

FORENSICS AS SCHOLARSHIP: TESTING ZAREFSKY'S BOLD HYPOTHESIS IN A DIGITAL AGE

G. Thomas Goodnight and Gordon R. Mitchell

The tables of contents from the 1915–1917 volumes of the Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking reveal how the field of communication's academic lineage can be traced back to the forensic debating tradition. In the U.S., that tradition's practical roots were established by hundreds of contracts between universities to hold intercollegiate debates for public audiences. Later in the 20th century, the advent of organized debate tournaments turned forensics into a specialized laboratory for argumentation, where contest round practice yielded first a stock-issues model of argument, followed by multiple debate paradigms, and then a series of critical rhetorics. We envision a next evolutionary step where forensics moves to seize novel opportunities offered by the digital age to refresh its practice as a "participatory culture." Key to this evolution is recognition of David Zarefsky's insights into the relationship between argument, criticism, and judgment. We illustrate the potential of debate to model strategies of new media literacy through adaptation of his hypothesis-testing model of argument to digital contexts. **Key Words:** Debate, argumentation, hypothesis-testing, participatory culture, rhetoric, forensics, public argument, rhetorical validity, cybersphere, digital democracy, blogs, social networking, media literacy.

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The study of argumentation underwent a stunning renaissance in the last half of the twentieth century. After World War II, one would not have given strong odds that argumentation would flourish to link communities of inquiry across the globe. Logic was attached to the formalism of deductive method. The sciences competed for status based on the purity of method and the power of technological applications. The social sciences carved up, mathematicized, and procedurally categorized human activities into social, psychological, social-psychological, and economic decision-making contexts. A general faith in positivist method had driven rhetoric into the byways of assisting struggling students with composition.

Rhetorical inquiry is now a global field. The International Society for the History of Rhetoric, the Rhetoric Society of America, together with the National Communication Association and the International Communication Association and other organizations, promote critical, historical, cultural and public studies of rhetoric. Argumentation, too, draws from the field of communication but also pulls in interdisciplinary interests ranging from philosophy to computer science (van Eemeren, et al., 1996, pp. 163–355; Zarefsky, 1995b). The Alta Conference on Argumentation for over a quarter of century has promoted critical and theoretical inquiry and has been joined on a rotating, intercontinental schedule by the International Society for the Study of Argumentation located in Amsterdam; the Ontario Society for the Study of Argumentation based in Canada; and the Tokyo Conference on Argumentation in Japan. At the heart of these movements are intellectual leaders who have made a commitment to the theory and practice of human reasoning.

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One such leader is David Zarefsky, now recognized widely as a luminary in the field of communication. As a scholar and teacher, he is best known for his work in public address, criticism, and argumentation, which spans the breadth of American rhetorical history. As the expansive reach of the essays in this special issue attest, Zarefsky's contributions to disciplinary development are substantial. This essay concentrates on one of his earliest and most sustained contributions: argumentation and debate.

Debate has long preserved a place for practical reason and argumentation in American universities. In public debate events, then later at intercollegiate tournaments, students, teachers, and audience members would gather to redeem the promise of an activity with ancient roots and durable salience. In United States colleges and universities, debate societies are among the oldest programs on campus. These programs have attracted students interested in testing the force of the better argument, and they have engaged in a vibrant "participatory culture" (Jenkins, 2006) for well over a century. Scholarly analysis of the practical and theoretical challenges involved in the debating enterprise created a path for the study of argumentation that shaped the larger academic field of communication (Hochmuth & Murphy, 1954; Keith, 1997; Zarefsky, 1995b).

Although the study of argumentation has gone global, debate continues to develop in relative obscurity, its participants absorbed by practice and its transitory conclusions evaporated into the internetworked society's digital ether. Yet debate remains a rich storehouse of communicative action. Debate entails a unique form of contention that draws its rules into itself, enabling conversations that link theory to practice and prompt participants to reflect constantly about how their performances relate to evolving norms and conventions of argument.

Academic debate's evolution has followed a trajectory structured by its status as a role-playing simulation exercise in which students entertain certain useful fictions (such as the notion that they have power to dictate government policy) to drive dialectic forward. Yet ironically, as the debating simulation has evolved, the membrane separating academic practice from the wider world has become more permeable. The advent of global, internetworked communication technology has stimulated a renaissance of argument invention, with new argumentative practices and forms of debate circulating each day. And as available means of persuasion and ways of engaging argument online have exploded, such platform developments have filtered back into intercollegiate debate practice.

The current moment offers a propitious opportunity to revisit Zarefsky's views on debate, first because they retain salience in light of the current challenges and opportunities facing the debate community—consider that his writings had a key impact on deliberations at the third National Developmental Conference on Debate hosted by Wake Forest University in June 2009. Additionally, recent advances in electronic dissemination of scholarly research are making some of Zarefsky's works available to a wider readership for the first time. Several of these articles and convention papers appeared in the 1970s and 1980s, a time when the status of forensics as a scholarly practice was in significant flux. Zarefsky's bold conjecture was that the forensics enterprise could evolve in ways that would create new avenues of knowledge production, ones that would complement, not supplant, traditional modes of contest-round competition. Here, we test Zarefsky's bold hypothesis, considering whether his idea of argument as critical practice retains vitality as a paradigm for reading, evaluating, and participating in internetworked argumentation in a digital age.

We proceed by reconstructing Zarefsky's general view of debate as a method of inquiry (part one), his notion of forensics as a site for argumentation scholarship (part two), and his

hypothesis-testing paradigm for debate (part three). This prepares the ground for discussion of criticism as argument in part four, and then speculation on the evolutionary path of the forensics enterprise in our closing segments.

THE DEBATE METHOD

As an intercollegiate debater, Zarefsky earned a sterling reputation as a precision word-smith, capable of doubling the cogency of arguments in half the usual number of words. As such it is appropriate at this early point in the essay to sharpen the meaning of key terms in play, focusing first on the term debate itself. Following Douglas Ehninger, Zarefsky (1995b) views debate as a situated practice in which humans use argumentation to navigate through moments of uncertainty. In addressing the values of debate, Ehninger (1966) starts out, "We begin with the commonplace observation that there are in the world as a given fact of experience problem situations which invite a choice between mutually exclusive alternatives and which for reasons of personal satisfaction or public necessity men [and women] desire to resolve" (p. 184).

Humans have developed myriad rituals and procedures to resolve difficult situations where options appear mutually exclusive. Some of these approaches offer expediency (such as dice and administrative fiat), but the problem with chance or fiat is that such strategies tend to empty the human element from the decision-making process. Methods that appear neutral because of their formalism often obscure the underlying presumptions embedded within the view that is being forwarded as true, fair or efficient. As a method of inquiry, debate is not perfect, but it is superior to intuition, chance, or blind acquiescence to formal authority. "For at least two reasons," Ehninger (1966) writes, "debate is to be preferred to the other possibilities—first, it is more reliable than they are, and, second, it is more humane" (p. 184).

The debate process not only operates as a process of inquiry. It also involves "the practice of justifying decisions under conditions of uncertainty" (Zarefsky, 1995b, p. 43; also see Zarefsky, 1995a). Justifications offer critical reasons rather than certain proof and are "supported by what the audience would regard as good reasons warranting belief or action" (Zarefsky, 1995b, p. 44). Arguments thus are addressed communication constituting the practices of advocacy cultivating individual and collective judgment. "Decisions involve choices, for if there were only one alternative there would be nothing to decide" (Zarefsky, 1995b, p. 44). Better argument makes for better debate, and better advocacy makes for more informed public decisions. Good reasons improve the public realm, but there is a more personal side to the communicative process as well.

In putting forward the best reasons one has to make the case to support change or to question it, participants take a risk by exposing personal commitments to public commentary. Unlike the safe, embracing conversation of dialogue, debate invites confrontation, clash, and pushing positions to the limit. Like dialogue, taking such risks involves a commitment to reciprocity, respect, and advance of truth through advocacy. Debate as a "person-risking" enterprise involves partnership in the mutual task of argument and so stands as a communicative correction to the "coercive correction" of authority (Ehninger, 1970, p. 102; see also Johnstone, 1965; Natanson, 1965). In this regard, debate as an advocacy practice is self-corrective. Simultaneously, debating generates "practice in making reflective judgments" while it "develops and disciplines the critical faculties," thereby developing agency in respect to making better decisions and communication "choices in the future"

(Ehninger, 1966, p. 183). Forensics gives concrete expression to debate's values; we explore these values in the next section.

FORENSICS AS A SITE FOR ARGUMENTATION SCHOLARSHIP

Zarefsky left a large footprint on the intercollegiate policy debate record books. He was named top speaker at the National Debate Tournament (NDT) as an undergraduate student, and he coached a team, Eliot Minberg and Ron Marmer, to the championship of the same tournament in 1974 later as director of the Northwestern University Debate Society. Yet reflection on Zarefsky's debate tournament record and scholarly writings reveals a surprising lacuna. At roughly the same time that he was racking up so many contest round victories, he was also a key voice in a campaign to reframe the role of competition within the forensics enterprise.

From 1971–1974, the U.S. forensics community generated an intense national conversation about its future. The dialogue drew in hundreds of interlocutors, stretched across multiple face-to-face meetings, left an impressive paper trail, and culminated in the 1974 National Development Conference on Forensics held at the Sedalia Retreat House near Denver, Colorado. One of the first orders of business for participants attending the 1974 Sedalia Conference was to pin down definitions of key terms that would guide conference deliberations. Accordingly, the group defined forensics as “an educational activity primarily concerned with using an argumentative perspective in examining problems and communicating with people” (McBath, 1975, p. 11). Notably, this definition reflected a “shift in thinking from forensics as activities to forensics as perspective for scholarship” that “profoundly influenced subsequent deliberations” (McBath, 1975, p. 12).

A prominent theme percolating from Sedalia concerned the importance of positioning forensics as a scholarly endeavor, not merely a game or sport. Toward that end, Sedalia conferees called for debate programs to integrate with academic departments, for graduate programs to redouble training of future forensics leaders, and for all members of the forensics community to embrace scholarly research as a part of their professional portfolios (McBath, 1975, pp. 12–21).

A few Sedalia conferees underscored these overall recommendations with detailed commentary. As the youngest conferee commissioned to submit such extended commentary, Zarefsky joined with Malcolm Sillars to write an essay on “Future Goals and Roles of Forensics,” (Sillars & Zarefsky, 1975, p. 83) advancing the thesis that “scholars and teachers in forensics should define their interests primarily in terms of their *substantive scholarly concerns, rather than their roles as administrators of activity programs*” (emphasis added; see also Rieke & Brock, 1975, pp. 129–136).

Echoing again a key theme from his forensics training, Zarefsky emphasized the importance of defining terms in order to frame the ensuing discussion. Accordingly, he and Sillars reinforced a shift in nomenclature echoed by other Sedalia conferees, with the sport-oriented “coach” terminology giving way to terms like “forensics specialist”—a preferred label for describing debate professionals (see e.g. Hagood, 1975, p. 101; Keele & Anderson, 1975). As Sillars and Zarefsky (1975, pp. 91–92) put it, the sportified “debate coach” definitions have “permitted the hiring of inexperienced candidates for positions often *defined* as non-tenured, with extensive work loads and a range of responsibilities that precludes the time and energy needed for serious scholarship.” Later, Zarefsky (1980) would reprise this theme in his Alta keynote address, suggesting that people in forensics err when they “define their professional

roles by reference to activity programs rather than to the object of their study. This myopic self-concept adversely affects research and scholarship" (p. 22).

The rationale for defining forensics as a scholarly enterprise becomes apparent when one considers how academic scholarship contributes to the long-term vitality of intercollegiate debate by securing institutional support for the activity, bolstering the intellectual freedom of participants, and engendering mutually informing conversations between debate scholars and interlocutors beyond the debate community. As the Sedalia conferees concluded, "programs without any academic affiliation decrease the likelihood that the forensics specialist will be perceived as a scholar whose work is vital to the educational process, and increase the likelihood that competitive activity programs will be regarded as ends in themselves" (McBath, 1975, p. 14). In their position paper, Sillars and Zarefsky sketched some possible extensions of the forensic curriculum with potential to deliver on this promise:

- The development of training programs and short courses for prelaw students in the identification and analysis of controversy.
- Workshops and programs centered on issues of concern to the individual campus or community.
- Policy argument studies "which might prove useful to students in history and government."
- Course offerings in decision making and the analysis and solution of problems, which might be of interest to students of management and administration. (Sillars & Zarefsky, 1975, p. 89)

Arguing for leaders of the forensics community to take an active role in promoting these beyond the tournament box activities, Sillars and Zarefsky (1975, p. 89) argued, "to facilitate the development of such special curricula, forensics organizations should be encouraged to commission the creation of model programs, to seek funding to underwrite these ventures, and to disseminate results."

Noting that forensics directors shoulder "a combination of teaching, coaching, travel, and administrative duties that boggles the mind," Zarefsky (1980, p. 21) warned against the tendency of these duties to crowd out scholarly endeavors. Reinforcing Sedalia's distinction between viewing forensics as a set of competitive activities and forensics as an argumentative perspective on communication in the wider world, Zarefsky (1980, p. 21) called for a "reassessment of priorities."

One intriguing element of Zarefsky's Alta keynote address is his anticipation that future events might transform the world in such ways as to render his call for changes in the nature of forensics as "doing no more than urging the inevitable" (Zarefsky, 1980, p. 21). The fact that the OPEC oil embargo and tight educational budgets in the 1980s did not put debate tournaments out of business may lead some to question Zarefsky's prescience on this point. However, only the fullness of time will reveal the extent to which the debate tournament economy will remain viable in an age where again, rising fuel prices, baggage limits, and economic turbulence make it increasingly difficult for schools to send debate teams to meet each other in the crucible of face-to-face tournament competition.

Despite Zarefsky's sharp criticisms of the sportified model of forensics, it is certain that he would not cheer the demise, or even decline, of the tournament circuit. His pronouncements at Sedalia and Alta did not call for "dismantling or de-emphasizing our contest-activity orientation, but for using it more skillfully as a way to meet our research needs" (Zarefsky, 1980, p. 23). Marginalization of the competitive spirit would throw the baby out with the

bathwater. As Zarefsky would write later in reflecting on the value of the NDT, tournament competition “stimulates all who participate to do their best” (Zarefsky, 1996, p. 32). Such a perspective echoes earlier comments by A. Craig Baird: “The fact that competition may be carried to excess does not prove that it is not valuable as a stimulus” (Baird, 1950, p. 322; cf. Ehninger, 1952; Newman, 1970; Parrish, 1931).

As is well known among those who have practiced and coached the art of intercollegiate debate, the competitive spirit, even as it finds itself in each and every round, tends to transcend tournaments, topics, and careers. Different coaches and programs tend to become known for a core set of precepts, which are most crucial to advocacy efforts. For Zarefsky, his colleagues, and his debaters, there remains perhaps no more elegant and important element to debate than evidence. Research finds itself in the appreciation of the theoretical, historical, programmatic aims of study that range across expert literatures to reason-giving by people (Zarefsky, 2002, pp. 33–35). In particular, developing the connecting link to justifications in the interests of testing the benefits of policy provides the very extension to practice that the current Social Science Research Council fears has been lost because of to excessive disciplinary specialty (Calhoun, 2009). Indeed, Zarefsky conceives of this epistemic connection between theory and practice as fundamentally bilateral: “We are unlikely to advance the notion of argument *fields* without systematic examination of how the process of argument varies from subject to subject, or from community to community of arguers” (1980, p. 2). Debate interconnects theory and practice through the testing of evidence. Zarefsky recognized that diverse paradigms may produce this result. “When we investigate how contest activities may be modeled after policy-making, system-analytic, hypothesis-testing, or game-theoretic paradigms of human behavior, we actually may be contributing to the answers to broader questions about how argument functions as an instrument of knowledge and decision,” he concluded (1980, p. 3). It is to the paradigm that best balances the relationships between evidence, inference, testing, truth, and judgment in fueling best practices that we now turn.

HYPOTHESIS-TESTING

In addition to his competitive achievements, Zarefsky is probably best known on the intercollegiate debate circuit as author of a particular debate paradigm called “hypothesis-testing.” As Zarefsky (1995b) himself chronicles, during the 1960s through 1980s, theories of argument moved from furnishing advice on particular strategies or techniques to “different paradigms or models of debate—the policy-making model, the hypothesis-testing model, the game-theory model, the critic-judge model, and the *tabula rasa*” (p. 34).

Hypothesis-testing is informed by a general model of argumentation as a “communication process in which people make, attack, and defend claims in order to gain the assent of others or to justify their own beliefs and acts” that takes place in a range of social settings from informal conversation to the court room (Zarefsky, 1976, p. 89; also see Zarefsky, 1972, 1979). In its every day uses, argumentation ranges from personal disagreement to institutional controversy. Wayne Booth starts with the problem of how such exchange can remain open, productive, and reasonable—especially in face of intense expressions of belief, consequence and outcomes. Addressing the problem of dogma and the rhetoric of assent, Booth asked: “Am I now forced to accept any piece of silliness that any fanatic wants to advance, provided only that he can get somebody to assent to it and that it cannot be clearly refuted with particular dis-proofs?” (1974, p. 106). Were argument reduced to the performance of

reasons singly, then an interlocutor would have the impossible task of distinguishing justifiable or reasonable choices from personal preference. In such a world, special pleading would fill the spaces of discourse with assertions of the value that a claim must be conceded to be true because it has always been so regarded or to confess it as true because it is utterly new and different. Argument swaddled in dogmatic assertion would reduce disputation to the tautological demand for correctness: one sees the proposition the right way or one does not.

To resist such circularity, Booth (1974) invites us to imagine engaging an interlocutor who "will be present to probe the weaknesses" in one's claims "and to present counter-claims." The other is "assumed to be as intelligent and skilled as oneself" (p. 7). Situated argument is nowhere better grounded than in "the rigor of scientific procedure," which according to Booth (1974) embraces "the assumption of the null hypothesis, the revelation of one's method, the advance determination of needed levels of significance, and so on" (pp. 6-7). The unspecified "so-ons" are key to rigorous rhetorical argument, which like science deters sophistic superficiality and yields "knowledge which is reliable and consistent" (Zarefsky, 1976, p. 4). "[P]roperly conceived, argumentation and debate are methods for testing the probable truth of hypotheses offered by advocates," J. W. Patterson and Zarefsky conclude in their 1983 textbook, *Contemporary Debate* (p. ix).

Hypothesis-testing is a counterpart to the knowledge provided by empirical observation. "When the issues involve the uncertain and contingent," whether in science or questions of policy judgment, "argumentation becomes the path to probable truth." The assertion of a statement as a hypothesis with a claim to truth is contested rigorously by an opposing advocate. "Hypotheses withstanding this test can be regarded as true and acted upon with a greater degree of confidence," Patterson and Zarefsky (1983) hold, "particularly if the test occurred within the formal and carefully controlled context of debate" (pp. ix-x). Just as science places the burden of proof on the assertion of a claim and stipulates a presumption of doubt that testing has to overcome, so debate adapts these methods to establish whether any asserted claim is probably true. Just as scientific experiment can result either in evidence that disproves the asserted claim or the absence of a clear result, so, too, the end of debate can result in a judgment that the asserted statement is false or that the evidence is so mixed that it would be prudent to withhold judgment temporarily. Unlike science which invokes law-like statements as true to explain experimental results that are context invariant, debate strives to establish agreement in moments of situated judgment where audiences are called upon to coordinate viewpoints. Requiring those asserting a claim to show good reasons and willingness to listen to testing of those reasons situates any audience in a position where self-flattery is resisted, openness to difference cultivated, and judgment—for the time being—secured. "When a rhetorical transaction is characterized by the presence of this rigor," Zarefsky concludes, "one may feel comfortable in giving to its outcome the same status of knowledge" that would be granted "to the results of scientific investigation" (1976, p. 7). Thus, a conclusion is reached similar to that of Richard McKeon where "argumentation is a generative, or architectonic, process" (Zarefsky, 1976, p. 14).

During the 1970s and 1980s, the hypothesis-testing paradigm evolved as practitioners applied it to debate contest rounds. Whereas many advocates sought to contrast the costs and benefits of a proposed policy resolution, hypothesis-testing asked more basically whether the resolution itself was true. Hence, emphasis was placed on searching for the causes that inhere in status quo approaches to regulating or solving problems, to make sure that a proposal was not too easily ballyhooed for its proposed benefits; conversely, debate extended to the

counterfactual realm, with advocates considering the merits of hypothetical alternatives to resolutorial action. Just as advocates debate, so, too, theory generates and engages debate. For instance, Thomas Hollihan (1983b) concluded that one cannot separate judgments about a paradigm's value from the way it is used in contest rounds. As hypothesis-testing came to be identified ever more closely with the competitive practices justified in its name (e.g. conditional, contradictory arguments, spread debating, and so forth), Zarefsky's original rationale for the paradigm receded and debate theory moved on.

In key respects the full potential of the hypothesis-testing paradigm was never realized, we feel, because it was reduced to a judging paradigm, suitable for use only in the context of argument-evaluation during intercollegiate debate contest rounds. This led to narrow debates about the paradigm's usefulness, with points of disagreement hinging on how the paradigm promoted certain argument practices within the tournament setting (see e.g. Corsi, 1983; Hollihan, 1983a; Rowland, 1982; Ulrich, 1984a, 1984b; Zarefsky, 1982, 1984). Missed in the process were broader applications of the hypothesis-testing paradigm, made possible by wedding the paradigm to the new modes of knowledge production in forensics proposed by Zarefsky. The difference can be understood as a comparison between a reductionist and mechanical interpretation of hypothesis-testing (applying the scientific method as a literal analog to the debate contest round) and an organic, ecological interpretation that frames interpretation of the paradigm against the backdrop of Zarefsky's overall *oeuvre*. In the next section we pursue this latter interpretation, because we believe that it promises to generate relevant insight regarding the hypothesis that new forms of forensic knowledge production can evolve to re-animate scholarly dimensions of the forensics enterprise.

CRITICISM AS ARGUMENT

The institutional tie between forensics programs and academic departments is an arrangement that has historically provided stable homes for debate teams. But such arrangements have also enriched the academy, as debate scholars have played prominent roles in steering the nascent field of speech communication. For example, Douglas Ehninger and Wayne Brockriede used analysis of forensics to connect particular practices in the debate community with more general treatments of debate as a mode of democratic decision-making, thereby highlighting the importance of argumentation theory in the broader study of communication (see, e.g., Brockriede, 1972; Ehninger, 1970; Ehninger & Brockriede, 1960, 1972). Brockriede's doctoral dissertation advisor, Marie Hochmuth Nichols, entered the study of communication as president of the Women's Debating Association at the University of Pittsburgh in 1932, and then went on to publish landmark essays in rhetorical criticism and serve as president of the Speech Communication Association (Patton, 2001, pp. 123-141).

Debate creates an appreciation for the predicaments of practice, a sensibility to the cross-cutting, doubled-side reasoning where advocacy is stressed not only to support a cause, but to test critically whether that cause already has been supported too much or too little, or in the wrong manner. Debate creates sensitivity to human argumentation that is now only faintly reflected in the everyday, simulated populism of mass mediated talk-show exchange of infotainment. Many of the leading American scholars of argumentation acquired this sensibility, Zarefsky (1995b) notes, as they "were introduced to the subject through contest debate, labored in the vineyards of that activity, and found it an important influence on their subsequent work." Indeed, "the case of academic debate illustrates a basic, recurrent pattern in the speech communication discipline: practice precedes theory. Rather than being driven

by grand theories tested through application," the discipline has tended to explain or to solve problems encountered in practice" (pp. 35–36). "Argumentation is the study of reason giving by people in communication situations," where reasons "get put together and build into other arguments" (Sillars & Zarefsky, pp. 84–85). This insight dovetails with Brockriede's (1974) long-influential position, "Rhetorical Criticism as Argument," and remains useful for Booth (1979) in understanding the powers and limits of pluralism.

Debate translates into the interventions of criticism through the idea of "rhetorical validity," an Aristotelian notion first recovered by Thomas Farrell (1977). Rhetorical validity is situationally constituted as a normative burden where reasons are given that move from what is known, shared, or understood to testing in light of audiences that endure over space and through time (see Farrell, 1995). By extension, Zarefsky (1987) finds "a valid critical argument is addressed to the general audience of critical readers, not just to those who adhere to a particular 'school' or point of view" (p. 57). The critic struggles with obligations to understand a text within the given context that embeds its arguments and from within a broader horizon needed to hold it accountable. Like the advocacy of arguers, critics cannot avoid the risk of being in error. Indeed, intervention embraces the danger with a valid effort "to keep the conversation going" in the face of everyday and expert-determined self-sealing arguments and non-falsifiable claims. Sillars and Zarefsky (1975, p. 97) conclude that "the implication of regarding argumentation as the analog of science to establish a strong claim for it as a means of knowing," and the question always subject to intervention and review is whether the faith put in the reasons given remains true for us, for others, and for all.

The practice of intercollegiate debate has remained remarkably stable over the years. True, the argumentation goes on apace to add to paradigms, question outlooks, and even abandon "rationality" to take on the performative duties of cultural studies. Further, debate as a practice has reached out more broadly to experiment with a variety of new formats that leverage exchange by aligning topics and timing to favor intensive research, public persuasion, or the playful exercise of parliamentary give and take. New audiences are involved as well, moving expertise from ivory tower pedagogy to inner city concerns, and the competitive practices of debate now range widely across the world, continuing student competition, and even extending debate into civil society training for journalists in new democracies. Thus far, while practices have been stretched creatively, the core of the activity remains in tournament competition—a format created originally to serve travel needs during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The core needs to be rethought, and Zarefsky's model of hypothesis-testing, developed as a road to critical intervention into "participatory culture" is a good place to start.

HYPOTHESIS-TESTING, THE DIGITAL AGE, AND RENEWALS OF FORENSICS PRACTICE

"Perhaps new practices are needed (even new theory?) to cast forensics in a broader pedagogical role. This might not mean eliminating what we do now: rather, it might mean adding new programs, perhaps even new systems of programs, to forensics," Sillars and Zarefsky (1975, pp. 88–89) wrote in a moment of transition when the old model of debate as an exercise in public persuasion was giving way to its subsequent policy oriented counterpart. Although much has changed since that day, debate's practical pedagogy remains centered around the competitive tournament experience. The digital age has intensified this experience by adding layers of research driving a need for speed in rounds and opportunities

for instant viewpoint exchange once rounds have finished. Like most institutions, debate has deployed digital technologies to supplement and extend the capacity of its own competitive activities.

Partly in response to the very trends that Zarefsky foresaw as constraints on tournament travel (such as higher fuel prices, baggage fees and budget pressures), debate teams have begun digitally scanning evidence and transporting their files on laptop computers, which are now ubiquitous at tournaments. In-round note-taking has gone digital too, with many debaters and judges keeping a "flowsheet" of contest round arguments on laptop spreadsheets. Pencils are gone; pens are becoming rare. And perhaps most importantly, widespread wireless connectivity links debaters together in ways that facilitate evidence sharing, argument scouting, results reporting, and interactive commentary about argument trends and practices on Internet discussion boards. Such technologies, and the communication practices they spur, combine to digitally knit the debate community into a quintessential example of what the MacArthur Foundation calls a participatory culture:

A participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created). (Jenkins, 2006)

Intercollegiate debate is the original participatory culture hosted by American universities (see Keith, 2007). Debaters pursue knowledge through engagement in and across topics, wherever critical discussion should follow. This mode of collective knowledge production bears a strong similarity to the types of expression, negotiation, problem solving, and justification through reasonable exchange championed by the MacArthur Foundation as central features of "participatory culture." Yet, the ritual of tournament participation has thus far obscured the potential for rethinking argument, not as harnessed to a ritual, highly-asceticized simulation, but as directed and developed in cutting edge ways made possible by new technologies of contention.

Recast in the digital age, Zarefsky's concept of debate as hypothesis-testing points to possibilities for fresh avenues of knowledge production with the potential to redeem his Sedalia/Alta vision of forensics as scholarship. The Internet, and the rapid diffusion and absorption of advanced communication technology by the intercollegiate policy debate community, makes possible modes of hypothesis-testing difficult to fathom in the 1970s and 1980s. Consider the notion of internetworked hypothesis-testing, where the debate community acts in concert as a collective research unit, pooling its resources to generate truly unique insights regarding the national policy debate resolution. A related concept is hypothesis-testing as critique of digital public argument, where forensics specialists intervene in live controversies as argument critics, tapping the blogosphere's potential for many-to-many communication to publicly distribute knowledge generated from applied practice in the contest round setting.

INTERNETWORKED HYPOTHESIS-TESTING AND AUTHORITY 3.0 METRICS

Roughly speaking, the act of publishing entails preparing material for public uptake, securing editorial sanction, and then announcing the event to facilitate circulation. For many years, this process was structured largely as an economic transaction between authors and

printing press owners, with editors often serving as gatekeepers who would vet and filter material. Readers relied on markers of professionalism (quality of print and ink, circulation, reputation of editors) to judge the relative credibility of publications. In the academy, referees employed similar metrics to assess a given writer's degree of scholarly authority, metrics that were rooted in principles of publication scarcity and exclusivity—that a scholar's caliber was in part demonstrated by his or her ability to persuade editors to publish their work.

Acceleration of internet communication and the advent of digital online publication destabilized these arrangements fundamentally. Publication, previously a one-to-many transaction, has become a many-to-many enterprise unfolding across a complex latticework of internetworked digital nodes. Now weblogs, e-books, online journals, and print-on-demand book production and delivery systems make it possible for a whole new population of prospective authors to publish material in what Michael Jensen (2008), National Academies of Science Director of Strategic Web Communications, calls an “era of content democracy and abundance.”

In content abundance, the key challenge for readers and referees has less to do with finding scarce information, and more to do with sorting wheat from the proverbial chaff (the ever-burgeoning surplus of digital material available online). In the debate community, this is what drives forensics specialists to comb through and process copious data in preparation for contest rounds. In the wider world, the pressing nature of this information-overload predicament has spurred invention of what Jensen (2007) calls “new metrics of scholarly authority”—essentially, new ways of measuring the credibility and gravitas of knowledge producers in a digital world of content abundance.

For Jensen, traditional “authority 1.0” metrics, such as book reviews, peer-reviewed journal publications, and journal impact factors, “are gradually being supplanted in popular culture by authority 2.0” metrics such as Google page ranks, blog post trackbacks, and diggs. Jensen's point is not that these new metrics of scholarly authority are necessarily superior to the old measurement tools, or that they are especially reliable or appropriate for assessing any given author's credibility (especially in an academic context). His point is that they are developing very fast, and becoming more widespread as markers of intellectual gravitas:

Scholarly authority, the nuanced, deep, perspective-laden authority we hold dear, is under threat by the easily-computable metrics of popularity, famousness, and binary votes, which are amplified by the nature of abundance-jaded audiences. (Jensen, 2008, p. 25)

While Jensen (2008, p. 25) sees this current trend from an era of content scarcity to an era of content abundance as a “revolutionary shift,” a “cultural U-turn so extreme it's hard to comprehend,” he also eschews determinism by stipulating that this “is a transformation we can influence.” One key avenue of influence entails invention and refinement of what Jensen calls “authority 3.0” metrics—sophisticated instruments that track and measure knowledge creation and dissemination in ways that blend traditional “authority 1.0” principles such as peer review with newfangled digital tools like *Reference Finder* (a National Academies Press “fuzzy matching” search tool) and Microsoft's *Photosynth*.

Certainly the new metrics present tools for debaters to measure the credibility of online publications, a task that is becoming ever more salient as digital material increasingly finds its way into debate research and tournament advocacy. But a personal connection hints at something greater—Jensen's brother was a successful high school debater under Randy McCutcheon at East High School in Lincoln, Nebraska, so Jensen knows all about inher-

ency, index cards and spread delivery. And in the debate community's early efforts at collaborative online knowledge production (such as *Debate Results*, *Planet Debate*, *Cross-x.com* and case list wikis), Jensen sees seeds of new metrics of scholarly authority.

Consider what takes place in a debate tournament contest round, one held under today's conditions of digitally networked transparency. Debaters present their research on both sides of a given topic, citing evidence to support their claims. Those claims (and increasingly, the precise citations or exact performative elements supporting them) are often transcribed and then uploaded to a publicly available digital archive (a process streamlined by laptop flowing). The yield is a remarkably intricate and detailed map of a whole set of interwoven policy controversies falling under the rubric of a yearlong national policy debate resolution. Who cares about this? Of course debaters and forensics specialists preparing for the next tournament take interest, as the map provides a navigational tool that leverages preparation for future contests. With refinement (perhaps through incorporation of *Django*, *GeNIe* and *SMILE* web tools), online case list wikis could be transformed into publicly accessible databases designed to provide policy-makers, journalists, and others resources for interactive study of national policy controversies, such as the 2009–2010 topic area on nuclear weaponry. Let's say a reporter for the Global Security Newswire is following the START arms control beat. With a visit to a *Digital Debate Archive* (DDA), she could not only pull up hundreds of the contest rounds where arms control was debated; she could click through to find out how certain teams deployed similar arguments, which citations were getting the most play, which sources were cited most frequently by winning teams, and which citations on arms control were new at the last tournament. Such post-mortem analysis of the debate process could enable non-debaters to hypothesis test by "replaying the chess match" that took place at unintelligible speed during a given contest round (Jensen, 2009; see also Woods, et al., 2006).

The marriage of a DDA with Jon Bruschke's ingenious *Debate Results* online resource could pave the way for a host of new statistical measures with great salience for a wide array of audiences. Internally, the debate community could benefit from development of a new set of measures and corresponding rewards associated with research outcomes. Who are the most productive individual researchers in the nation? The most original? Which debater or forensics specialist has the greatest "research impact factor" (a possible metric measuring the persons whose arguments tend to be picked up and replicated most by others in contest round competition). A system for tracking and publishing answers to these questions could open up a new symbolic reward economy, with potential to counter the drift toward sportification entailed in the strict tournament-outcome oriented reward structure. The same system could be used to track frequency and mode of source citations, yielding statistics that could answer such questions as: Which experts on nuclear weapons policy are cited most frequently in contest rounds? Which experts are cited most broadly (on a wide range of sub-topics)? When a given expert is cited by one side, who are the experts most likely to be cited by the opposing side? Scholars are increasingly using similar data to document their research impact during professional reviews (see Meho, 2007). Since intercollegiate policy debate is driven by an intellectual community committed to the rigorous standards of evidence analysis and hypothesis-testing, a strong case could be made that citation in that community is more meaningful than a website hit indicating that a scholar's work product was viewed by an anonymous person browsing the Internet (this is a good example of the difference between a 3.0 and 2.0 scholarly metric).

Many aspects of the foregoing discussion regarding prospects for a DDA were considered at the third National Developmental Conference on Debate hosted by Wake Forest University in June 2009. There, over 100 conferees endorsed a resolution calling for forensics organizations to “improve online digital systems for archiving and distributing debate knowledge production,” doing so through a “participatory design process that maximizes benefits of digital archives for the contest round participants, production of peer reviewed scholarship, and public engagement” (see Appendix; Resolution 1).

HYPOTHESIS-TESTING AS CRITIQUE OF DIGITAL PUBLIC ARGUMENT

Zarefsky’s *oeuvre* challenges us to invent modes of academic debate that celebrate and reinforce the tournament structure, while also building out from that structure to overcome its insularity. The most promising efforts would blend competition, scholarship, pedagogy and public engagement, with the various dimensions of forensic practice synergistically interlocking to form a virtuous circle. As an illustration, consider the hypothetical example from the previous section concerning a journalist who accesses a publicly accessible digital debate archive, as part of background research for a story related to her beat (which happens to overlap topically with the intercollegiate policy debate resolution). Were the reporter to discover, through “replaying the chess match” (Jensen, 2009) that certain debate teams had developed innovative arguments salient for her story, that discovery might prompt conversations between her and relevant forensic specialists and debaters. The ensuing contact could position members of the debate community to enter the live, public debate through inter-networked digital exchange. Hypothesis-testing, in this register, entails members of the debate community providing critical commentary on assertions and evidence featured in the ongoing public dialogue. The testing rests on grounds of rhetorical validity which question for whom the claim is inferred to be true—or even worthy of notice, under what conditions, with what sharing of risk, and why. The outcomes of such intervention can be either an affirmation of the claim made, a counterclaim that the statement is false or not sufficiently established to warrant belief, or that an extension of the implications of the statement is needed on the grounds that its truth was insufficiently stated at the outset.

One possible outlet for such hypothesis-testing criticism is a new online journal, *Timely Interventions: A Translational Journal of Public Policy Debate*. Plans for this peer reviewed, serial publication were announced in a resolution approved by the third National Developmental Conference on Debate (see Appendix; Resolution 2). The aim of *Timely Interventions* is to “showcase debate’s collaborative research model” by providing opportunities for mixed groups of researchers (undergraduate students, graduate students and faculty, even from different institutions) to translate the fruits of contest round research into medium-length manuscripts suitable for rapid uptake by wider public audiences interested in the public policy issues being researched under the rubric of that year’s intercollegiate policy debate resolution.

The Internet opens space for the flow of reasons swathed in memes to carry along as pictures, symbols, signs, and glowing graphics. This makes possible bottom-up publication of whatever can be converted through digital technologies to multimedia forms of presentation. Hypothesis-testing works from a critical standpoint to assess whether attention given to a particular meme is warranted, and it can also take on a creative, inventive task by inviting advocates to think through the semiotic implications should pieces, form or color of the meme be changed. As a form of criticism hypothesis-testing holds (enthy)memes account-

able to implied inferences and makes transparent short-cuts in reasoning that link evidence to justified adoption or action.

The power of this model is its simplicity, applicability, and potential to intervene within a “participatory culture” that has a vast array of public statements, ranging from highly technical and sophisticated information to the outpourings of private diaries. And the examples of a DDA prompting reporter-driven connections, or a team of forensics specialists publishing translated debate research in *Timely Interventions* does not exhaust fully the range of possibilities. The following survey of modalities demonstrates the flexibility and power of hypothesis-testing as critique of digital public argument.

Blogs

Five years ago, journalists looked down upon blogging generally as the practice of reporting by those without credentials. Journalists presently are attempting to recover from the transformation of attention from mass media to digital sites, and the move from well-framed standards of presentation to innovation in newsgathering, presentation, and coverage. Likewise, bloggers continue to question the framing of mass media stories. With hypothesis-testing this questioning could sharpen argument to examine whether old and new media have gathered evidence that warrants conclusions, have chosen frames that fit the evidence, have excluded evidence that might retell the story, and whether perhaps the narrative should be constructed another way. The exercise is more than hypothetical because blog sites are interactive, inviting reply and response. Critical literacy is stimulated by activities in the blogosphere to study why certain stories are aggregated, spread, developed, and critiqued. Blogs are a hotbed of argumentation practices inviting learning through critical engagement and production.

Public Address

For half a century, the mass media controlled which speakers were heard and what parts of the speech were shown. Competition for space and time reduced the grand art of oratory to speech snippets. Moreover, social occasions for address seemed to disappear into the voracious cable box that ate up leisure time. No longer. The low cost and ubiquitous technology has made public address available to publics. Presently, technology on sites like *YouTube* limit the length of orations available for viewing. However, national debates evolve in virtual debate space. In the past, there was great distance between a student and a person in government. One could always write, of course. With the Internet, now students can mash up these short orations and debate members of government. Speeches in the United States Congress, for example, are normally short, shallow, and poor. Imagine a debate class where students worked on short responses that deployed hypothesis-testing to see if the arguments made on behalf of a cause were accurate, true and the best available. Debate responses could be mashed up and set on the Web with students either taking the negative in Lincoln Douglas style, or members of a team could alternative affirm or contest the speech. Here, hypothesis-testing becomes a route to public participation in a virtual sphere open to argument.

Institutional Practice

Argument makes a case for public access to information that equips or interferes with exchange in professional practice. Private and public institutions have sponsored sites on the

Internet, sometimes providing information of genuine use to the public and sometimes providing advertising or making social networking moves to capitalize on opportunities for publicity or to ward off bad press. Hypothesis-testing opens up these sites as spaces for case making, where explanation, justification, actions, and judgment are invited. Sponsored sites are interactive, too. Arguers can intervene to connect, challenge, modify or adapt sponsored sites for publics in need of services or with prospects of engagement. Hypothesis-testing argument can uncover how institutional logics are assembled to support narratives that justify access, cost, risks, and state-of-the-art practices. Modern institutions play a pervasive role in modern urban life, and hypothesis-testing offers a route into testing the coherence of communicative practices that demand expert and client reasonable communicative exchanges.

These sites offer substantial opportunities for innovative uses of forensic practice. Connecting evidence to prose in sound, rapid, and stylish fashion is a skill in high demand. Forensics is highly relevant, its disciplined thought processes needed, and hypothesis-testing appears as a preeminent model that combines simplicity of form with rigor of engagement. Other models will undoubtedly develop. The activity has practices of value, but the context of training, scholarship, and theory need to be re-imagined to remain vital.

CONCLUSION

During the heyday of policy debate's "paradigm wars," hypothesis-testing had its share of adherents, some in the judging ranks who applied the paradigm as a tool for adjudication of individual contest rounds, and others in the debating ranks, who used the paradigm to justify certain argumentative strategies (e.g. multiple, conditional and contradictory negative counterplans).

Lost in this process of reduction was Zarefsky's vision of academic debate as a vehicle to transport the theory and practice of argumentation to wider society. Hypothesis-testing, in this wider frame, was a construct for establishing the gravitas and authority of forensics specialists in conversations about the nature of argumentation beyond the contest round setting. Here, the analogy linking debate to scientific hypothesis-testing was not designed to show how debate itself was a scientific process, but rather to alert external audiences to the fact that academic debate, while deviating significantly from established patterns of scientific inquiry, features its own set of rigorous procedures for the testing of argumentative hypotheses.

Craig Calhoun (2009), head of the Social Science Research Council, recently proposed a link between interdisciplinary work undertaken by the university and public knowledge. The durable mythos of ivory tower isolation and indifference should give way, he believes, to "a story of trying to inform the public with necessary knowledge, recognizing that the public gets informed in different ways, through different media, through different kinds of intermediary groups, including professions and nongovernmental organizations and social movements and policy and regulatory bodies and business companies." From the standpoint of public argument, "informing" demands testing across the relevant and interested audiences to which reasons are directed. Forensics always has simulated such tests in tournament competition, and the critical approach to situated exchange extends arguments to rhetorical history and contemporary public debate.

Once an enterprise borne from the difficulties of engagement with public audiences, academic debate became estranged from its audience-centered origins during the mid-

twentieth century. The rise of tournament competition as an organizing *telos* augured debate's ascetic turn, characterized by heightened specialization, intensifying insularity, and fetishization of technique. Rewards for participation in debate rose, but so did entry barriers. Participation rates shrunk, and the activity took on the patina of an exotic sporting event, even attracting a cable sports television network to cover several NDTs in the new millennium.

In charting a course for the future of forensics, the Sedalia conferees envisioned the debate community rounding into a scholarly enterprise that would grow from its audience-centric roots to tackle research questions on such topics as political campaign debates, conflict resolution, public opinion formation, and processes of persuasion (see McBath, 1975, pp. 35–36).

Now debate's digital turn opens up opportunities for forensics specialists and debaters to recuperate the audience dimension of argumentative practice, without jettisoning the wondrous enterprise of fast-talking, evidence-intensive, dynamically reflexive tournament debating. As Zarefsky opens a new chapter of his long and rich professional career, the lasting salience of his argumentation and debate *oeuvre* may well help the debate community turn this page.

APPENDIX

RESOLUTIONS ON FORENSICS RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP

ADOPTED AT THE THIRD NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL CONFERENCE ON DEBATE

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY, WINSTON-SALEM, NC

JUNE 5–7, 2009

1. The National Developmental Conference on Debate (NDCD) recommends that forensics organizations should improve online digital systems for archiving and distributing debate knowledge production. In pursuit of that goal we recommend establishment of a participatory design process that maximizes benefits of digital archives for the contest round participants, production of peer reviewed scholarship, and public engagement.

2. The NDCD recommends establishment of a publishing outlet that translates knowledge produced in contest debating into double peer reviewed academic journal articles. Ideally, the journal will showcase debate's collaborative research model and its ability to impact live public argument with timely interventions.

3. The NDCD recommends that the American Forensics Association Research Committee should exercise professional leadership by including in its annual reports updated lists that identify opportunities for innovation in forensics scholarship intersecting with issues of public concern.

4. The NDCD encourages research and scholarship on topics relating to contest debate round practice such as argument trends, frameworks, tournament governance, coaching pedagogy, and other related topics. We also encourage debate scholars to extend these research findings to matters of wider public concern. We encourage *Contemporary Argumen-*

tation and Debate to review and publish such scholarship on a quarterly basis.

5. The NDCD encourages the formation of a mentoring group as a resource for emerging scholars. This group will be composed primarily of former debate coaches comfortable with providing advice and possible review of scholarship. The purpose of this group is to encourage young scholars to produce quality debate research and to provide positive relationships for continuation of the debate scholarship tradition.

6. The NDCD should recommend that American Forensics Association should adopt guidelines for collaborative coauthored scholarship.

7. The NDCD endorses the establishment of a U.S. Congressional Speech and Debate caucus and encourages that caucus to foster debate research and scholarship, including the publication of a Congressional Research Service topic area packet, and support of a participatory design process oriented toward refinement and development of an open source digital debate archive.

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