourse states that “by reclaiming urban spaces to create community-oriented *places*, we plant the seeds for greater neighborhood communication, empower our communities and nurture our local culture.”² Your university or college community may even enter the drama. Consider the University of Chicago’s 2006 conference, “Wal-Mart, Race, & Gender: Local Controversies, Global Processes,” a response to Wal-Mart’s current attempt to move to sections of Chicago.

While Wal-Mart is certainly not the only protagonist in the wide variety of local dramas we witness today, the repetitiveness of such debates in different locales highlights both the significance of global economy and the importance of local places. It also emphasizes the challenges faced by local governments and the people they serve. Throughout America, people are concerned about their local communities, and they are doing something about it. Remarkably, academics are starting to notice. The field of communication studies, however, has been slow to recognize this trend, but that too is beginning to change. At Baylor University’s 2000 workshop on “Practical Theory, Public Participation, and Community,” the institution featured the city manager of Waco, Texas. Universities across the United States, from the University of Texas’s Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Participation to the University of Washington’s Center for Communication and Civic Engagement, are directing greater attention and research to local civic practices (and local ways of communication in defining and dealing with problems).

Current scholarship in rhetoric and political communication teaches us much about presidential discourse, the judicial reasoning of the Supreme Court, and the leadership strategies of governors and state legislators. Unfortunately, we have, as a discipline, not paid as much attention to local forms of political communication. This is unfortunate for two reasons. First, rhetorical criticism, as it informs public sphere theory (and its compatriots, counter-publics, public-screen, etc.), would benefit greatly from a conversational partner—local rhetorical democracy studies. Second, in the last ten years there has been a significant rise in scholarship from other disciplines that begins to address grassroots democracy, local political rhetoric, and political social interaction. Even this attention is relatively new, however.

To be sure, there are studies of petitions, social movements, and activist rhetoric. In terms of official, local governing bodies of cities or towns, however, the studies are few and far between. Michael Schudson notes the absence of scholarship on local politics:

There are over 500,000 elected public officials in the United States but scholars limit their attention almost exclusively to the 536 of them in Washington (and mostly to just one of those) plus up to fifty others who reside in governors’ mansions, plus the occasional big city mayor. The rest of the lot come and go without a sociologist

or anthropologist ever noticing, and with only the occasional political scientist dropping by to chat.³

Few scholars have produced book-length treatises, and article-length studies are isolated.⁴ So, what about local democracy studies made them so scarce? Local dramas may be hard to recognize, as Schudson notes, for a variety of reasons. He outlines a few of these issues in his introduction to the special 1999 issue of the *Communication Review*:

It may be that the sewer, street light, school bond substance of local politics is too boring to ever excite much literary or scholarly attention. . . . This is where civic life begins. . . . [L]ocal politics has its own small dramas: of education, of steadfastness, of unsung courage, of the relentless necessity of the face-to-face and the telephone-to-telephone in this age of mass communications.⁵

In addition, academic life can be nomadic. Undergraduate students travel across the country to become graduate students, who then travel further to obtain their first tenure-track position. Adjuncts, the growing body of workhorses of academia, often cross their states in search of employment. The tenure system itself promotes frequent publication in the early stages of one's career. Developing a careful, nuanced study of one's home municipality is harder to do in this period. At the later stages, positions become more secure, and while it may become easier to study local examples of democracy, often there is little professional incentive to do so. Finally, sometimes some local actors can be suspicious of people "from the university."

Standards for rhetoric and social interaction are time- and culture-specific. A truism in anthropology and ethnography of communication is that scholars cannot assume that expectations for speech or interaction (or evaluations of their worth) transcend time and place. And just as scholars of historical rhetoric need to understand the context, scholars of local, particular rhetoric need to do similar work. If our studies are to be practical to students learning about rhetoric and communication,⁶ the examples we present should arise from specific, grounded locales.

With a growing number of scholars interested in local interactions, community media, and cultural communication, knowledge about how humans communicate in the local political realm can provide practical wisdom for a reinvigorated *civitas*. If, as the late Massachusetts Speaker of the House Edward "Tip" O'Neill opined, "all politics is local," then all political rhetoric and social-rhetorical interactions are systems, processes bound by space, place, and time. Possibly later they will be spliced and ripped from context and re-contextualized, but a remarkable amount of political rhetoric will never leave the town halls and community centers where they originate, and our scholarship needs to account for the fragments as well as the whole. We need studies that pay serious attention to the local interactions of residents in a place, citizens in a democracy. Asen's work on a "discourse theory of citizenship"⁷ needs fleshing out through studies that focus on the work of those citizens. The meanings and messages imbued in people's acts of speaking out as part of their local government can help scholars reflect upon the larger rhetorical culture discussed by

Thomas Farrell in 1993.⁸ We need to expand work in this field to understand humans better, and perhaps then to create knowledge with and from our local guides that will enable them to live better. Understanding need not lead to prediction and control but to a new way to proceed or a renewed appreciation for the old ways that persist.

Fortunately, there are signs that the study of local democracy may begin to thrive in communication studies. Two new books on New England's town meeting democracy have emerged in the last six years, signaling a key moment for this emerging field. Jane Mansbridge's *Beyond Adversary Democracy* was the only other book that analyzed town meetings prior to this point.⁹ The development and application of Gerard Hauser's theory about vernacular voices also signals a willingness to engage local concerns and discourse. And furthermore, the creation of the Urban Communication Foundation is stirring scholarly interest. This review essay will contribute to the shifting focus of communication studies by considering the contributions of five books published in the last eight years: Frank Bryan's *Real Democracy: The New England Town Meeting and How It Works*, Nina Eliasoph's *Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life*, Frank Fischer's *Citizens, Experts, and the Environment: The Politics of Local Knowledge*, Bent Flyvbjerg's *Rationality and Power: Democracy in Practice*, and Kevin Howley's *Community Media: People, Places, and Communication Technologies*.

While they cover a range of practices and use a variety of methods, these books' attention to local matters makes them distinct and worthy of review here. In some cases, they center on official establishment discourse. In other cases, they focus on the vernacular. In still others, they concentrate on conflicts generated with the intersection of official and vernacular discourses. Frank Bryan's study is the newest book on "town meeting," a term that has a great deal of cultural caché but whose constitutive practices are little understood. Flyvbjerg's narrative about politics, planning, deliberation, context, and culture in Aalborg, Denmark, is startlingly familiar to anyone who has tried to work through the web of political relationships at the local level. Nina Eliasoph's *Avoiding Politics*, which won the American Sociological Association's award for "Outstanding Book of 2000," and Kevin Howley's *Community Media* highlight the value of ethnography for the study of local communication, with regard to everyday social interaction in the study of local democracy and community media, respectively.

Vermont, New England

Theories of "the public" are lenses through which we filter social interaction. Grounded by empirical studies of rhetorical interactions, these theories (e.g., Michael Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics*)¹⁰ should accommodate unanticipated actions and interactions. One idea that needs review, for example, is Warner's assertion that rarely, if ever, does deliberation subside in a stable decision. In the case of town meetings, research suggests that a localized public does indeed stop and make a binding decision on critical matters. In New England town meetings registered voters

do gather, discuss predominantly binding articles (like the town's budget, or zoning by-laws), and then vote on them. The work of three authors illustrates this point well.

Jane Mansbridge is the author of the oft-cited study of town meeting democracy in the town of "Selby," Vermont (name changed). Her work, with fieldwork from 1970, critiques this form of governance for its adversarial nature that often excludes participation rather than encouraging it. Her main argument theorizes a dichotomy of democracy and assesses a small town's open town meeting and a "workplace democracy" for its achievement of either "adversarial" or "unitary" democracy.¹¹ Joseph A. Zimmerman's *The New England Town Meeting: Democracy in Action* is by far the most wide-ranging analysis of this governance structure.¹² He discusses the law-making abilities of ordinary citizens, the origins of town meeting, each New England state's particular version of town meeting, the distinctions and similarities of "representative" and "open" town meetings, and the democratic nature of town meetings. His thesis is that, due to attendance rates, "open" town meetings are *de facto* representative bodies, with the safeguard that if a voter chooses to attend, she may. Zimmerman examines declines in participation figures and offers suggestions to boost those figures. This highly detailed report is an invaluable resource on town meeting.

Frank Bryan's "life's work" is a book that culminates 28 years of formal data collection on Vermont town meetings. While Bryan and his students steadily collected data on Vermont town meetings, readers familiar with his project had to wait until 2003 to read the results of his analyses. As if the scholarship presented in the book is not enough, he shares additional work on his website.¹³ Long a proponent of human-scale democracy, Bryan's book is a sweeping tour of Vermont's local legislatures and local lives. His prose does not sweep past the particular moments that make town meeting unique, however. His dry Vermont humor makes the book enjoyable. In comparing Athenian and Vermont democracy, he notes, "The Athenians included a sacrifice, whereas Vermonters do not, unless we include allowing a representative from the state legislature to explain what is going on in Montpelier" (fn. 15, 7). In 12 chapters, Bryan tours the state that he clearly loves. His extraordinarily well-researched and well-written book provides an excellent place for students of local democracy to begin. He is adroit at both application of secondary sources on democracy and the massive quantitative analysis of attendance and participation rates (with controls for town population size, socio-economic data, and other variables such as whether the town holds its meeting on a weekend, evening, or during the daytime). Bryan also situates his studies. Whenever he provides a case (or two, or three), he first uses several paragraphs to describe the town's geography. He even explains how to get there.

In the preface, Bryan orients readers to the scholarship of "making do" (x). *Real Democracy* is a book that emerged from his own history, a history that is tied to the process of communicating and governing known as town meeting democracy. "My mother raised me a Democrat. Vermont raised me a democrat. This book springs from a life of fighting the dissonance between the two" (x). Having undergraduate students systematically collect data on approximately 1500 town meetings across

Vermont over 28 years is the result of his making do with available resources to handle two dilemmas: most Vermont town meetings occur on the same day, and he did not have a team of graduate student researchers to help him. *Real Democracy* presents the results of his annual class “field trip” (xiii) with profound tacking back and forth between democratic details and democratic theory.

The book’s organization starts with a methodologically-focused introduction, interwoven with telling asides. This treatment of what scholars know about direct democracy in Athens versus town meeting leads him to his questions about just *how* to study the contemporary town meeting democracy. “Puzzlement provokes inquiry”; Bryan’s wonder at the lack of scholarly attention begat a major work establishing a baseline study. The subsequent chapter, “Town Meeting: An American Conversation” provides an historical and theoretical overview of the relationship between liberalism and democracy. There he focuses on the process of local talk’s relationship to democracy. In Chapter 3 (“Democracy as Public Presence: Walking the Bounds”), he concentrates on the importance of individuals’ placement in public spaces.

Among Bryan’s findings are that town size is the strongest predictor of attendance: the smaller the town, the larger the percentage of attendance. He found

[no] meaningful connection between the income, education, or occupation levels of a town’s citizens and its town meeting attendance. Education alone survived the multiple regression equation provided at the end of this chapter (table 5.1), and it explained only 1 percent of the variance in attendance. (115)

Attendance rates vary by town size, and participation rates vary by meeting size. “Town meetings with the smallest number of people in attendance have the largest percentage of participators and the best distribution of participation among those present” (157). Bryan does not shy away from the cost of this style of local democracy. Attending and participating vocally brings significant costs to residents: time, money, and “psychic” stress. He does not suggest that other places in America should use town meeting, nor does he suggest town meeting as a national model (if anything he critiques such views). He also avoids discounting the value of town meeting as he compares the act of attending, deliberating, and voting in town meeting to national elections. “Compare the 20 percent turn out at town meeting with the presidential election in America. . . . America has difficulty drawing even 50 percent of its eligible citizens to the polls once every four years to elect its president” (282). The civic engagement these meetings require is fundamentally different than the expectations of an election. A town meeting also is different than volunteer work. Even though the attendance rates are lower than most people would like to see (except when a controversial issue is on the warrant), they must be placed in context. There are other costs, Bryan points out. It is “not . . . primarily a social event” (283).

Bryan re-configures “democracy” again in Chapters 5 through 7. Reflecting on the Norman Rockwell portraits of Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms,” he considers democracy as public talk. “Above all else, town meeting is public talk—common people *standing*

for something. Town meeting is more than free speech, of course. It offers a fifth freedom, freedom to *govern*" (139). This governing power is something that blurs the separation of "official" and "popular" power.¹⁴ It complicates what we think about those "in power." If any voter can vote on the community's budget, who is in power? Perhaps those who get to assemble the budget? In many cases, volunteer boards of five to seven people prepare a budget, but all voters may amend it, and all voters may place items on the agenda (called a "warrant") for the meeting. "Voting after speaking is to governance what keeping the score is to sports. It changes everything" (139–40).

Following those chapters on public talk Bryan explores subsets of data, including those of women's presence (Chapter 8) and participation (Chapter 9). Of particular note, however, "Vermont town meeting has not achieved parity" with regard to women's equality of participation in town meeting (284). Women's role in local government in Vermont nevertheless outpaces their participation in other forms of local government (e.g., city councils).

These preceding chapters set up three concluding chapters, providing a foundation for Bryan's analysis of the "expectations on each of the components of real democracy . . . (attendance, participation, and women's involvement)" (234). Bryan created databases of the "fifty best and fifty worst of these meetings" across towns for which he had at least 10 meetings' worth of data and one featuring the "best and worst meeting for each town" for the remainder of the towns (234). Analyses of these databases provided evidence for his claim that open conflict over specific issues is most prominent in small towns. The three concluding chapters focus on characteristics of some of those issues (Chapter 10), a profiling of the best and worst democracies overall (Chapter 11), and a return to the "lover's quarrel" political science has had with local democracy (279). Town meeting democracy depends on local people deciding their fate on issues that matter to them: the school budget, the quality of road plowing.

Real Democracy uses the narrative accounts amassed by Bryan and his research team to supplement the quantitative data it presents. These narratives, included as "Witness" sections sprinkled throughout the chapters, provide rich, and sometimes humorous, sometimes poignant, moments of understanding. They cannot capture—nor do they appear to be designed to capture—the essence of the town meetings, but they do provide close looks at the tapestry of local politics. Decisions at the local level often involve the stories of real people; therefore, Bryan should be applauded for not allowing these stories to get lost amid the statistics.

What role do ordinary people have in handling complex social and environmental problems? Real democracy, for Bryan, involves "citizens—in person, in face-to-face meetings of the whole— . . . [making] the laws that govern the actions of everyone within their geographic boundaries" (4). Thus, for him, citizens solve problems face-to-face, and they have the authority to do so. Bryan bemoans the slow but sure whittling away of local control. Where Bryan's many cases of local democracy remind scholars of the importance of local legislative bodies, a single case study from across

the Atlantic provides a cautionary tale for how city government leaders' administrative and planning maneuvering can rationalize power.

Aalborg, Denmark

Bent Flyvbjerg's *Rationality and Power* claims and eloquently demonstrates in a case study of Aalborg, Denmark, how

democracy is not something a society "gets": democracy must be fought for each and every day in concrete instances, even long after democracy is first constituted in a society. If citizens do not engage in this fight, there will be no democracy. (5)

And democracy, although retained, does not always proceed smoothly. "There is evidence, however," he argues, "that social conflicts themselves produce the valuable ties that hold modern democratic societies together and provide such ties with the strength and cohesion they need; social conflicts themselves are pillars of democratic society" (6).

Flyvbjerg is a professor of planning at Aalborg University who wants scholars to reconceptualize rationality and power. Two epigraphs, taken from Niccolò Machiavelli and Friedrich Nietzsche, frame this book: "Since my intention is to say something that will prove of practical use to the inquirer, I have thought it proper to represent things as they are in real truth, rather than as they are imagined" (Machiavelli); "Thucydides, and . . . the *Principe* of Machiavelli, are related to me closely by their unconditional will not to deceive themselves and to see reason in *reality*" (Nietzsche). Flyvbjerg tells the reader, "The action [of this book] takes place in the Kingdom of Denmark, that is, nowhere and everywhere" (1). His style of storytelling, assisted by translator Steven Sampson, weaves a fascinating tale of the production of knowledge, the rationalization of power, and more. This book helps to demonstrate his own claim about "phronetic social science," which he brilliantly illustrated in *Making Social Science Matter*.¹⁵ Flyvbjerg's narrative method establishes the third aim of *Rationality and Power* (1). I mention it first because of his notable ability to sustain reader interest in a Wittgensteinian narrative of the creation, revision, and consequences of an urban planning project that spanned the years from 1977 to 1995. He incorporates competing interviews and conflicting reports as they unfold, whether they counter or support the critical narrative he advances. Readers see how institutions and characters have a contingent quality, allowing us to appreciate other routes to their constitutions. This story, Flyvbjerg argues, "may be used not as a model but as a guide for situational ethics and practical action. After all, we tell stories in order to do things differently" (5). The two other goals for this study are (a) "to do an empirically deep and richly detailed case study of modernity and democracy—as manifested in modern politics, administration, and planning" and (b) "to carry out the study drawing upon an intellectual tradition largely ignored by the Enlightenment, a tradition that starts with Thucydides and continues with Machiavelli and Nietzsche to Michel Foucault" (1).

Flyvbjerg's text shows how the community of Aalborg is one of Nietzsche's "little things": "All the problems of politics, of social organization, and of education have been falsified through and through, . . . because one learned to despise the 'little' things, which means the basic concerns of life itself" (4). Readers of Flyvbjerg's book will benefit from his theoretical association between Thucydides' view of power as, in part, subtle "strategies and tactics" (5) and the productive senses of power in Nietzsche and Foucault. Flyvbjerg's contribution to this tradition is his notion of *Realrationalität*, or "real rationality" (6). Formal rationality's relationship to "real rationality" is analogous to "formal politics" and what "would become known as *Realpolitik*" (6). Charting the "less visible mechanisms of power" (6), the process of how rationality gets defined in operation is a perspective that allows Flyvbjerg to view conflict not as necessarily a problem for modern democracy, but as the phenomenon that holds the democracy together. If societies "rationalize," marginalize, or delegitimize conflict, they then "[suppress] freedom because the option to engage in conflict is a part of that freedom" (6). Flyvbjerg adroitly demonstrates just how Aalborg's city planning process itself shunted conflict aside and how the actors in that story rationalized their behavior.

His chapters proceed methodically, but never ploddingly (readers may grow frustrated with what actors do, but not with Flyvbjerg's presentation), starting with the late 1970s vision for "the Aalborg project," "one of Denmark's most lauded, and most controversial, urban projects" (9). Readers follow the development of an urban renewal plan that incorporates strategies to deal with land use matters, traffic, and environment problems. The plan gets larger, with sub-plans, centering on the purchase, transformation, and relocation of a bus terminal (in anticipation of phasing in a public transportation project). The author demonstrates how the city architect's anxieties led to further evaluations of the bus terminal's location, which, in turn, only led to additional "rationalizations of a political decision made in advance" (19). Power, Flyvbjerg argues,

seeks change, not knowledge. And power may very well see knowledge as an obstacle to the change power wants. . . . Power, quite simply, produces that knowledge and that rationality which is conducive to the reality it wants. Conversely, power suppresses that knowledge and rationality for which it has no use. (36)

To explain further his view of power, Flyvbjerg explains every aspect of the project's development from the city's budget and who controls it to the excitement generated by the project's design phase. He then goes into considerable detail about the praise and criticism with which citizens (including neighborhood associations and the Danish Cycling Federation) met the project, the roles of the local media and local businesses (especially the Chamber of Commerce), and the virtual absence of participation from the trade unions. Among the public reactions to the first phase of the project was "broad opposition" to the apparently predetermined location of the bus terminal (74). "Like citizen participation elsewhere, citizen participation in the Aalborg Project reveals that interest in and, especially, resistance to a policy or plan

appears in conjunction with certain specific measures” (78). Readers see how those in power excluded participants in designing the project; we see how meeting minutes erroneously frame events as “a genuine discussion between equal parties” (81), and how the city council’s role is more relegated to rubber-stamping, in part due to how the “*magistrat* form of government [grew] out of a long tradition of identity between the city government and the business community” (90).

The story gets more complex when various law firms, the Danish Environmental Protection Agency, and political parties become involved. In sharp contrast to the messages and social habits of cyclists and pedestrians, the author demonstrates that the business community’s campaign along with headlines like “Aalborg’s Best Customers Come Driving in Cars” produced a “repetition of statements until they have an effect.” According to Flyvbjerg, repetition “is a principal strategy in the rationality of power and in the way power defines reality” regardless of any empirical reality (113). Yet despite the seemingly incommensurate positions and abuses of power he reveals, Flyvbjerg’s work never tends toward nihilism. Readers learn of Aalborg’s own “Deep Throat,” a central character in the narrative who “risks his career in order to mobilize public opinion and a sense of justice” (130).

Flyvbjerg poses his main question—“What basic relations of rationality and power have shaped the Aalborg Project and have led to its lack of balance, fragmentation, and lack of goal achievement”—in the final chapter of his book (226). Given the work’s narrative structure, I believe that this question could *only* be asked at this point; to do so earlier would diminish the drama Flyvbjerg creates. In the final chapter, the author summarizes his findings in “ten propositions about rationality and power” (226). The first is “power defines rationality” (227) and the last is “the power of rationality is embedded in stable power relations rather than in confrontations” (233). These propositions provide a “challenge to democracy” based in rationality (234). He concludes:

In the *longue durée*, we see that in practice democratic progress is chiefly achieved not by constitutional and institutional reform alone but by facing the mechanisms of power and the practices of class and privilege more directly, often head-on: if you want to participate in politics but find the possibilities for doing so constricting, then you team up with like-minded people and you fight for what you want, utilizing the means that work in your context to undermine those who try to limit your participation. If you want to know what is going on in politics but find little transparency, you do the same. . . . At times direct power struggle over specific issues works best; on the other occasions changing the ground rules for struggle is necessary, which is where constitutional and institutional reform come in; and sometimes writing genealogies and case histories like the Aalborg study, that is, laying open the relationships between rationality and power, will help achieve the desired results. More often it takes a combination of all three, in addition to the blessings of beneficial circumstance and pure luck. Democracy in practice is that simple and that difficult. (236)

I contend that any study of a major local development project would benefit from referencing and, preferably, using Flyvbjerg’s considerable contribution. His reorientation of normative rationality toward actual practice suggests a revised sense of

“normative,” understanding the norms for interaction, the norms for interpretation, to which ethnographers of communication are taught to attend. Flyvbjerg’s plea to readers is that “Instead of thinking of modernity and democracy as a rational means for dissolving power, we need to see them as practical attempts at regulating power and domination” (236). When we study actual practice, we may know “what it takes to change” it “for the better” (236). He provides a remarkable “Post script” to inform readers that in 1995, the European Union awarded Aalborg city officials the “‘European Planning Prize.’ Triumphant over 300 nominees, Aalborg received the prize for having developed what the jury viewed as an innovative, democratic urban policy and planning with particular emphasis on the involvement of citizens and interest groups” (237). Flyvbjerg takes some credit for the city’s accolades:

Since 1991, Aalborg’s new approach to planning policy has evolved as an antithesis to the Aalborg Project, which officials and the public had viewed as being incapable of solving the city’s problems, preserving its key aesthetic assets, or improving environmental quality. Awareness of these inadequacies came about partly because of the public debate generated by this study when it first appeared in Danish. (237)

This, then, is the promise of careful attention to local politics and the exertion of power. Scholarship can sometimes enhance civic life.

Environment

Prior to scholarship’s intended enhancement of civic life must come the detailed knowledge of how a system works. *Rationality and Power* is one case study of a municipality’s urban planning project, a darker side of how those in power produced and used knowledge to create a project in an anti-democratic climate. Yet, “everyone, at least officially,” Frank Fischer notes, “is for democracy” (ix). How can the public be involved in a cooperative endeavor with those who possess technical expertise, especially in locales that do not have a strong tradition of public works oversight and management? This issue is at the heart of Fischer’s book on *Citizens, Experts, and the Environment*. There are other matters apart from land use about which citizens and “experts” experience antagonism; nevertheless, land use is one of the most conflict-ridden aspects of local government.¹⁶ With many towns and cities facing dwindling state financial aid, local leaders must do more with less, and local land is often the most convenient resource for generating revenue and sustaining development. One consequence of this situation is that conflicts about environmental issues have become one of the primary means by which local decision makers exert control. From environmental impact studies to zoning ordinances, the classification of a specific geographic environment will impact, significantly, the surrounding communities.

The relationship among citizens, experts, and the environment poses interesting questions for the practice of democracy. Fischer faults scholars in allowing this relationship to go understudied: “Despite the contemporary emphasis on citizenship, democratic theorists largely remain distant from the level of the citizen” (xi). His

book reviews secondary studies involving “civic discovery”; consequently, it is a valuable resource even without his primary research question: What are the “the realistic possibilities of meaningful citizen participation . . . ? What evidence supports the contention that citizens can effectively participate in helping to make the complex decisions facing contemporary policy makers?” (xi). Despite his obvious preference for citizen participation, Fischer does not argue for participation at any cost. He notes, “this work carefully assesses what citizens *can* do, what kinds of institutional reforms will help them do that, and in which kinds of policy domains such participation is useful” (xi). Fischer claims that “evidence demonstrates that the ordinary citizen is capable of a great deal more participation than generally recognized or acknowledged” (xi). While perhaps town meeting scholars like Frank Bryan may not be surprised at this finding, it deserves to be highlighted here.

Fischer’s work is organized into four main parts, each comprising two to four chapters. The first focuses on the relationship citizens and experts have “in the risk society” (1). Part 2 explores the relationship between “Technical versus Cultural Rationality” within a local field of environmental politics. In this section he argues that the “radical alternative to scientific decision making” offered by many environmentalist organizations is important because it helps ordinary citizens question their leaders’ claims about their consumer lifestyle (88). Fischer presents case studies in Part 3 titled: “Local Knowledge and Participatory Inquiry: *Methodological Practices for Political Empowerment.*” Finally, the last section, “Discursive Institutions and Policy Epistemics,” differs from the rest of the book. This section outlines a theory of “policy epistemics” that could appear in our own scholarly debates over the epistemic nature of rhetoric.

Although Fischer is a political and environmental policy professor, he also is part of a larger movement of scholars who have moved toward rhetorical notions of policy formation. Using Dewey, Willard, Toulmin, and various social constructionist writings, his book can be read as part of the general trajectory that both involves and departs from the perspectives of Flyvbjerg’s study. Flyvbjerg draws from one richly detailed case study to show how power produces its own rationality. Flyvbjerg also attempts to present the changing and sometimes competing discourses produced by all the “stakeholders” in a public project. Fischer, on the other hand, concurs with the importance of ethnography and rhetoric in generating practical knowledge, but he argues for a clearer identification of parties that voice different opinions. Interest groups deserve attention, but “they should not be confused with citizens. Although interest groups represent citizens, especially ‘public interest groups,’ they are hierarchical organizations often rather distantly removed from the citizens for whom they speak” (245).

Fischer’s definition of citizen participation is “deliberation on issues affecting one’s own life” (1). The definition implies a public-ness and an investment in the practice of deliberation. This definition also reflects Fischer’s perspective: although he has concerns about the current state of local democracy, he is optimistic about its possibility. That is, he believes that ordinary people have a capacity for deliberating

even complex matters. When we keep our eyes toward human-scale practices, we must rethink knowledge generation, values, power, and critical approaches. Academics are not the only experts, Fischer cautions. Academics, termed “specialized citizens,” at times engage with “local experts” (147–69) on matters of joint concern. This goes beyond “advocacy research” (38), because it is first a commitment to “helping people speak for themselves” and, second, a commitment to use a wide variety of methodological approaches (38–9). Fischer presents models of both tragic and effective relationships between citizens and experts. Among his success stories he lists Woburn, Massachusetts, a town that had to address toxic waste concerns; participatory resource mapping in Kerala, India; the Canadian Berger Commission’s assessment of a planned route for an oil pipeline to dissect traditional lands of Native Americans; and South African wildlife conservation practices. Each case involves innovative approaches to citizen participation. Fischer’s review of these cases leads him to consider the ethics of local knowledge production. Throughout the text, he investigates who owns local knowledge and questions whether it is possible to own knowledge that is contingent, often nonverbal, and constantly shifting from moment to moment. One consequence of considering local interaction with the environment is an appreciation for how knowledge, identity, and agency are related. A major contribution of Fischer’s chapters featuring exploration of case studies of environment, the public sphere, and local knowledge is his articulation of a new line of inquiry that would value public talk about public policy. In his concluding chapter, entitled “The Environments of Argument,” Fischer calls for the creation of “policy epistemics” which “would focus on the ways people communicate across differences, the flow and transformation of ideas across borders of different fields, how different professional groups and local communities see and inquire differently, and the ways in which the differences become disputes” (255). Such a mode of inquiry values local knowledge for “problem identification, definition, and legitimation, not to mention any solutions that may be put forward” (217). Fischer relies upon multiple voices providing best solutions, and simultaneously reserves caution for deliberation’s promise: “Deliberation . . . cannot be expected to end all controversy” (249). Flyvbjerg’s narrative cautions against too much optimism.

Fischer’s “policy epistemics” is akin to Flyvbjerg’s “phronetic research.” Flyvbjerg explains, “Phronetic researchers’ immersion in the local political dialogue will influence that dialogue. Conversely, locally-exercised power may influence what researchers learn.”¹⁷ Flyvbjerg himself notes: “[A]t the same time as continuing the critique [of local democracy, knowledge, and power], as Fischer recommends, alternatives must also be developed. In Fischer’s words, we have to ‘operate on both fronts, critique and reconstruction.’”¹⁸ Given the two scholars’ distinct god-terms, *epistemics* and *phronetics*, and given the audience of this review, my guess is readers will find more in rhetorical studies to align with *phronetics*. Rhetorical inquiry into local, community-based practices can help promote better practices, however that value is designated. Natural and social scientists are poised to become “facilitator[s] of citizen deliberation,” Fischer argues. Rhetorical critics may join that group when they examine local matters. And they may facilitate more than deliberation; they can

aid in judgment.¹⁹ Local rhetorical knowledge may challenge how we think about invention; local rhetorical artistry may challenge how we write about design. But we have to involve ourselves in real communities first.

“Amargo and Evergreen City”

Ethnographic study of local communities is one way to understand the social production of knowledge, power, and rationality. The ethnographies that privilege native meanings and relationships do not have to focus on explicitly “political” organizations or communities. Some of the case studies in Fischer’s book involve ethnographic fieldwork; Bryan’s book, which is primarily a quantitatively-based analysis of town meeting attendance and participation, also uses ethnographic methods of participant observation. Sociologist Nina Eliasoph’s award-winning *Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life* stands out, however, as an excellent example of both an ethnographic analysis and the study of political avoidance. Similar to Huspek and Kendall’s study of loggers who withhold their political voice,²⁰ Eliasoph studied how ordinary people, in the cities that she “call[s] Amargo and Evergreen City,” (9) create the contexts that support or preclude spirited political conversation.

In her study of a primarily parent-run anti-drugs volunteer group, two country-western dance clubs, and suburban environmental activist groups, Eliasoph examines how participants in each group speak in group settings, with media (when it occurred), with members of institutions, and privately, “backstage” (Eliasoph 7; Goffman 128).²¹ “Communities for Environmental Safety Everywhere,” one of the groups Eliasoph studied, is “a group that was trying to prevent a toxic incinerator from being built in Evergreen City” and another group, “Testament for Humanity, [is] a coalition that was protesting arms shipments to the Third World from the local weapons depot” (166–7). Her focus is on the “groups’ processes of *producing* contexts” (236). She argues that these groups exhibit four styles of interaction. Among country-westerners, “no interaction” typifies the democratic citizen, especially one who felt “unqualified” (239). Cynics “talked politics incessantly” to prove that their ideal version of the informed democratic citizen is unreachable (239). Volunteers, or republican idealists, avoided public political conversation about matters they felt they were unable to solve as a group. Activists transformed their interaction in the time Eliasoph studied them: initially hesitant to participate in public displays of controversy, they eventually become connected with fellow activists at the state and national levels and participated in “discordant verbal clashes with institutions” (239).

Eliasoph seems surprised by two of her findings: “People sounded *better* back stage than frontstage; at each step in the broadening of the audience, the ideas shrank” (7) and “the people I met did sound as if they cared about politics, but only in some contexts and not others” (7). She does not disclose the locations for the study, but describes some of it. Following her introduction, Eliasoph focuses first on volunteers, spending time on their virtual embarrassment at being civic-minded, and on the institutional setting for their work. The middle of her book, which focuses on people

who learned to dance at country-western clubs, is about humor, nostalgia for a “dream of family and community,” and consumption (246). Activists round out the trio of groups. A penultimate chapter on newspapers precedes her conclusions about political evaporation. In addition to these chapters, there are two appendices that are worth reading: one on class and one on method.

According to Eliasoph, making a sociolinguistic argument about speech acts’ relationship to certain scenes, *scene*, more than *setting*, plays a role in whether a context is appropriate for the act of “political” speech and for the social positioning of people as agents.²² The scene is the “cultural definition” of context, whereas setting involves the physical location of the action. Volunteers used the phrase “close to home” to mean that which is within the bounds of their control, seen as an individual problem. Thus, drug use, which volunteers (and institutions like schools) view as an individually-caused problem, not one that is endemic to a system, is within the realm of controllable problems. It contrasts with the nuclear battleship base, which one volunteer described as containing “dangerous . . . scary” ships and “half” of whose workers “are on dope all the time. It makes me nervous.” Nuclear battleships, even if volunteers can see them through kitchen windows, are not “close to home” (1). Volunteers felt impotent to do anything about the shipyard or the chemical plant upstream (with its oil spills). But, since it “did not really ‘touch’ them personally” (1) they did not get involved more. The volunteer’s communication avoided anything that hinted at controversy.

Activists, while they did speak more about controversial issues, followed the pattern of “speak[ing] for yourself” in public. Again, scene leads to position (4). Activists who one moment speak as concerned citizens about the future or about corporate control switched gears rapidly in front of the press. For example, those who owned property suddenly spoke only as “concerned property owner[s]” (4). Both volunteers and activists spoke “for the children” (246–8). Women who were mothers suddenly enacted what Eliasoph calls “mandatory public Momism” (4, 246). “[R]eal mothers have brains” (247), and yet, Elisaoph found, “In the Mom discourse, [in public settings] Mom’s intellect never appears” (248). According to the author, this discourse disparages women’s intelligence and capacity for political, social concern. It “makes all mothers sound like apolitical, natural animals protecting their young, but not at all like thoughtful human beings who live in a broad, wide world with a meaningful history and an uncertain future. We can be both,” she concludes (248).

What would Eliasoph have found had she studied groups that were associated directly with the local government? The “political evaporation” that she did find among recreational groups and anti-drug groups (and somewhat among activist groups) was not strategic, nor was it apathetic (6). Such “evaporation” has to do with “good manners prevent[ing] publicly minded speech in the potential contexts of the public sphere” (6). If apathy is about not caring, Eliasoph did not find that. What she found, instead, were communities of people who were at least marginally aware of political matters who actively “tried not to care.” One wonders, however, whether her own involvement with these people, by eliciting their comments in interviews, created a new context for them.

In her discussion of the evaporating public sphere, she assesses the role of structural power and beliefs (230–1), in an approach that addresses “the boundaries of interaction—the boundaries of the public sphere—that keep people even from considering bringing some ideas into public debate *even if they can think those same ideas in some other contexts*” (234). “Participants . . . ‘contextualize’ any interaction, trying to make sense of it and the wider world, simultaneously” (236). Power became relevant at certain moments in the conversations Eliasoph observed; just as in *Rationality and Power*, readers see how power has its own rationality.

Understanding what speakers say in public is an important step in understanding what people assume talk itself is for in those contexts, and ultimately, what they assume public life is for and what democratic participation is. We answer the question “What is democracy?” in practice; scrutinizing our practice might reveal to us that our implicit definition of democracy is not satisfying. (237)

The relationship between these “weak” publics²³ and decision-making bodies needs further examination to help address Eliasoph’s concerns about citizen apathy and the power of government authority.

Agency and Technology

In the introduction to his book *Community Media: People, Places, and Communication Technology*, Kevin Howley describes how he stumbled upon WFHB, which his cabbie called “our community radio station” in Bloomington, Indiana. As a work of media scholarship, this book displays a keen sense of how place and community create the discourse the community desires. Howley defines community media as

grassroots or locally oriented media access initiatives predicated on a profound sense of dissatisfaction with mainstream media form and content, dedicated to the principles of free expression and participatory democracy, and committed to enhancing the community relations and promoting community solidarity. (2)

Ordinary people’s relationship to media technology and to their communities is at the hub of this book. Local media and the people who use them help shape the autonomous identity of the community. The “mediators are the message” in Bloomington and elsewhere, as Howley describes the role of human agency in localized places in North America and Australia (12).

Howley shares with other authors in this review the sense of wonder at the sizable gaps in scholarly knowledge about local communication. He claims that “despite their keen appreciation for local cultural production and their affirmation of popular forms of resistance, cultural studies scholars likewise and inexplicably overlook community media” (3). Further, “cultural scholars consistently overlook community media: a site that not only indicates considerable audience activity but vividly demonstrates tangible audience power” (3). Howley distinguishes community media from alternative or public service broadcasting. While public broadcasting may be termed a type of community media, it is just that, a different type or subset. “Not one to argue theory for theory’s sake,” Howley is

nonetheless convinced that in the absence of a more theoretically informed approach to community media, one that can guide further investigation and analysis of locally oriented, participatory media organizations and practices, we fail to fully appreciate one of the more dynamic aspects of contemporary media culture. (5)

In contrast to the other books in this review, all of which demonstrated an empirically ground-up approach, this claim seems to assume that a universal or more top-down approach can help us appreciate local media, media that are deemed somehow necessarily participatory. They may not be, however; this is to be found, not presumed.

Howley builds a framework for cultural analysis of local media. Using Stuart Hall's theory of articulation, he "conceptualize[s] community as a unity of differences; a unity forged through symbol, ritual, language, and discursive practices" (6). His examination of local media's "rearticulation of technologies in the service of local populations" is conducted via statements about who supports such local efforts (40). Participant observation affords Howley the opportunity to study the relationships among "community organizers, NGOs, philanthropic organizations, government agencies, technology manufacturers, artists and other cultural workers, and geographically situated populations—in creating and sustaining a locally oriented, participatory media organizations" including Bloomington's WFHB, New York City's Downtown Community television, Halifax, Nova Scotia's "street newspaper" *Street Feat*, and Victoria, Australia's library computer network (VICNET) (7). Historical research, textual analysis, and in-depth interviewing also inform Howley's analyses.

The varied media organizations hint at some of the complexity of local community. Howley's treatment of these local institutions suggests that local people are quite creative; indeed, together with the cases Fischer's book describes, the local experts of each community can be a valuable resource for learning about their communities in particular and the phenomenon of communication more generally. These forms of scholarship serve as another case of reconstruction parallel with critique. In addition to what I see as his study serving these roles, Howley also notes how "locally oriented, participatory media organizations are at once a *response* to the encroachment of the global upon the local as well as an *assertion* of local cultural identities and socio-political autonomy in the light of these global forces" (40).

Not all the cases Howley presents are endorsements of each community media organization. In particular, Howley analyzes "how VICNET's design philosophy may confound popular participation in community networking" (10). Even this case is instructive, however, because it provides a new perspective on globalization—that is, the perspective of local citizens (40). With VICNET, readers learn about "a strategic investment on the part of the Victorian government to create an information infrastructure that will support local business" and other "economic considerations" (235). Howley's other critiques of (amid the plentiful praise for) VICNET, in part a library-sponsored network, include its service "to support 'official histories' and reify a particular world view" due to the library's need to organize and classify knowledge

(239). That any world view may be reified seems to run counter to his earlier claim that cultures are “mobile, adaptive, and dynamic” (32).

In addition to the detail Howley provides about each case study, he adds three contextualizing chapters: by way of introduction, one chapter focuses on “locating” community media, while a second widens the scope to a global view of community media. His concluding chapter argues for the practical and theoretical importance of this type of study. These chapters are valuable reviews of the theories of global media and critiques of their limitations; his critiques stem from deep and broad discussion of empirically grounded studies of local media. He walks a fine line in his theoretical orientation, however, raising important questions about the relationships Western societies form with communities from the rest of the world. Of particular difficulty is the question of cultural imperialism. Among the points Howley uses to provide a corrective to over-deterministic cultural imperialist models of globalization is the tendency of such models to “essentialize culture” with a “paternalistic attitude,” suggesting that “pure, authentic, and egalitarian cultures are ‘contaminated’ by the destructive force and modernizing influence of Western culture” (31). He cites Neena Behl’s study of an Indian rural village in which familial life became more equal post-television. He concludes that “the values, institutions, and practices associated with globalization open up new realms of possibility for individuals and social groups long dominated by repressive relations of power in local cultures” (32). To what extent is the promotion of democratic practices an imperialistic enterprise—favorable or not? Rather than pat application of global ideas to local action (as the now clichéd “think globally act locally” phrase directs), why not start with understanding local action’s system first? By examining local community media, this book expands Flyvbjerg’s of power relations as “ultra-dynamic; power is not merely something one appropriates, it is also something one reappropriates and exercises in a constant back-and-forth movement within the relationships of strength, tactics, and strategies inside of which one exists.”²⁴ Scholars interested in local media will find in Howley’s book scores of studies and media histories from street newspapers to radio to television to computer networks.

Conclusion: Where Can We Go From Here?

Studying local matters involves a variable, contingent orientation toward context, detail, process, value, and culture. Contexts vary, details vary. Assumptions about governance or participation in one place cannot necessarily hold true elsewhere. These books also encourage readers to reflect upon their own participation in government, education, and cultural policy. From an academic perspective, these books establish several opportunities for future rhetorical scholarship. How “democratic” are city council meetings? What are the grammars of democracy in particular locales? The analysis of rhetoric and discourse within and about traditional governmental branches at the local level is possible: local judicial appointments or elections, zoning boards of appeals, planning boards, municipal associations, charter commissions, community stories, rural communities, immigrant communities,

citizen forums, etc. How have municipalities developed? Around a courthouse and a square or a church and a commons? The separate yet abutting sacred-secular places marked by the church and the commons in New England towns helped shape a certain type of civic actor. Attending to local discourse opens up wide fields for exploration.

What does this literature, this field, demand of scholars? Academic citizens must take people and their contexts more seriously. Talk of a “local level” politics implies a nested (or “lower”) nature of local politics within state and national levels (presumed as “higher,” or superior levels). This prevents us from seeing where local “home rule” exists parallel to, rather than subsumed within, state or commonwealth rule. We must treat them and their traditions and their places on their own terms, and preferably *in* their own terms (eschewing a comparison of everyday practices with ideal models of democratic deliberation). If we believe, as Benedetto Fontana, Cary J. Nederman, and Gary Remer claim in *Talking Democracy*, that “Rhetoric is the form of public discourse able to link reason and power, knowledge and interest, leaders and people,”²⁵ then we must earnestly examine rhetorical democracy at all its locales of occurrence.

Prior to and parallel with critique, we must comprehend complex and sometimes conflicting local practices. We must be ready to attend to context in new ways. We should guard our claims and ensure their provisional status. How can scholars better understand the complex, highly contextualized relationships among members in a local political system? While Eliasoph and Howley each note their challenges with participant observation, approaches that are situated and curious about how the participants perceive whatever problem is before them will best address this field.

The study of local political discourse that integrates ethnography of communication and social interaction with rhetoric has the promise of serving as phronetic research, if only because both forms of scholarship are familiar with study of speech communities and the importance of socio-cultural context. Once our orientation becomes more “practical”²⁶ we obtain a new perspective, one that ethnography of communication scholars have as a guiding premise: that where there are communities, there is something to be discovered. Rhetorical critics sensitive to cultural dimensions of communication are aware of this; Ono and Sloop, for example, anticipate this:

Studies of vernacular culture may force us to examine figures of discourse not according to specific time periods or genres and not according to historical achievements, embarrassments, or acts. . . . The emphasis on community relations does not allow for examination of texts *sans* context. This focus allows for a culturally specific approach to discourse that impacts the formation of specific textual moments. . . . [I]t forces critic and reader alike to note the ways in which text are often constructed apart from solely hegemonic or counter-hegemonic considerations.²⁷

We also can begin the practice by asking how localized communities critique their own practices,²⁸ how localized communities help create their own identities. The books in this review introduce readers to democratic and discursive practices that some Americans are seeking, in part or in ideal form, to present to the world. Any

scholar interested in public discourse, democracy, deliberation, participation, place, and political social interaction should take note. Learning about the communication of local people in local places helps us, as scholars, ask the questions that matter for the people we study as well as for the qualities we sometimes seek in civic society. Our vision of the possible can only be enhanced with a vision of the actual. And in asking questions with those whom we study, in learning about questions we could not imagine, we intervene in a system. That intervention cannot be undone. Public discourse studies of local political-rhetorical interactions can illuminate how people practice democracy and enter into publics to help create a sustainable democracy. We can learn what it is by watching and interpreting what people do in the name of democracy.

Notes

- [1] Hadley Neighbors for Sustainable Development, January 10, 2006, <http://www.hadleyneighbors.org/>
- [2] The City Repair Project, retrieved January 10, 2006, <http://www.cityrepair.org/index.html>
- [3] Michael Schudson, "Introduction: All Politics is Local, Some Local Politics is Personal," *The Communication Review* 3 (1999): http://communication.ucsd.edu/commreview/tcr_vol3.3.html#schudson
- [4] See Robert Asen and Daniel C. Boruwer, eds., *Counterpublics and the State* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); Donal Carbaugh, *Situating Selves: The Communication of Social Identities in American Scenes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); Gerard A. Hauser, *Vernacular Voices: The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Spheres* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999); Tamar Katriel, *Communal Webs: Communication and Culture in Contemporary Israel* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); Tarla Rai Peterson, *Sharing the Earth: The Rhetoric of Sustainable Development* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997). For examples of article length studies, see Karen Tracy and Aaron Dimock, "Meetings: Discursive Sites for Building and Fragmenting Community," *Communication Yearbook* 28, ed. Pamela J. Kabfleisch (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004), 127–165; Karen Tracy and Heidi Muller, "Diagnosing a School Board's Interactional Trouble: Theorizing Problem Formulation," *Communication Theory*, 11 (2001): 84–104; Karen Tracy and Christina Standerfer, "Selecting a School Superintendent: Interactional Sensitivities in the Deliberative Process," *Group Communication in Context: Studies of Bona Fide Groups*, ed. Lawrence R. Frey (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2003), 109–134; and Karen Tracy and Catherine Ashcraft, "Crafting Policies about Controversial Values: How Wording Disputes Manage a Group Dilemma," *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 29 (2001): 297–316.
- [5] Schudson, n.p.
- [6] For example, John Stewart and Karen Zediker, *Practically Theorizing Theory and Practice*, paper presented at the Practical Theory, Public Participation, and Community Conference (Waco, TX: Baylor University, January 27–29, 2000); Robert T. Craig, "Communication as a Practical Discipline," in *Rethinking Communication; Volume 1: Paradigm Issues*, ed. B. Dervin, L. Grossberg, B. J. O'Keefe, and E. Wartella (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989), 97–122; Vernon Cronen, *Practical Theory and a Naturalistic Account of Inquiry*, paper presented at the Practical Theory, Public Participation, and Community Conference (Waco, TX: Baylor University, January 27–29, 2000); Bent Flyvbjerg, "Phronetic Planning Research: Theoretical and Methodological Reflections," *Planning Theory and Practice* 5 (2004): 283–306.

- [7] Robert Asen, "A Discourse Theory of Citizenship," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90 (2004): 189–211.
- [8] Thomas B. Farrell, *Norms of Rhetorical Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).
- [9] Jane Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversarial Democracy* (New York: Basic, 1980).
- [10] Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).
- [11] Mansbridge, 139.
- [12] Joseph Francis Zimmerman, *The New England Town Meeting: Democracy in Action* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999).
- [13] See the "Unexpurgated Version" at <http://www.uvm.edu/~fbryan/realdemocracy.html>
- [14] Samuel McCormick, "Earning One's Inheritance: Rhetorical Criticism, Everyday Talk, and the Analysis of Public Discourse," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89 (2003): 126.
- [15] Bent Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How it Can Succeed Again*, trans. Steven Sampson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- [16] Timothy Gibson, "Covering the World-Class Downtown: Seattle's Local Media and the Politics of Urban Redevelopment," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 21 (2004): 283–304.
- [17] Flyvbjerg, "Phronetic Planning," 294.
- [18] Flyvbjerg, "Phronetic Planning," 289.
- [19] Christopher Eisenhart, "The Humanist Scholar as Public Expert," *Written Communication* 3 (2006): 150–72.
- [20] Michael Huspek and Kathleen K. Kendall, "On Withholding Political Voice: An Analysis of the Political Vocabulary of a 'Nonpolitical' Speech Community," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77 (1991): 1–19.
- [21] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959).
- [22] Dell Hymes, *Foundations of Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974), 55.
- [23] Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Exploring Rhetorical Theory: A Reader*, ed. Christine Harold and Stephen H. Brown (State College, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press 2002).
- [24] Flyvbjerg, "Phronetic Planning," 293.
- [25] Benedetto Fontana, Cary J. Nederman, and Gary Remer, *Talking Democracy: Historical Perspectives on Rhetoric and Democracy* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 19.
- [26] Or as Flyvbjerg would say, "phronetic," perhaps related to "productive criticism" (Ivie), or "grounded" (Craig) or practical theories (Cronen). Robert L. Ivie, "Productive Criticism Then and Now," *American Journal of Communication* 4 (2001): 1–4.
- [27] Kent Ono and John Sloop, "The Critique of Vernacular Discourse," *Communication Monographs* 62 (1995): 40.
- [28] For example, Donal Carbaugh, "The Critical Voice in Ethnography of Communication Research," *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 23 (1989/1990): 261–82.