"When I talk, it's not a rant. It's a symphony of ideas": a study on the rhetorical devices in Kanye West's speech

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Rap-musiikin suosio on ollut jyrkässä nousussa viime vuosikymmenien aikana. Tämä on johtanut rap-musiikin yhteiskunnallisen statuksen kasvamiseen ja antanut kyseisen genren artisteille yhä isomman alustan ilmaista mielipiteitään sekä mahdollisuuden vaikuttaa yhteiskunnallisiin asioihin. Tämän tutkielman tavoitteena oli saada lisää tietoa rap-artisti Kanye Westin käyttämistä retorisista keinoista. Tutkielmassa pyrittiin selvittämään retoristen keinojen esiintyvyys, käsiteltävät teemat, sekä analysoimaan retoristen keinojen mahdollisia vaikutusmekanismeja aikaisemman tutkimustiedon avulla.

Tutkielman aineistona toimi lähes kolmen tunnin mittainen podcast-jakso, jossa Yhdysvaltalainen juontaja ja mediapersoona Joe Rogan haastatteli Westiä. Tutkielma toteutettiin laadullisen sisällönanalyysin avulla. Westin käyttämät retoriset keinot tunnistettiin ja niistä kolme yleisimmin esiintynyttä retorista keinoa otettiin lähempään tarkasteluun. Eniten käytetyt retoriset keinot olivat esimerkki, metafora sekä toistaminen. Analyysista kävi ilmi, että West pyrki vaikuttamaan erityisesti tunteisiin vetoamalla. Westin retoriikasta korostui epäluulo instituutioita sekä muita ihmisiä kohtaa. Tämän lisäksi Westin retoriikassa korostui itsenäisyyden ja itseluottamuksen ihannointi. Samanlaisia tuloksia on tätä ennen löydetty niin rap-musiikkia kuin poliittista retoriikkaa käsittelevissä tutkimuksissa.

Tutkimuksen tuloksia voidaan jatkossa hyödyntää esimerkiksi syventämään käsitystä retoristen keinojen vaikutuksista kohderyhmien avulla. Tämän lisäksi on mahdollista syventyä tässä tutkielmassa käsiteltäviin aiheisiin esimerkiksi diskurssin tutkimuksen avulla. Tällöin voitaisiin saada enemmän tietoa aiheeseen liittyvistä sosiaalisista sekä kieleen ja vallankäyttöön liittyvistä seikoista.

Asiasanat – Keywords: Kanye West, rhetorical analysis, rhetorical device, rap music

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1. Introduction

Modern rap music is a fairly new phenomenon. Rap music was created in the 1970s making it one of the youngest genres of music. Thematically, rap music stemmed from the unequal treatment of African-Americans and has been closely linked to fighting oppressive societal structures (Caldwell, 2007, 12–13). In the recent years, rap has seen a massive increase in its popularity, and, as a result, a change in its perceived status in the society. When comparing the total streaming times of different musical genres, rap is currently one of the most popular genres of music in the US (Statista, 2021). The meteoric rise of the genre and the resulting cultural prominence of rap music has given rappers an exceedingly large platform to express their views on various issues beyond music, and an opportunity to branch out into various different fields. One of the most influential rap artists of the past two decades is Kanye Omari West (Bailey, 2015, 11). West started his music career in the early 2000s as a beat maker before transitioning into rapping. After making a substantial impact in the world of rap and hip hop music, West expanded his brand by getting involved in the fashion industry where he has managed to remain in the forefront for more than a decade. As of recently, West has gotten increasingly involved in politics, and he was a presidential candidate in the 2020 US election.

Rhetoric has been subject of interest to a vast amount of scholars ever since the inception of modern rhetoric in the ancient Greece. The study of rhetoric started from the law courts and other formal settings of 500 B.C. Greece from which it branched out into many different directions over the next couple of hundreds of years by highly influential philosophers such as Socrates, Aristotle and Plato (Kennedy, 1994, 3). In simple terms, rhetoric has come to encompass the available means of persuasion. The study of rhetoric is centered on how language affects the situation in which it is spoken by influencing both the speaker as well as the listeners. Unique to the rhetorical tradition is the concept of rhetorical devices, which can be viewed as the specific language choices and tools that are meant to persuade (Kelen, 2007, 8). This study focuses on aforementioned rhetorical devices and their use by Kanye West.

There have been previous studies conducted on the rhetoric devices used by rap artists. However, many of the studies have focused specifically on the musical content. Elswerth (1996) and Caldwell (2007) have both noted themes of oppression, racism and empowerment in rap's rhetoric. Kanye West's rhetoric has also been a subject of research in the past. A 2010 study examined the lyrical content and rhetoric of West's music, as well as the mass media's portrayal of West's rhetoric (Cole 2010). Jim Bailey's (2015) publication *"The cultural impact of Kanye*

West" examines Kanye West's character portrayal and public persona from a myriad of important viewpoints, such as heteronormativity, hypermasculinity and religion. It is important to note that during the past 3 years, there has been a clear shift in West's mentality towards many urgent issues, such as racial tensions, political divide and religion. The apparent change in West's worldview, coupled with the fact that he is one of the most successful musicians and entrepreneurs are reasons for revisiting West's rhetoric.

The second chapter begins by providing an overview of the history and development of rhetoric over the course of history. After this, a clear definition of rhetorical analysis and rhetorical devices will be presented. Previous rhetorical studies that are crucial for my thesis will also be discussed. Chapter three contains the methodological choices and ethical considerations, as well as the data of the present study. Chapter four focuses on the analysis of the findings and the overall results. Finally, the fifth chapter will provide the reader with a summary of the most relevant findings. In addition, I will discuss their significance for this field of study, evaluate the study's effectiveness, and outline some potential ways these results can be built upon in future studies.

2. Background

In this section, I will aim to provide necessary background information about rhetoric. First, the term 'rhetoric' is defined. In addition, the history of the rhetoric tradition is discussed. The second part will focus on rhetorical analysis. The definition of rhetoric analysis is then presented, as well as its application. The final part will present previous findings of various rhetorical studies relevant to this thesis.

2.1. Rhetoric

Rhetoric has been broadly defined as the act of persuasion (Leach, 2000, 207). When discussing rhetoric, it is often accompanied by the fundamental belief that language is not only used to communicate thoughts and ideas, but also used as a means to establish a certain power dynamic, organize thoughts and even to perceive the world. Hence, when studying rhetoric, the focus is not only on the methods of persuasion, but also on unpacking why something is persuasive (Leach, 2000, 208). However, unlike various other linguistic fields, rhetoric is specifically interested in the use of rhetorical devices (Kelen, 2007, 8). The concept of rhetorical devices will be discussed more thoroughly in section 2.2.

The use of the term *rhetoric* dates back to the fifth century B.C. Greece. During that time, the term was specifically used to discuss the art of public speaking in formal settings, such as courts. The power of words was recognized as crucial in many instances in the newly formed democracy, and there was a growing interest towards examining speaking and how it affects a given situation. Therefore, rhetoric can be seen as an embodiment of the primal need to control one's environment. During the fifth century B.C., rhetoric began to evolve and it started to become viewed as a problem-solving tool, and for the first time, people began identifying what makes a speech effective. Naturally, this was accompanied by the act of teaching the new discipline to others. Thus, the foundations for what we perceive as the field of modern rhetoric were created during this era (Kennedy, 1994, 3). However, it should be noted that the legacy of the early days of rhetoric did not leave us with a clearly defined doctrine, but more so a debate that branches out into many different directions (Wardy, 1996, 2). This is further exemplified by the ideological differences in the works of some of the most prominent scholars.

Plato and Aristotle are some of the most important figures to advance the study of rhetoric during its early phases, and their influence is still visible in today's world. Plato's *Gorgias* examines rhetoric as well as the dangers and deceptiveness associated with it. In Gorgias, Plato criticizes the Sophists' use of rhetoric and claims that rhetoric is used to create 'appearances of truth'. For this reason, some scholars have suggested that *Gorgias* is in part responsible for the negative image that is often associated with rhetoric in today's socio-political landscape (Gottweis, 2007, 240). However, Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, views rhetoric through a more optimistic lens. Aristotle, who was taught by Plato, not only built upon the ideas Plato had established in his works, but also approached rhetoric from a different perspective. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle viewed rhetoric as the basis for political community and as a tool for rational thinking (Olmsted, 2006, 11). It is crucial to note that Aristotle himself criticized using rhetoric as a tool for malicious purposes (Jörke, 2014, 73–74). Furthermore, Aristotle attempted to describe characteristics that are central for persuasion on a universal level (Rodney, 2009, 39). Out of all of the various philosophers of the ancient Greece, Aristotle is often seen as the most influential.

Through his own empirical studying of governmental settings and courts, Aristotle categorized persuasion into 3 different modes: *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*. The first one, *ethos*, refers to the speaker's characteristics. It encompasses the charisma and personal experience possessed by the speaker. (Demirdöğen, 2010, 192). However, it is important to recognize that ethos does not refer to internal attitudes, but instead is a performative phenomenon (Gottweis, 2007, 242).

The second one, *pathos*, is used to talk about the mood of the speech, as well as the emotions of the audience. Aristotle believed that a speaker must be able to assess the emotional state of the listeners in order to appeal to their passions. The last one, *logos*, can be viewed as the rational side of persuasion. According to Aristotle, the speaker has to present his arguments in an understandable and rational manner so that the audience is able to process them (Demirdöğen, 2010, 192). It should be recognized that out of the three modes, logos is the only one that is not tied to specific contexts and instead convinces by itself (Gottweis, 2007, 242). Aristotle's categorization of the three modes influenced many scholars of rhetorical studies, such as Cicero (Demirdöğen, 2010, 192). Furthermore, the concept is present in many modern fields that are relevant to the present study, such as the study of political rhetoric (Reisigl, 2008, 97).

Later, the Roman's continued to further the study of rhetoric. They gave persuasive strategies labels, as well as invented complex rhetorical schemes. Rhetoric was taught side by side other respected communicative practices for a long time. However, eventually after the fall of the Roman Empire, the study of rhetoric saw a stagnation as the church grew in power. The focus of rhetoric had shifted from law courts to knowledge needed to interpret the bible, and was performed by a relatively small number of people (Kennedy, 1994, 271–272). The role of the rhetorical tradition continued to fade over the course of over a thousand years, until it saw a rise during the Renaissance. Many of the texts that were created during the ancient Greece and the Roman Empire were rediscovered and used to revive the study of rhetoric in the new western world. Furthermore, renaissance thinkers contributed to the tradition of rhetoric through a plethora of ways, for example by deepening the understanding of how argumentation works on a fundamental level. Lastly, renaissance thinkers created new tools for argumentation, and placed emphasis on proverbs, maxims, examples, and emotions (Mack, 2011, 2–3).

In conclusion, it should be recognized that the tradition of modern rhetoric has matured for over 2500 years (Leach, 2000, 209). Modern scholars draw from many of the classical ideas of rhetoric, such as the theories on argumentation, as well as Aristotle's modes of persuasion in order to not only understand language, but also the world at large. Quite recently, the study of rhetoric has become more salient in various different fields, such as politics and law (Olmsted, 2006, 114). Lastly, and perhaps most importantly in the context of this thesis, Leach (2000, 209) makes note of its important role in humanitarian sciences today.

2.2. Rhetorical analysis

Rhetorical analysis focuses on explaining methodologically how a communication event attempts to persuade through a set of select features. Thus, rhetorical analysis requires the analyst to not only examine the overall aim of a given discourse, but also to what effect each individual part of the communication function in the larger context. Even though rhetorical analysis shares many similarities with other methods of textual analyzing, it draws from a specific set of ideas that is based on the tradition of rhetoric. (Zachry, 2009, 69)

Rhetorical analysis relies on the concept of rhetorical devices, which are the specific techniques and tools that are used to persuade and influence. Kelen (2007, 8) refers to the various rhetorical devices as modes of thought and ways of meaning. Rhetorical devices affect through various different mechanisms (Harris, 2013, 3). For instance, they can be used as transitional tools to move from one idea to another in a fluid manner. In addition, they can be used to make an argument clearer and to make communication more captivating. However, it should be recognized that the use of rhetorical devices may not be deliberate in every situation (Kelen 2007, 9). Thus, the effect of a rhetorical device may not be in accordance with the intended outcome of the speaker, and is always sensitive to the context in which it is interpreted. Rhetorical devices have been labeled in slightly different ways, and the exact number of rhetorical devices has not been accurately established. For the objectives of this thesis, the Wikipedia page *Glossary of Rhetorical Terms* offers a satisfactory list that functions as a starting point for the categorization of rhetorical devices.

In order to conduct a rhetorical analysis, one must start by defining the speaker's purpose. This is done by examining the specific context in which the discourse takes place, as well as the audience (Leach, 2000, 209). Secondly, the analyst should accurately identify and label the rhetorical devices used in the discourse. One valid way of approaching rhetorical analysis is to create an inventory of the rhetorical devices and observe which devices are used most frequently. After this step, the analyst must connect the individual parts to the discourse, and interpret the meaning of the elements both in isolation and within the overall communication (Zachry, 2009, 69). Lastly, it is paramount for the successfulness of the rhetorical analysis that the effectiveness is evaluated, instead of simply summarizing the findings.

2.3. Past research on rhetoric

Rhetoric has been studied extensively in many different contexts. However, because of the focus of this particular thesis, the following examples will be centered on spoken language. Furthermore, past research on politics, rap music and Kanye West's rhetoric are discussed, as they are deemed to be the most crucial for the present study.

2.3.1 Rhetoric in politics

A common area of rhetorical study is the field of politics. Political leaders and their means of persuasion have been studied vastly in the past. Lim (2002) examined the rhetoric of US presidents between years 1789–2000. In his analysis, he highlights a shift in presidential rhetoric and lists five trends: assertive, abstract, anti-intellectual, conversational, and democratic (Lim, 2002, 328). One of the main findings from the viewpoint of my thesis is the fact that presidential rhetoric has moved from formal to more informal in various ways (Lim 2002 333). Victoria West (2014) examined former president Barack Obama's rhetoric in his inaugural speeches. In her analysis, West focused on three main topics: civil religion and shared ideals, immigration, and race. West claims that Obama's rhetoric was largely different compared to his predecessors. One of the main differentiating factors is Obama's personal rhetoric style when discussing racial matters. According to West, Obama was the first president to put the blame of racial discrimination onto the American people (West, 2014, 16). Both West's and Lim's studies gave my thesis resources for comparison and contrast.

In addition, López (2020) examined the rhetoric of Female political activists by analyzing speeches from Greta Thunberg, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Malala Yousafzai. López found that the trio's rhetoric aimed to simplify complex topics through the use of metaphors (López, 2020, 40). The political figures used various rhetorical devices, such as repetition and personal stories to invoke both positive and negative emotions in their audience (López, 2020, 10). Further, their age and personal experience was noted as an important factor for the overall persuasive effect, as these factors can strengthen the speakers' ethos through increased reliability (López, 2020, 60). López' study provided my thesis with structural reference, as well as information on the effects of repetition and metaphor and their relation to Aristotle's modes of persuasion (López, 2020, 20).

2.3.2 Rhetoric in rap music

Another relevant area of rhetorical studies from the viewpoint of this thesis is the rhetoric of rap artists. Elswerth (1996) focused on Public Enemy's music and defined rap music as *protest rhetoric*. He claims that rap music gives the impoverished African-American neighborhoods a way to speak about their problems and make their voices heard (Elswerth, 1996, 3). African-American empowerment was noted as a reoccurring theme. Furthermore, Elswerth claims that the lyrics in rap often express frustration towards the police, government, and society at large (Elswerth, 1996, 6). Caldwell (2007) noted similar themes in his study of rap's rhetoric. His analysis was focused on 15 rap songs that were meant to represent African-American rap. The rap songs were further divided into three different subgenres: gangsta rap, hip hop rap and political rap. One of the key findings was that instead of directly engaging with the dominant forces, many rapper's choose to use a strategy that Caldwell labels as 'resistance by ignoring' (Caldwell, 2007, 13). In short, Caldwell argues that rappers avoid reproducing dominant-subordinate terms that are used by the colonizing system as a way of thinking. Both Elswerth's and Caldwell's studies provided my thesis with a basic understanding of some of the central themes that are present in African-American rap music and how they are typically communicated.

2.3.3 The rhetoric of Kanye West

Lastly, Kanye West has been a subject of rhetorical analysis. Bailey (2015) examines West's rhetoric and draws conclusions of how West builds his own identity and views the world. Bailey claims that instead of having a clear, well-defined lane in the music industry, West in a fluid manner (Bailey, 2015, 18). Furthermore, he claims that the changes in West's public persona are less about the world around him changing, and more about his own perception changing. In the book, West is described as an artist who is driven by his ego (Bailey, 2015, 18). Lastly, Bailey highlights West's dissatisfaction with his position in the music industry, which is a driving force for West's decision-making (Bailey, 2015, 19). Cole (2010) expands on the topic of West's rhetoric and notes that it is often full of political critiques. The critiques are often aimed towards oppressive social structures as well as the racism within America (Cole, 2010,

196). Similar to Bailey, Cole also highlights West's struggles with publicity (Cole, 2010, 197). These publications were important for this thesis, as they allowed me to identify certain themes that emerged from West's rhetoric, as well as examine the underlying causes for various rhetorical choices in specific contexts.

3. Present study

3.1. Aim of the research

Even though Kanye West has been the subject of various studies, the studies have mostly focused on West's music. With West continuing to gain prominence in many different avenues and becoming more vocal outside of his musical content, an updated look at his rhetoric is needed. The following research questions were used to guide this process:

1. Which rhetorical devices appear most often in Kanye West's speech?
2. Which of the themes that have been identified in past research on rhetoric are brought up by Kanye West via the rhetorical devices?
3. Based on previous research on rhetorical devices, what are the possible purposes and effects of the devices in the context in which they appear in?

The first research question is meant to provide the quantities of the various rhetorical devices and aid in discovering the most frequently used ones. Research questions 2 and 3 are used to gain further understanding regarding how the rhetorical devices are used and in what context. By linking the use of rhetorical devices to themes that have been found in research I am able to derive information on various relevant topics and examine West's rhetoric on a holistic level. Thus, the overall aim of this study is to use these research questions to obtain new information regarding West's use of rhetorical devices in his speech.

3.2. Data

The data used in this thesis was Joe Rogan Experience podcast episode number 1554 featuring Kanye West. The video was published on Joe Rogan's YouTube channel *PowerfulJRE* on the 24th of October 2021. At the time of writing this thesis, the interview has garnered over 17 million views. This particular interview was chosen because of the wide variety of topics that

are discussed. Instead of simply focusing on a single aspect, such as politics or rap music, the podcast episode offers a look into Kanye West's rhetoric regarding a myriad of issues. Furthermore, with the episode being 2 hours and 57 minutes in length, there was a satisfactory amount of material to analyze.

3.3. Methods

The method of analysis for this thesis was content analysis. Content analysis was deemed to be an appropriate method of analysis, as it has been cited as a suitable method for analyzing verbal interactions in natural and non-reactive settings (Krippendorff, 2013, 40–41). Furthermore, content analysis is extremely context-sensitive and can be used to process symbolic meanings (Prasad, 2008, 8). In addition, drawing new observations is one of its major strengths in comparison to other alternatives. Furthermore, content analysis is highly suitable for humanitarian topics and phenomena such as language and political discourse (Krippendorff, 2013, 76–77). Since the topic of this thesis deals with the use of language, content analysis is an appropriate method. In addition, inductive coding was used in this thesis. Thus, the data analysis moved from particular to general and was approached without any predetermined themes and (Krippendorff, 2013, 36). This is an appropriate method when the existing information on a subject is scant or if the data is fragmented. Due to the diverse nature of rhetorical analysis, inductive coding was deemed to be a viable method of coding. (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, 1279)

Furthermore, rhetorical analysis is used to complement the content analysis in this thesis, as it allows me to examine the persuasiveness of West's speech. By combining content analysis with rhetorical analysis I am able to not only examine the quantities of the rhetorical devices but also gain further insight into the reasoning of their use and the effects that they have. This is complemented by two specific tools from discourse analysis. The situational meaning tool is used to analyse how context affects the meaning of an utterance. According to Gee (2014), understanding the meaning of an utterance or a word within a sentence is not a matter of merely looking up the definition of the word (Gee, 2014, 159). Thus, the analyst must ask what situated meanings the words have in the specific context, and how the context is construed (Gee, 2014, 159). This is coupled with the social language tool, which requires the analyst to take into

consideration how the specific variety of language are used to enact a particular identity (Gee, 2014, 162).

The process starts with transcribing the relevant parts of the data. This requires meticulously going through the interview to ensure a reliable transcript. After this, the various rhetorical devices are identified. A thorough background knowledge of the various rhetorical devices is a prerequisite for this step (Zachry, 2009, 68). The Wikipedia page *Glossary of Rhetorical Terms* provided me with a sufficient starting point that I supplemented with Harris' (2013) *A Handbook of Rhetorical Devices* in order to better understand the rhetorical devices. Emphasis was placed on the most frequently appearing rhetorical devices due to the limitations of the recommended thesis length. However, excerpts are provided for every rhetorical device. This is done to improve the transparency, which has been noted as a crucial consideration in qualitative research (Kapiszewski & Karcher, 2020, 1–2).

The final part of the process consists of analyzing the effect that the rhetorical devices have and identifying the patterns of use as well as common themes. The word 'theme' has been used in literature in a variety of different ways (Rimmon-Kenan, 1994, 9). In this thesis, I will use the definition laid out by Rimmon-Kenan (1994, 13). This means that instead of viewing theme as component in the text-continuum, theme is approached as *"a construct derived from discontinuous elements in the text"*. Bazeley (2009) emphasizes that in order to make a robust qualitative research, the researcher must go beyond identifying themes. Thus, I will attempt to contextualize and make links between the themes, as well as to existing research on rhetoric (Bazeley, 2009, 21).

3.4. Ethical considerations

Due to the data being a publicly available interview, there are no aspects in this research that deal with personal information of any type. Guidelines laid out by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2012, 30) are followed when conducting this thesis, and presenting and evaluating the content within. Previous research done by other authors will be accurately cited throughout this paper following these guidelines.

4. Findings

There were found to be a total of 12 rhetorical devices that West used in his interview, three of which appeared significantly more frequently than others (Table 1.). These rhetorical devices were *exemplum*, *metaphor*, and three subcategories of *repetition*. As mentioned earlier, due to the prominence of the three most common rhetorical devices, as well as the limitations of this thesis, the analysis will focus on the aforementioned devices. I will aim to provide definitions of the devices, as well as excerpts from the transcript that highlight the rhetorical devices. Furthermore, I will analyze how the rhetorical devices are used in the context in which they appear in, to what effect, and highlight common themes and patterns.

Table 1. The rhetorical devices present in the data

Rhetorical device	Quantity	Example from data
Exemplum	**51** **(35%)**	Like Bob Marley. They didn't just JFK or MLK him. There's like reports that it was something in his toe or he had cancer.
Metaphor/simile	**34** **(24%)**	When I talk, it's not a rant. It's a symphony of ideas.
Repetition	**28** **(19%)**	I won't let that be the kryptonite. I won't let my own ego be my kryptonite. I won't let other people's opinions be my kryptonite.
Rhetorical question	7	So it's so funny how people are so like free and almost arrogant with their advice. And I'm just like, why would I listen to you?
Hypophora	7	But what's holding us back? Fear.
Colloquialism	6	I'm going to listen to the kids, bro.
Metonymy	3	There's, you know, like Hollywood and media has control so much of the narrative.
Asyndeton	2	When people say is Ye crazy is Ye a narcissistic, is Ye an egomaniac is Ye self-absorbed is Ye…all these no Ye know who Ye is.
Anacoluthon	2	So one of the ideas I had when I was in this process of innova -- I'm not I'm not at war with the music industry, it's just it's time for us to innovate.
Hyperbole	2	And they're telling me all these millions of reasons why I couldn't run for president.
Data	1	It's actually technically possible for me to win now, which would be the best option for America. I would I'm on 12 ballots and in 17 states that you could write me in on.
Comparatio	1	Because in Japan there is like a way that people treat there isn't like this systemic racism embedded in every single individual that's inside of the place, like in America.
Total	**144**	

4.1. Exemplum

The rhetorical device that appeared the most frequently in Kanye West's speech was exemplum. This is in line with the existing research on rhetorical devices, as exemplum has been quoted as the most frequently used rhetorical device in literature (McGuigan, 2007, 97). Exemplum can loosely be defined as using an example to illustrate a point. According to Aristotle, the examples can be of past events, but also fictional fables (Robinson, 1986, 14).

Excerpt 1

"Yeah. I mean, but I think about that any time I go to the go to the hospital, I'm very. You know, I'm mindful of that stuff you think about, like Bob Marley. They didn't just JFK or MLK him. There's like reports that it was something in his toe or he had cancer."

In this excerpt, West expresses his concerns regarding the medical industry. West uses Bob Marley as an example of a case involving lots of unclear details. He contrasts that with the assassinations of JFK and MLK underline the suspicious nature of the case. West uses the example to argue why he exercises caution when dealing with medical institutions. This excerpt introduces the theme of distrust towards various establishments and institutions, which has been a common theme in rap music according to research (Elswerth, 1996, 6).

Exempla that deal with history are said to please the audience (Robinson, 1986, 7). Thus, the use of exemplum in this context can persuade by strengthening the pathos. Further, accurate historical exempla can function as evidence and increase the authoritativeness of the speaker, thus potentially appealing to *logos*. However, it must be noted that exemplum can be used inappropriately by making false comparisons (Robinson, 1986, 8). Therefore, in this context, the effectiveness of the rhetorical device ultimately depends on whether the listener believes in the theory of Bob Marley's assassination.

Excerpt 2

"He's just a rapper. It's just a it's just an entertainer. It's just whatever it is. ... It's like Veronica Cornerstone wanting to be an anchor person. And I remember she says, "Ron, I told you I wanted to be an anchor person. He said, yes, I heard you. I wrote it down. Veronica

Cornerstone had a very funny joke tonight. And every time I talk, it's like Veronica Cornerstone having a very funny joke tonight. Like when I said I was going to run for president."

Excerpt number 2 features West discussing how his presidential ambitions are not being taken seriously. He uses the 2004 comedy movie *The Anchorman* to describe how he feels the public thinks less of him due to him being a rapper. He compares himself to fictional character Veronica Cornerstone, who is not taken seriously due to her gender, despite her being highly qualified for the job. By using an extremely popular American movie as an example, West is relating to the audience (Langlands, 2000, 33). In addition, the use of the device makes the claim more vivid (Langlands, 2000, 17).

West's struggles with his public image and brand have been previously found in literature (Bailey, 2015, 18). Furthermore, according to research, the topic of feeling marginalized by the surrounding world has been noted generally in rap as well as in Kanye West's rhetoric specifically (Cole, 2010, 197). This excerpt also highlights West's dissatisfaction with his status, a theme that has been noted in research. Bailey (2015) claims that West continuously expresses that he is not content with being viewed simply as a rap artist (Bailey, 2015, 19). However, it is important to note that the perception of rap music within the society appears to be quite positive according to research (Tyson, 2006, 219). This suggests a discordance between Kanye's perception of society's attitudes and the actual attitudes, which has also been noted in literature (Bailey, 2015, 18).

Excerpt 3

"Racism doesn't end until we get to a point where we stop putting the word black in front of it because it's like we're putting the rim a little bit lower for ourselves.
Like it's when I say I'm the second wealthiest black man in America, like, why do I have to say that? ... I'll be like I'm the 17th wealthiest man in America, but we shouldn't have to have a special box, a special month."

In this excerpt West is discussing his interpretation of systemic racism and how to end it. He highlights the point by using an example of how e he feels the need to include his race as a modifier when discussing his financial success. Using himself as an example of an incredibly wealthy individual increases the authoritativeness, as does the exemplum's truthfulness

(Langlands, 2000, 19). Thus, the exemplum can persuade through strengthening the logos. Furthermore, the fact that West is discussing his personal experience can affect the credibility, which strengthens the ethos.

It can be argued that West approaches the topic of ending racism in this excerpt from a different angle than what is has been portrayed in rap and politics. In rap music, critique of racism on a societal scale is often aimed towards the system at large, instead of African-Americans (Berry, 1994, 179). It should also be noted that West himself has previously blamed the government for racism (Cole, 2010, 195–196). This hints towards a shift in West's opinions. Furthermore, unlike the former president of the United States Barack Obama, West puts the responsibility of ending racism specifically on African-American people (West, 2014, 16). Lastly, the rhetoric of empowerment has been shown to be a recurring theme in rap music (Elswerth, 1996, 19). It can be argued that West is attempting to empower African-American people by saying that they have both the personal responsibility to take action on the issue of racism, as well as the means to make a change. Therefore, this excerpt introduces the theme of self-reliance.

4.2. Metaphor/simile

The second most common group of rhetorical devices was metaphor and simile. Simile is the comparison of two things that share a similar characteristic. Metaphor means speaking of one thing by using a different word. Due to how similar the two rhetorical devices are, they have been combined in this paper (McGuigan, 2007, 52).

Excerpt 4

"You know, it's like when the Metoo movement happened, you know, it wasn't just the guys that were getting tagged and, you know, some of the guys should have got hit with it. Some guy shouldn't. ... I'm saying that in a way everyone's responsible. To see someone being raped, you know, is the reason why I compare what's happening to in the music industry to #metoo, because artists are raped."

In excerpt 4 West makes reference to the #metoo online campaign that was focused on revealing the prevalence of sexual abuse towards women. Metaphors are used to make an abstract concept more understandable (Harris, 2013, 35). In this example, West can be seen doing that by

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comparing how labels treat artists in the music industry to rape in order to illustrate that one party is in control and is benefitting of the situation at the expense of the subordinate party. Themes of oppression have been noted in research regarding the rhetoric of rap (Caldwell, 2007, 12). More specifically, West's rhetoric has in many instances focused on how black culture is being exploited by white people for financial gain (Bailey, 2015, 14).

Using rape as a metaphor can be argued to have a major emotional impact. Therefore, the device strengthens the pathos, which is a common means of persuasion in political rhetoric (López, 2020, 12). It can be argued that by using the metaphor of rape instead of a less intrusive crime such as stealing, West is putting more emphasis on the traumatizing and dehumanizing nature of the interaction within the music industry. This example highlights the previously mentioned theme of distrust towards establishments. It can be argued that the theme of self-reliance is also present in the excerpt, as West is underscoring that artists are better of being independent by emphasizing how vicious the industry is.

Excerpt 5

"And that's like the gladiator position that all artists are put into, like we're in the middle of this coliseum. Let me show you. I can kill. We're lions and tigers and bears and people more than any other gladiator that happened, so that's what I'm that's what I was doing."

In excerpt 5 West portrays the music industry using the simile of battle and war. Metaphors of various military situations have been found to be ubiquitous in the English language in research (Ling, 2010, 1). In this excerpt, West uses the coliseum and gladiators to describe how artists have to combat viciously against one another in order to success. This specific metaphor also highlights the dynamic of the competition within the music industry and the previously mentioned theme of oppression: much like gladiators, the vicious fight between the artists does not involve the people higher up in the hierarchy. This excerpt also furthers the theme of distrust.

Furthermore, instead of referring to the artists as human soldiers, West uses lions, tigers and bears as metaphors to further the idea of how primal and animalistic the competition between individuals can be. Ling (2010, 15) suggests that in business, the metaphor of war is often used to make the abstract business concepts more concrete. However, it can be argued that due to the dramatic nature of the metaphor, the main focus is on making the speech more vivid and

emotional as well as highlighting West's character (López, 2020, 12–13). This is supported by the finding that metaphors of war can make a speech less convincing because they reduce the overall objectivity of the speech (Wenner, 2007, 1). Thus, this excerpt strengthens the notion that West is primarily appealing to the *ethos* and *pathos*.

4.3. Repetition

Repetition means restating information that has already been stated (Webber, 2015, 804) Repetition has been further classified into various subcategories. The ones that are relevant for this thesis are *anaphora*, *epiphora* and *conduplicatio*. According to research, repetition serves many functions (Forraiová, 2011, 61). It is often used to make the discourse more memorable as well as put emphasis on a certain point. Furthermore, irrespective of what style of repetition is used, it increases the conviction and arouses emotions (López, 2020, 10).

4.3.1 Anaphora

Anaphora means starting multiple sentences with the same word or a similar set of words (Harris, 2013, 17).

Excerpt 6

"It destroyed my confidence. It may be this shell of who I really am. It like grade over my eyes. It it it made me. It made the Mustang not Buck anymore."

In this excerpt West is discussing all of the various effects that the medication had on him. The use of anaphora has been stated to keep the audience more engaged (Harris, 2013, 3). Thus, by starting successive sentences with a similar structure, West is perhaps seeking to underscore the importance and gravity of the subject (López, 2020, 10). Furthermore, anaphora has been also found to create a sense of rhythm in a speech, which strengthens the statement by making it more memorable (Forraiová, 2011, 46). Thus, by placing emphasis on the negative effects the medication had, he is further contributing to the theme of distrust by exercising skepticism towards medical science, a topic that has been extremely prominent in recent research. According to Bajaj & Stanford (2021, 1), African-American communities are shown to be exceptionally skeptical towards health-care systems due to various historical and current

factors. It is perhaps worth considering how much the themes of distrust towards the world at large stem from the unjust treatment of African-Americans.

4.3.2. Epiphora

Epiphora is a type of repetition in which a person repeats a word or multiple words at the end of successive sentences.

Excerpt 7

"You're going to split the black vote. You can't vote for the… you you're only a rapper. You want to. It's like all these things that diminish me. Yeah. And now it's like Deadpool, like I came back is like a superhero. And I won't let that be the kryptonite. I won't let my own ego be my kryptonite. I won't let other people's opinions be my kryptonite. I won't let these labels that people put on me be my kryptonite."

In excerpt 7 West repeats the word kryptonite at the end of multiple sentences. Fictional material *kryptonite* from the Superman franchise is used as a metaphor for the various things that he feels are challenging his success. The use of epiphora is said to create a strong sense of emphasis (Harris, 2013, 18). Thus, in this example, West is emphasizing his defiance towards the things that could potentially hold him back, and adding salience to their abundance. In addition, by repeatedly exclaiming that he won't be held back he is highlighting his conviction and defiant attitude, thus, strengthening the ethos of his speech.

This excerpt also reveals similar themes of empowerment that have been found in previous research on rap (Elswerth, 1996, 3). Further, this example highlights the aforementioned struggles with his status and the opinions of the public, which together with the previously mentioned distrust in various institutions hints towards an overall distrust towards the surrounding world. It is important to note that in this excerpt West is not only expressing defiance towards the outside world, but also makes note of his own ego being detrimental to his success. West's ego has been noted as a central factor behind his actions (Bailey, 2015, 18). This is further amplified by the fact that West uses Superman as metaphor for himself through the mentions of kryptonite.

4.3.3. Conduplicatio

Conduplicatio denotes the repetition of a key word throughout a paragraph (Harris, 2013, 19).

Excerpt 8

"When kids follow me in preschool, the leader that people saw when we changed the Sound of Music, the leader, when we change the sneaker industry, the leader and what we're doing with with farming and with with shelters, when I was building, you know, the homeless shelters a couple of years ago and visiting parks and then going to Skid Row and understanding the the dynamics and empathizing with what actual mental health issues are."

In this excerpt West repeats the word leader in multiple successive clauses. He does this to emphasize that he has been perceived as a leader in many different areas of life, in order to make a case for him being a valid presidential candidate. The effect of conduplicatio is similar to epiphora, as it is used to emphasize a certain key idea within discourse (Harris, 2013, 19). Thus, the use of repetition emphasizes how confident West is when it comes to being a leader. This also highlights the aforementioned aspiration to be something greater than a rapper and the overall theme of self-reliance.

It is crucial to note that even when discussing his presidential ambitions and stating claims for why he should be elected, West doesn't divert greatly from the rhetoric that focuses on emotions and his own character. While he does bring up various points as evidence to support his claims, and thus appeals to the *logos*, there is little to no elaboration on them. This points towards a shift towards anti-intellectual and abstract rhetoric that has been noted in studies examining the development of political rhetoric (Lim, 2002, 328). It can be argued that because West is from the entertainment world and not politics, he has yet to develop the skill-set that is required to present logical arguments and instead exhibits an over-reliance on *pathos* and *ethos* which have undoubtedly been instrumental for his success prior the transition to politics. In short, West has not made the transition from the social language of rap to that of politics (Gee, 2014, 163). However, while many of the topics discussed are formal, it should be recognized that the informal nature of the interview and its intended audience may cause West to opt for a more informal social language in this specific setting.

5. Conclusion

As was previously stated, the aim of this study was to examine the rhetoric of Kanye West in his interview with Joe Rogan. It was found that West used 12 rhetorical devices during the interview. Three of these devices were used significantly more frequently than others. These rhetorical devices were *exemplum*, *metaphor* and *repetition*. Thus, the analysis in this study focused on the aforementioned devices. West used exempla to make the speech more enjoyable, as well as to increase his authoritativeness. Metaphors were used mainly to make the speech more vivid, increase the emotional appeal, and to make abstract concepts more understandable. The use of repetition made West's speech more emotional, increased conviction, and signified important points to the listener.

Throughout the interview, West used rhetorical devices to appeal to the *pathos* and *ethos* of the audience. This is not only evident in the content of the speech, but also in the choice of rhetorical devices. Metaphor and repetition, for example, are both often associated with ethos and pathos (López, 2020, 10–12). Many of the popular themes that are present in rap music are present in West's rhetoric throughout his speech, namely distrust in various different authorities and institutions, racism, and self-reliance. The analysis also highlights some discordances, namely regarding how West thinks the public perceives him. All in all, the themes of overall distrust towards the surrounding world and self-reliance combined with the appeal to emotions and character instead of logic hint towards a paradigm shift that has been noted in studies regarding political rhetoric long before Kanye West decided to run for office (Lim, 2002, 328).

One of the main significances that this thesis has is that it offers a rare insight into Kanye West's rhetoric outside of his musical content. In the chosen data, the actual content of the rhetoric is in the forefront, which arguably may not always be the case if the data consists of music, as the medium's main focus is in its entertainment value. In addition, West's position as both a high-profile rapper but also a political figure renders him an intriguing and a unique character to study. Thus, the findings can be useful when examining a wide variety of topics that are relevant in today's world. All in all, this thesis sheds new light on relevant socio-political topics, such as the racial divide and distrust towards authorities, and highlights developments in political rhetoric that have been previously noted.

The main weaknesses of this thesis lie in the methodology of the analysis. While content analysis and rhetoric analysis are both viable methods for gaining new insight into matters of language, they are still subjective in nature (Leach, 2000, 218). This means that the role of the

author is extremely crucial, thus increasing the likelihood of human error through misinterpretation (Krippendorff, 2013, 111-112). This can include the conclusions drawn from the use of rhetorical devices as well as the process of identifying the rhetorical devices. Furthermore, as pointed out by Kelen (2007, 9), the use of rhetorical devices may not always be premeditated, thus analyzing their use may not be accurate. In addition, Bazeley, (2009, 7) highlights similar problems with the analysis of themes by stating that there is a risk of misinterpretation. Lastly, the process of transcribing spoken word always carries the risk of error, despite repeating the process attentively multiple times.

There is still plenty of room for future research in West's rhetoric. One of the areas that could make for a robust study is evaluating the effectiveness of West's rhetoric's. As one of the main themes that keeps appearing in West's speech is the presupposition of how people perceive him, gaining further insight into how his messages are actually interpreted could pinpoint some causes of the disconnect. This type of research could be done using a focus group that would be exposed to West's rhetoric and then asked to state their impressions. As Kjeldsen (2017, 6) notes, audience studies can be extremely useful in the field of rhetorical analysis, because the audience is an active participant in the meaning making process. This would further the understanding of how specific rhetoric devices affect people, which is a subject that is, for the most part, out of the scope of this thesis.

Another avenue of possible further research could be comparing the rhetoric of various other high profile rap artists to West. As highlighted in this thesis, there are certain topics that West approaches in a different way than what is usually portrayed in rap music. Rap is arguably seen as more homogenous in terms of its ideological variety than other genres, perhaps due to the genres young age, as well as the specific circumstances that birthed the genre (Cole, 2010, 197). Therefore, it would be intriguing to observe whether or not the rhetoric used by various rappers has lots of variety in the expression of socio-political issues. A study of this sort could possibly benefit from the theoretical framework of discourse studies, as this would place more emphasis on examining various social structures and power dynamics that were briefly touched upon in this thesis (Fairclough, 2013, 5). A study of this nature could use the present study as a reference point, and build upon many of the themes and issues that were raised.

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