

# Argumentation in rhetoric

## Argumentacja w retoryce

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**Provocative greenness and staged rebellion: Youth's rhetorical performances of environmental citizenship**

**Prowokacyjna ekologiczność i bunt na pokaz: obywatelstwo ekologiczne w retoryce młodzieżowej**

### Abstract

The paper examines the rhetorical use and function of a provocative “rebel” persona in argumentative texts, collected from the youth column in Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* and the national speech contest for high school students, *Ta ordet!*, seeking to influence the audience's attitudes towards green lifestyles. Approaching “the rebel” as a persona construction and a rhetorical appeal, I explore how young people engage with and participate in environmental debates and how their rhetorical intervention invites the audience to experience and perform environmental citizenship.

W artykule przedstawiono retoryczne zastosowanie konstruktów prowokacyjnej osoby buntownika. Funkcje tego zabiegu zostały odtworzone na podstawie analizy tekstów argumentacyjnych z kolumny prowadzonej przez młodzież w norweskim dzienniku „Aftenposten” oraz materiały z konkursu krasomówczego dla uczniów szkół średnich *Ta ordet!*. Ich celem było nakłonienie odbiorców do przyjęcia zielonego stylu życia. Analiza posłużyła również do zbadania, jak młodzi ludzie angażują się w debatę publiczną o środowisku i jak ich retoryczne zaangażowanie włącza odbiorców do współuczestniczenia w ekologicznym obywatelstwie.

### Key words

environmental citizenship, rhetorical agency, persona, parrhesia, provocative style  
obywatelstwo ekologiczne, sprawczość retoryczna, persona, parrhesia, styl prowokacyjny

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## **Provocative greenness and staged rebellion: Youth's rhetorical performances of environmental citizenship**

### **1. Introduction**

Political, mediated, and educational environmental discourses increasingly emphasise the moral responsibility of individuals to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, thereby situating environmental citizenship as a matter of individuals' duties and consumer action (Berglez, Höijer, and Olausson 2009; Parr 2015; Dale, Mathai, and Puppim de Oliveira 2016; Dimick 2015; Sæther 2017). In this article, I examine a sample of argumentative debate articles and speeches written by young people aged 13-21, who advocate individual consumer action to tackle the challenges of climate change. In so doing, the young rhetors echo the idea that responsibility for sustainability lies with the individual. However, contrary to the widespread narrative about green consumerism as attractive, aspirational, and increasingly popular (Randall 2009; Gössling, Humpe, and Bausch 2020; Shirani et al. 2015), the young rhetors promote individual-oriented environmental citizenship practised through changed consumption as radical, unpopular, and rebellious.

The youth practice environmental citizenship through sustainable consumption – and through rhetorical practice, as they appeal to an audience to change their attitudes and behaviours in relation to consumption. Both as consumers and rhetors, the young speakers fashion themselves as rebels whose consumption and rhetorical acts are provocative and at odds with the audience's views and expectations. They do so by explicitly naming themselves and their actions “rebellious” and by introducing their rhetorical acts as disruptive and provocative. As such, their rhetorical enactment of rebellion consists not of promoting viewpoints and arguments that are rebellious in the sense that they constitute a profound challenge to the rhetorical community's dominant discourses. Instead, their rebellion is enacted by fashioning the speaker and the rhetorical action as rebellious. It is, in other words, a staged rebellion.

In the paper, I examine this particular rhetorical enactment of rebellion in a sample of texts collected from the Norwegian newspaper, *Aftenposten's* youth column, "Si;D", and the national speech contest for high school students, *Ta ordet!* I explore this staged rebellion as an expression of young speakers' experience of their role and agency in environmental debates and decision-making, as a strategic performance of a persona, and as a rhetorical appeal addressed to an audience with the possibility to effect change. In doing so, I aim to generate knowledge about how young people participate in and experience their possibilities to participate in environmental debates, and how their rhetorical intervention in this debate, in turn, invites the audience to understand the situation, their abilities and possibilities to act.

Although climate change and environmental harms will affect the young more than other age groups, we have limited knowledge about how this age group acts rhetorically to try to influence decisions and actions (Hayward 2021, 87–89). By directing attention to one way that the youth attempt to intervene and bring about change, this study contributes to increased knowledge about how young people practice environmental citizenship and their rhetorical agency in so doing.

## 2. Young people's participation in environmental debates

Young people experience limited possibilities to participate as rhetorical agents in the public debate in general and the climate debate specifically (Ursin 2019). Young activists' voices have been excluded from the rhetorical and political community when politicians, the mass media, and online commentators have accused them of being politically inexperienced, immature, and ignorant (Bergmann and Ossewaarde 2020; Feldman 2020; Elgesem and Felde 2021; Nordahl 2021, 63-67).

Dominant views of children and youth as apolitical beings and citizen in-the-making obstruct their views from being recognised as relevant contributions to the adult sphere of politics (Lorgen and Ursin 2021; Borge and Mochmann 2019). Moreover, young people's political participation often takes place outside the established and institutionalised political arenas and may often violate the adult world's norms for rational discourse by being characterised by affective expressions and strategic gestures (e.g., Andersen and Fløttum 2022; Bjerggaard Nielsen 2021). Therefore, young people are often not recognised as rational agents and given a speaker position from where they may seek influence (Gordon and Taft 2011; Liebel and Saadi 2012; Ursin 2019).

While constrained by the adult world's views of them, young citizens should, however, also be seen as capable of reflecting upon and intervening in the social

context they are addressing (Liebel and Saadi 2012; Lorgen and Ursin 2021). In particular, their interventions may contribute to shaping and influencing how other young people, who are the primary readers and hearers of the messages conveyed in the youth column and speech contest, understand and perceive their possibilities to practice environmental citizenship.

By examining one specific appeal employed by young rhetors in the climate change debate, this paper contributes to increased knowledge about how they experience and perform their environmental citizenship and agency. As I focus on one particular appeal, namely the rhetorical enactment of a staged rebellion, the texts included in the study are a sample of texts in which the rhetors fashion themselves as rebels and their speech act as rebellious. The sample consists of 16 debate articles and 8 speech manuscripts from a larger corpus consisting of 342 debate articles and speeches by Norwegian youth about different aspects of the climate-, nature- and environmental challenges between 2016 and 2020.

The debate pieces are published in the youth column, “Si;D” (literally: “say it”) of the Norwegian national newspaper, *Aftenposten*. The column accepts texts written by youth aged 13-21 years. Debate pieces concerned with environmental issues are collected from the column’s webpage, <https://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/sid/>, since it first went online in September 2015, until September 2020. The speech manuscripts included in the study are written by youth participating in the Norwegian speech contest for high school students, *Ta ordet!* (literally: “seize the word!”, for more information, see [www.taordet.no](http://www.taordet.no)). Speech manuscripts about environmental issues are collected with the help from teachers from the contest started in 2016 until 2020. In the analysis, I refer to debate articles from “Si;D” with the letter *S* and speeches from *Ta ordet!* with the letter *T*, and subsequent numbering that can be looked up in the Appendix, where I account for all texts included in the study. For this article, the articles have been translated into English.

The selection of texts studied in this article has been identified by first carrying out a distant reading of the larger text corpus to identify general patterns and tendencies in the texts. Based on this, I have generated new research questions for subsequent close readings (cf. Therkildsen and Viklund 2020). The initial distant reading has also resulted in close readings of the young speakers’ use of generational accusations (Andersen and Fløttum 2022), and of how they express and justify climate anxiety and how their anxious expressions invite the audience to respond (Andersen 2023).

To study the selected texts, I perform close reading, using reflexive interpretative movements to examine how the young speakers construct their persona (the first persona) (Cherry 1988), how they construct the second persona (Black 1970), and invite the audience to understand the situation and act upon it. Thus, the analysis

explores the rhetoric of staged rebellion both as an enactment of a persona and as a social action addressed to an audience. Moreover, the analysis centres on the young rhetors' rhetorical agency, understood both as their ability to act rhetorically in the social context in which they are operating and their rhetorical actions as potentially influential in changing the same social context (Hoff-Clausen, Isager, and Villadsen 2005).

Being a rhetor is always associated with a risk: by seizing the word, one exposes oneself to the response and criticism of others (Goodwin 2008, lecture held at Copenhagen University, cited in Hoff-Clausen 2010, 58). Young people may be especially vulnerable, as they are still forming an identity and are likely taking their first steps to augment their views outside the family, circle of friends, and school. They are also in the process of developing their rhetorical skills. Therefore, conducting studies of young people's rhetoric comes with a special responsibility to treat their utterances responsibly. It requires balancing trying to understand what they are attempting to say while simultaneously recounting what they are actually saying as accurately as possible. Importantly, my analysis of the young speakers' texts should not be read as an assessment of their rhetorical skills and eloquence. Instead, I attempt to uncover and understand the discourses reproduced or challenged through the texts and how the youths' rhetorical acts can be influential – or what stands in the way of them being so.

### 3. Responsible consumption as rebellion

“I want to live in a version of Norway where Fretex and dumpster diving are cool.” This is the title of one of the debate articles published in the youth column, “Si;D”. In the article, the speaker – a young man – argues it is necessary to normalise green lifestyles to transition to a more sustainable society. He claims that wearing clothes from the second-hand shop Fretex and eating one's leftovers – or worse, fetching other people's leftovers through dumpster diving – are lifestyle practices that depart from normality and transgress mainstream conceptions of a worthy life. Consequently, people who engage in these practices, such as himself, risk social sanctions. The young man aims to change this and speaks up, addressing an averse audience:

There should be more pride in wearing your grandfather's old shirt than a polo shirt sewn by an underpaid textile worker. Unfortunately, this is not the case. To walk upright, we need expensive shirts and the newest ball gowns. The dinner should also preferably be fresh. If you are so unlucky to be seen inside a thrift store or with your head in a container, it is not very pleasant to go to work the next day. Can we change this somewhat unfortunate norm? ... With this text, I do not wish to force people into second-hand shops and containers but instead ask them not to despise others for doing so. Maybe one day you will do the same? (S16)

The young speaker presents the change he wants to induce in the audience, i.e., alter their view on green lifestyles, as desirable but also radical and unpopular. Moreover, the speaker introduces his rhetorical act as disruptive and provocative and fashions himself as a marginalised citizen who risks social sanctions by consuming responsibly: he risks social exclusion, ridicule, and embarrassment.

This discursive construction of the problem and its solutions is characteristic of the sample of texts studied in this paper. According to the young rhetors, the problem that must be acted upon is that our consumption is unsustainable. From this problem description follows the solution, namely changed consumption patterns. The speakers advocate individual actions such as reducing food waste (S16), taking the train instead of flying (S2, S10), and eating less meat (S4, S5, S8, S11, S13, T4). They encourage their audience to take shorter showers (T1), recycle and repair things (S3, S7), and buy things second hand (S1, S6, S14, S15, T6). Thereby, their appeals reproduce an individual-oriented discourse, which is dominant in the Western climate and environmental debate, that places the responsibility to act upon the individual consumer, while also promising that the individual consumer will not have to make any substantial sacrifices (Randall 2009, 119-120; Parr 2015; Dale, Mathai, and Puppim de Oliveira 2016).

The rhetors appeal to their audience to live more environmentally friendly and, most prominently, to change their negative attitudes towards others who choose to do so. The young man cited earlier asks the audience not to “despise” people for obtaining their clothes at thrift shops and their food from containers (S16). Similarly, a young girl claims that: “It is not cool to be environmentally conscious, but it should be” (S7). A third example is a young boy, who encourages the audience to “be rebellious by declining the things you do not need”, and claims that, although reduced consumption saves both the planet and money, most people are unwilling to reduce their consumption (S3). While promoted as the solution, sustainable consumption is, thus, framed as unpopular, unattractive – and an act of rebellion.

The direct appeal to the audience is to rebel against dominant views and norms by consuming differently. The call for rebellion suggests a view that the climate and environmental challenges cannot be solved within the established structures and norms, which we also have seen in the rhetoric of climate activists such as the Extinction Rebellion (XR) and Greta Thunberg (e.g., Thunberg 2022). However, unlike XR and Thunberg, the actions proposed by the young rhetors do not involve open resistance to authorities or a substantial challenge to the status quo. Instead, they address their audience in the role of responsible consumers and urge them to make relatively uncontroversial changes in their everyday consumption.

In contrast to the young speakers' understanding of their audience, several studies suggest that most Norwegians have positive attitudes towards measures to live more sustainably. However, they might be ill-informed about different measures' efficiency or find it challenging to change their habits due to external constraints such as money or time (Fløttum 2017; Langaas, Fløttum, and Gjerstad 2019; Tvinnereim et al. 2017). Moreover, some studies suggest that people who make environmentally conscious choices in their everyday lives are generally admired by others rather than despised (Fløttum, Scheurer, and Dahl 2021, 7), and that many perceive doing so as a social norm (Aasen et al. 2019). Thus, the speakers' construction of the situation can be understood as a staging of a conflict – and as a staging of their role in this conflict as the rebel who opposes social norms and challenges dominant perceptions.

In what follows, I first explore how this role is enacted rhetorically and discuss it as a staged and strategic performance that primarily invites the audience to observe the performance and the performer. Then, examine more closely the textual construction of the audience as designed in the texts, turning attention to the rhetorical performance as a social action that serves functions primarily associated with epideictic rhetoric, inviting the audience to reconsider its views and practices in relation to the community's traditional norms and values.

#### **4. The rhetorical enactment of a rebellious persona**

The young rhetors' rebellion consists not of promoting viewpoints that are rebellious in the sense that they are a profound challenge to the rhetorical community's dominant discourses, nor are they opposing the authorities' response to climate change. Instead, the rebellion is enacted rhetorically through a fashioning of the speaker and the rhetorical action as rebellious.

The youth introduce their rhetorical actions as disruptive and unpopular and fashion themselves as outsiders who are more or less voluntarily marginalised. Stylistically, they employ a provocative style, characterised by impoliteness and disruptiveness (Lund Klujeff 2012). More precisely, they stage their message as a provocative and bothersome truth that the audience is unwilling to hear. At the same time, they excuse themselves for being the conveyer of this truth. They say they do not wish to provoke but do so out of necessity.

An illustrative example is an article entitled “How would meat-eaters react if I had repaid in kind?”, written by a young vegan (S4). In the article's first paragraph, she positions herself as a marginalised voice – as one who is unpopular, hated, and considered a bothersome extremist:

I am vegan and have been so for almost two years. One would not think that people could hate you for doing something good for yourself and the world, but that is how wrong one can be. As a vegan, I have learned to be quiet. If I speak too loud about the food I do not eat, I am an extremist. I have learned that people who ask why I am vegan seldom want an answer that contains the truth because it is too cruel. I have learned that I take up too much space, am bothersome, pretentious and take life too seriously.

The rhetor constructs an image of herself as a marginalised and provocative voice in discussions about meat and veganism, thereby constructing a relationship with the audience of her text, in which she has limited rhetorical agency. The others' attitudes towards her make it challenging for her to speak her mind – and even more challenging to be heard, since few want to hear what she has to say. In the article, she expands on this, writing, “I have learned that the best thing for me is to sit quietly and endure all the jokes. I have no right to say anything back”.

The speaker uses her marginalised speaking position to justify her provocations. She reports being done listening to impolite remarks from meat-eaters and establishes that she has now decided to “act the same way in return”. Therefore, she confronts meat-eaters directly with the following provocative questions:

What kind of corpse do you have on your plate today? Does your body not become worn out by all the meat rotting in your intestines? Do you not wish you could have a good conscience after a meal?

These rhetorical questions are apparently addressed to an audience of meat-eaters that disagree with the speaker's statements and do not want to hear them, as suggested also in the article's next sentences: “Perhaps many perceive the vegan's utterances as very extreme. Well, they are extreme, but they are true”. Thereby, the rhetor appears to be addressing an unnamed opponent who holds negative attitudes towards the speaker and her message. However, as I expand on below, the utterances may also be interpreted as addressing an audience who shares the speakers' views and is invited to participate in her scolding of the unnamed opponent, while praising the vegan lifestyle.

Moreover, the rhetor claims, the reason why she is perceived as a bothersome and extreme person is that she possesses a truth that few want to hear, something that became apparent also at the beginning of the debate article, where she claims that people do not want to hear the truth since it is “too cruel”. Thus, conveying the bothersome truth is associated with danger; the speaker risks being met with hatred and social exclusion.

The speaker also emphasises these dangers as she reports on her troubles writing the article: “It is not easy for me to write this text, knowing that it will be published. But I want to do something that frightens me; I want to express my opinion”. Although she finds it uncomfortable to speak up, she is convinced that

what she has to say is the truth and that she, to be true to herself, is obliged to speak this truth. It is necessary for her to do so, she writes, “for me to be able to live according to my ethical view”.

Another girl, also advocating reduced meat consumption, offers a similar description of the vegetarian lifestyle when she calls it a “rebellious” and “dramatic” lifestyle change that she made some time ago (S13). After telling about her decision to stop eating meat, she introduces her message to the audience:

I have been a vegetarian for six years. It can be difficult for non-vegetarians to understand vegetarians. We humans do not like change, and we hate it when someone tells us what to do. I will not tell you what to do, but rather inform you about eating less meat. ... And I promise you that when you have managed to become completely vegetarian, you will not regret it. But do not become too self-complacent; no one likes a self-complacent vegetarian.

While less provocative than the author of the previous text, this speaker too highlights how it can be challenging to create understanding and identification between vegetarians and non-vegetarians, i.e., between herself and the audience she addresses. Moreover, she implies that she speaks from a position of less privilege than meat-eaters: She claims that “self-complacent vegetarians” are unpopular and attempts to avoid making herself unpopular by disclosing that she will “not tell you what to do”. At the same time, she is arguing that the audience should change their diet – she is telling them what to do.

According to the speaker, advising the audience to become vegetarian is a disruptive rhetorical act that presents a truth that many of us do not want to hear since we arguably “do not like change” and “hate it when someone tells us what to do”. Although we might not like to hear it, the speaker promises that if we listen to her and take her advice, we “will not regret it”. Thereby, she gives the impression that she knows more about the audience than they know about themselves.

The young speakers, thus, construct an unnamed opponent that is averse and adverse to the speakers and their messages. They present their messages as provocative and bothersome truths that their audience does not want to hear. Moreover, they excuse themselves and their message. They fashion themselves as marginalised speakers who do not wish to make noise and take up too much space but speak up out of necessity – a necessity created by the apparent audience’s attitudes.

The exigence of the young rhetors’ provocative performance is that they possess an uncomfortable truth that few want to hear but which is, nevertheless, crucial to convey. However, they go beyond simply conveying a disruptive truth to an averse audience: they explicitly stage their rhetorical performance as such and fashion themselves as rebels, often by naming themselves and their actions as rebellious and provocative. Moreover, they emphasise the dangers and discomforts associated

with speaking up and out of turn, thereby drawing the audience's attention to the rhetorical act, i.e., that they are speaking up despite the dangers associated with doing so.

In what follows, I first discuss how we may understand this rhetorical enactment of a rebellious persona through a Foucauldian conceptualisation of *parrhesia*, which is oriented to the truth-telling activity as a role (Foucault 2001; 2005; 2010), and provocation as a media strategy to craft a persona, increase visibility and circulation (Bengtsson and Rønlev 2021; Rønlev and Bengtsson 2020). Furthermore, although the fashioning of a green rebel may serve as a performance of the self and a deliberate provocation to attract attention, the youth's rhetorical performances also perform a social action: they are addressed to an audience, which is invited to act upon the situation that the speakers aim to change. Therefore, I proceed to explore the rhetorical functions of the young rebels' appeals by turning attention to their texts' second persona and epideictic functions.

## 5. Staged and strategic provocation and parrhesia

The rhetorical enactment of rebellion in the young rhetor's texts may appear as merely symbolic gestures serving to display the speakers' attitudes in front of an audience who is invited to observe the speakers' performances. As such, the rhetorical function of their staged rebellion may be conceptualised as a strategic performance of a persona – as a role created within the text through the speaker's argumentative and stylistic choices (Bengtsson and Rønlev 2021, 26; Cherry 1988, 393, 402).

The speakers' rebellious persona is crafted and enacted through the strategic use of a provocative style. Their provocations are strategic, I argue, as the rhetors explicitly comment both on what they intend to achieve by provoking and what effects they expect their provocations to have on the audience.

As discussed in relation to what has been termed the “media provocateur”, a provocative persona may be apt to create attention and circulation in a hybrid media system, allowing speakers to create a speaker position for themselves and set the public agenda (Bengtsson and Rønlev 2021; Rønlev and Bengtsson 2020). The concept of “media provocateur” suggests that contemporary media developments have made the ability to attract attention and create circulation a more valuable rhetorical resource than the ability to persuade. Presenting a prominent persona, for instance, through provocation and arousal of emotions, is, in turn, crucial to attract attention and create circulation (Marshall and Neil 2016). Being in the process of developing their rhetorical skills, the youth are likely to observe how others create circulation by creating a provocative persona (Bengtsson and Rønlev

2021; Rønlev and Bengtsson 2020; Marshall and Neil 2016). Thus, the staging of their acts as rebellious may be understood as a reproduction of a rhetorical culture they are cultivated into through their media consumption, and as a conscious rhetorical strategy to gain a speaker position and visibility.

Like the “media provocateur”, the green rebels’ utterances invite the audience to observe and react to the rhetors and their rhetorical performances. In contrast to the media provocateur, however, the young rebels explicitly stage their rhetorical performance as provocative by introducing and naming it as such. Moreover, the rebels excuse their provocation, ensuring their audience that they only provoke out of stringent necessity. Thus, they create a persona akin to the *parrhesiastes* – a marginalised but fearless speaker who speaks outside of what can typically be said and who does so out of duty and necessity (Foucault 2001).

The concept of *parrhesia* stems from ancient Greek literature, philosophy and rhetoric, where it referred to the practice of frank, free and fearless speech (Foucault 2001; Kennedy 1999). Through the works of Michel Foucault (2001; 2005; 2010), *parrhesia* has been examined as a truth-telling activity and a role. The *parrhesiastes* is, according to Foucault, one that “says what he *knows* to be true” (Foucault 2001, 14, italics in original). The *parrhesiastes* speaks from a position of less power than the hearer, and her truth is “different from what the majority believes”. Therefore, the act of truth-telling is associated with danger for the speaker (Foucault 2001, 13; 15; 18). The *parrhesiastes* takes this risk because she regards it as a duty to convey her truth to others – regardless of the cost (Foucault 2001, 19).

The rhetorical enactment of rebellion in the young rhetors’ texts can, I argue, be seen as a staged *parrhesia*, meaning that the *parrhesiastes* is a role created within the text through the speakers’ argumentative and stylistic choices (Bengtsson and Rønlev 2021, 26; Cherry 1988, 393; 402). Rather than conveying a disruptive truth to an averse audience, the rhetors stage their rhetorical performance as such and fashion themselves as *parrhesiastes* by drawing the audiences’ attention to the disruptiveness of their truth-telling activity. The rhetorical functions of this rebellious persona may be primarily self-serving, i.e., to construct an autonomous and independent persona. The role crafted within the texts could, thus, be understood against the backdrop of adolescence as a developmental phase, where developing into an autonomous, authentic, and independent being is of paramount concern, which often involves rebelling against the norms of the adult generation, sometimes also against peer norms (Ullman 1987). Viewed as such, the youth’s texts can be seen as performances of a persona, with the primary function of the audience’s recognition of the autonomous and independent identity presented by the speakers.

Although Foucault does not attend to how parrhesia invites the audience to respond, the conceptualisation of the young rhetors' enactment of parrhesia as a form of identity work, aligns with his account of parrhesia as a role and activity through which the truth-teller develops and affirms her relationship to her opinions and can be true to herself (Foucault 2001, 169; 2005, 372).

However, Foucault contrasts parrhesia with rhetoric, arguing that parrhesia is “without any [rhetorical] figure since it is completely natural” (Foucault 2001, 21). By contrast, rhetorical treatments of parrhesia view it as primarily rhetorical – as a social action that may effect change. Examining the vernacular rhetoric of the political prisoners at Robben Island as the foundation for political agency, Gerard A. Hauser (2012, 67), argues that, although parrhesia can be understood as “the subject's articulation of conscience as an obligation to personal authenticity for living in the world”, it must also – and primarily – be viewed “as rhetorical, as an expression addressed to an audience with the possibly of effecting change”. While acts of speaking an unpopular truth from the position of less privilege can be motivated by individuals' experience of a compelling necessity to speak their opinion and, in doing so, be true to themselves and their convictions, these acts are “not soliloquy” but can potentially act upon someone's mind, causing them to act upon the situation addressed by the speaker (Hauser 2012, 67).

In line with Hauser's discussion of parrhesia, I argue that although the staging of themselves as rebels and their message as rebellious may serve as a performance of the self and a deliberate provocation to attract attention, the youths' rhetorical performances are also social actions addressed to an audience with the capability of inducing change. In what follows, I look more closely at the rhetorical and social functions of the young rebels' appeals by focusing on their texts' second persona and epideictic functions.

## **6. The social functions of the rebellious intervention**

The youth's rhetorical interventions are deliberative: they give arguments for a specific future action, namely changed consumption. The audience of their deliberative appeal is, apparently, averse and adverse to both the speakers and their messages. The audience “resists” and “lacks the will to change” (T8, T1, S13). Rather than cultivating goodwill and identification, the speakers relate to this audience through opposition and provocation. They criticise the audience for being “spoiled” (S3, S9), “greedy” (T7), and for always wanting more: new phones, clothes, cars, bigger houses and cabins (S3, T5, T7). Moreover, the speakers position themselves in opposition to the audience, by underscoring how the audience desires “status” and conformity. By contrast, the speakers are,

according to themselves, resisting conformity and, therefore, marginalised (T1, S3, S15, S14, S10).

However, I argue that the functions of the rebel's rhetorical act are mainly epideictic: The speakers display persons, events and things that embody the values they promote, and they display their attitude towards others' conduct through praise and censure (Beale 1978; Condit 1985). What is displayed, praised, and censured can be seen as verbal tokens of ideology, implying an audience that shares this ideology – the second persona (Black 1970, 113) – or the actual audience of the rebel's rhetorical appeal. Viewed as such, the adverse audience, which is directly addressed in the rebel's appeals, is the “third persona”, i.e., the representative of “all that you and I are told to avoid becoming” (Wander 2013, 615). This third persona is a vaguely defined and unnamed “other”.

We have already seen how the young speakers criticise vices such as greed, conformity, and the desire for status and material things. Virtues commonly promoted are, in turn, courage and autonomy. For instance, one speaker asks the audience to find “the courage to take the first step” (T8), and another encourages the audience to “dare to be a little rebellious by declining things that you do not need” (S3). Moreover, solidarity is often displayed as a value that should guide the audience's actions. For instance, one of the young speakers defines the problem of overconsumption the following way: “When did we forget about solidarity and replace it with greed?” and argues that “solidarity is the only way to secure the future and our shared planet, for future generations to continue to live in the happiest nation in the world” (T7).

Furthermore, values of moderation and care are promoted by displaying persons embodying these values, primarily grandparents but sometimes also parents. Criticising the concept of Black Friday and its contribution to overconsumption, a young girl, for instance, turns to both her mother and her grandmother as role models:

Some years ago, my parents threw away the old television. My mother bought it almost thirty years ago when she was a student. I can look through my grandmother's wardrobe and still find fabulous, high-quality dresses from the 50s. Rugs, clothes, kitchenware, furniture and electronics have been used for decades. It is fixed and used again until it is finally broken and can be recycled and become something else. ... We must learn from my mother and grandmother. The earth does not have enough resources to waste them like we do today (S1).

Thus, the subject of the rebel's praise is general, inclusive, and uncontroversial, allowing most audiences to identify with the subject of praise. The speakers turn to generally accepted values, such as modesty and solidarity, and a temporally near past to envision a “new normal”. These values are contrasted with most Norwegians'

current lifestyles, arguably characterised by unsustainable consumption driven by greed and the desire for status.

While most Norwegians agree on the importance of tackling environmental problems and that individuals should contribute to this (Fløttum 2017; Langaas, Fløttum, and Gjerstad 2019; Tvinnereim et al. 2017), truly ecological lifestyles remain marginal in Norway, where the per capita consumption-based CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are substantially higher than the world average (Our World in Data 2019). While well-informed and well-intended, many people's motivations rarely result in real-life environmental action (Moser and Dilling 2011, 2007; Stoknes 2015). Thus, rather than the problem being that people despise green lifestyles, I argue that the problem attempted addressed by the young speakers could instead be the gap between individuals' intentions to mitigate their emissions and their actual behaviours. They critique the existing conditions, thereby revealing to the audience a gap between their values and intentions and their actual practices, what is often referred to as the "value-action gap" (e.g., Barr 2006). In so doing, the speakers invite the audience to identify and evaluate potential gaps between preach and practice, and, thereby, to reconsider their values in relation to the issue of climate change (cf. Sheard 1996).

Moreover, they link individualistic acts of consumption with collective values and activity and, by calling these consumer actions "rebellious", also frame them as political activities. Thereby, they interpellate the audience as individual consumers who are part of a political struggle for a more sustainable future. Thus, what appears to be little more than symbolic gestures intended to attract attention may serve as rhetorical interventions that invites the audience to reconsider the habitual ways of life and envision new modes of living (see also, Bsumek et al. 2019).

In the remaining part of the paper, I discuss how the rhetorical use and social functions of a provocative "rebel" persona relate to the young rhetors' rhetorical and political agency and consider how their rhetorical interventions contribute to reproducing and challenging dominant discourses about environmental citizenship.

## **7. Rebellion and rhetorical agency**

In rhetorical treatments of parrhesia and provocation, these modes of address are commonly associated with rhetorical agency (Hauser 2012; Lund Klujeff 2012; Kennedy 1999; Rand 2008). For example, Kennedy (1999) discusses the rhetoric of the Cynics as a rhetoric of parrhesia, characterised by a provocative style of impoliteness, disruptiveness, and noise (Kennedy 1999, 26). However, style should not be seen as merely linguistic decoration of the speech. Instead, style

serves rhetorical and political functions (cf. Brummett 2008; Lund 2017; Hariman 1995), evident in Kennedy's discussion of the Cynics' provocative style as a direct consequence of their speaker position: as marginalised voices, they could justify the use of noise and provocation as necessary means to make themselves heard (Kennedy 1999, 26).

The link between the provocative form and rhetorical agency is suggested in several scholarly accounts, where it is argued that polemic and provocative forms create circulation, are apt to spark debate, and set the public agenda (Rand 2008; Lund Klujeff 2012; Bengtsson and Rønlev 2021; Rønlev and Bengtsson 2020). In line with this, I argue that the staged rebellion of the young rhetors' practising of environmental citizenship could be understood as contingent on the social context, in which they by virtue of being young, experience limited rhetorical and political agency, while also constituting a social action with the possibility to challenge the same social context.

The young speakers' possibilities to be influential are constrained by the audiences' attitudes towards them as immature rhetorical actors and apolitical beings. Although the view advocated by the speakers may not be marginalised, their expressed experience of being marginalised voices in the climate change debate may be very true (Ursin 2019; Andersen and Fløttum 2022; Fløttum, Scheurer, and Dahl 2021, 9). Moreover, their green lifestyles may indeed be marginalised in their social circle and families. Although many Norwegians state in surveys that they make sustainable choices in their everyday lives and wish to live even more sustainable in the future, most Norwegian households are still characterised by high consumption (Fløttum 2017; Langaas, Fløttum, and Gjerstad 2019; Our World in Data 2019; Tvinnereim et al. 2017). High consumption, fast fashion and long-haul luxury travels also play a vital part in many affluent social media influencer communities, such as the self-proclaimed *Rich Kids on Instagram* (RKOI) (Cohen et al. 2022), with a large base of young followers.

Furthermore, the youth's rhetorical agency is constrained by the dominant discourses about climate change mitigation that they are cultivated into through the media and their education. In recent decades, environmental discourses have shifted from focusing on systemic issues to individuals' consumer power. The role of the consumer has increasingly become a common subject position when environmental policy is to be translated into concrete action, while socio-economic challenges are more neglected both in policy decisions and mass media coverage (Barkemeyer, Givry, and Figge 2018; Berglez, Höijer, and Olausson 2009; Parr 2015; Dale, Mathai, and Puppim de Oliveira 2016). Furthermore, education in environmental citizenship – in Norway and abroad – seems to validate rather than challenge a neoliberal view of sustainability as an individual concern and

to foreground individual actions to promote sustainability (Marti 2021; Dimick 2015; Sæther 2017).

While constrained by the social context, the young speakers should also be seen as capable of reflecting upon, intervening in, and challenging the social context they are addressing. The young speakers reduce the complex and intangible challenges of climate change into a tangible threat from an unnamed “other” whose negative attitudes towards environmentally friendly lifestyles must be fought. Moreover, they invite the audience to act in a manner that does not require a change of status quo but merely a celebration of green consumption. The creation of an “other”, followed by an invitation to act, allows the individual to step forward as an agent (Andersen and Fløttum 2022, 32; Hoff-Clausen 2018, 37–38). As such, their rebellion may also be a means to craft rhetorical agency for the individual speaker and the audience: it is an invitation to rethink, intervene, and change the social context. However, the agency offered is constrained to a narrow form of citizenship as a responsible consumer.

On the one hand, the young speakers reproduce dominant discourses they have been cultivated into, where climate action is presented as something individuals can do by consuming differently. At the same time, they differ from the dominant discourse in that these green lifestyle choices are not presented as “small and easy” (Randall 2009, 119–120) but, on the contrary, radical and difficult. Rather than the actions proposed by the young people being particularly radical and rebellious, their utterances could, thus, be read as a reflection of how solving the problems of climate change is difficult and obstructed by a political unwillingness to make radical and unpopular changes.

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#### Appendix: List of all texts included in the material

- S1: Black Friday: Det er både billigere og enklere å kjøpe en ny bukse enn å reparere den gamle [Black Friday: It both cheaper and easier to buy a new pair of jeans than to repair the old one]. Si;D, *Aftenposten*, Nov. 24, 2016.
- S2: Jeg har tatt to valg som kanskje virker naive og idiotiske [I have made two choices that might seem naive and stupid]. Si;D, *Aftenposten*, Sep. 7, 2017.
- S3: Vær rebelsk. Takk nei til det du ikke trenger [Be rebellious. Decline the things you do not need]. Si;D, *Aftenposten*, Oct. 10, 2017.
- S4: Hvordan hadde kjøttetere reagert om jeg hadde svart med samme mynt? [How would meat eaters react if I had repaid in kind?] Si;D, *Aftenposten*, Nov. 1, 2017.
- S5: Jeg tror mine valg er med på å forandre verden [I believe my choices contribute to changing the world]. Si;D, *Aftenposten*, April 12, 2018.
- S6: Til deg som klarer å ta vare på mobiltelefonen din [To you who manages to take care of your phone]. Si;D, *Aftenposten*, May 4, 2018.
- S7: Fremtiden? Jeg har en dårlig følelse [The future? I have a bad feeling]. Si;D, *Aftenposten*, Nov. 27, 2018.
- S8: Det finnes ingen gode argumenter for dagens høye kjøttforbruk [There are no good arguments for today's high meat consumption]. Si;D, *Aftenposten*, Jan. 9, 2019.
- S9: Det ingen snakker om i klimadebatten [What no one speaks of in the climate debate]. Si;D, *Aftenposten*, March 18, 2019.
- S10: Har vi glemt hvor vakkert Norge er? [Have we forgotten how beautiful Norway is?] Si;D, *Aftenposten*, April 13, 2019.
- S11: Først fikk pappa latterkrampe. Men nå har jeg hjernevasket ham og hele familien [At first, my father started laughing hysterically. But now I have brain-washed him and the entire family]. Si;D, *Aftenposten*, May 28, 2019.
- S12: Tiden for å tro på at markedet rydder opp i klimaendringene, er over [The time for believing that the market will fix climate change is over]. Si;D, *Aftenposten*, Oct. 3, 2019.
- S13: Guide til hvordan akkurat DU kan spise mindre kjøtt [Guide to how just YOU can eat less meat]. Si;D, *Aftenposten*, Oct. 11, 2019.
- S14: Tenk annerledes når du skal kjøpe julegaver i år [Think differently when buying Christmas presents this year]. Si;D, *Aftenposten*, Dec. 2, 2019.
- S15: Nytt av alt, hele tiden. Kjøp, kjøp, kjøp [New things, all the time. Buy, buy, buy]. Si;D, *Aftenposten*, Feb. 28, 2020.
- S16: Jeg vil leve i et Norge der Fretex og ‘dumpster diving’ er kult [I want to live in a version of Norway where Fretex and ‘dumpster diving’ are cool]. Si;D, *Aftenposten*, May 21, 2020.
- T1: Mot et forbrukersamfunn [Against the consumer society]. *Ta ordet*, 2020.
- T2: Tilbake til normalen [Back to normal]. *Ta ordet*, 2020.
- T3: Mot [Courage/Against]. *Ta ordet*, 2020.
- T4: Klimaendringene [Climate change]. *Ta ordet*, 2020.
- T5: Glede [Joy]. *Ta ordet*, 2019.

T6: Mote eller tortur? [Fashion or torture?] *Ta ordet*, 2018.

T7: Er grådighet blitt en norsk verdi? [Has greed become a Norwegian value?] *Ta ordet*, 2017.

T8: Mennesket mot likegyldighet [The human against ignorance]. *Ta ordet*, 2020.