

## CAVEAT ORATOR: AUDIENCE DISAFFILIATION IN THE 1988 PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

Steven E. Clayman

IT is widely recognized that public officials use forms of rhetoric to manage diverse aspects of contemporary politics. Thus, political speeches and other symbolic acts are seen as an important resource for politicians seeking to advance specific policy goals in intra-governmental negotiations (Ceasar, et al., 1981; Cook, 1989; Kernell, 1986; Tulis, 1987), to enhance their own personal popularity and career objectives (MacKuen, 1983), and to sustain the legitimacy of the governing institutions they represent (Edelman, 1964; Hinckley 1990). While rhetoric undoubtedly plays a role in these pursuits, even the most sophisticated rhetorical campaign cannot ensure political success. Studies demonstrate that the effectiveness of a speech is contingent on exogenous political and economic events over which politicians have little control (Ostrom and Simon, 1989; Simon and Ostrom, 1989). The impact of a speech also depends upon after-the-fact analyses and interpretations made by political commentators, partisan "spin doctors," and perhaps most importantly, professional journalists (Paletz and Vinegar, 1977/78; Robinson, 1977). These environmental factors may explain the otherwise puzzling fact that the rate of presidential speechmaking is only weakly correlated with presidents' legislative victories or with their popularity in the polls (Hart, 1987: 30-32, 87-88). Accordingly, while public figures may attempt to use rhetoric for political ends, success will necessarily be contingent on actors and events in the surrounding sociopolitical environment.

When political rhetoric takes the form of a public speech delivered in the presence of a live audience, an additional contingency is embodied in the collective behavior of audience members: the bursts of applause, booing, and laughter that can occur in response to a developing speech. Like other contingencies identified within the literature, audience responses represent an environmental factor that public figures cannot fully anticipate or control. Moreover, how the audience conducts itself during a speech can have significant political consequences. As Atkinson (1984a: 13-14) has observed, audience responses "provide an important barometer of [a politician's] popular appeal." This barometer is significant not only for the assessment of those attending the speech in person, but also for the wider media public; news reports generally include references to how speeches were received, and television news stories often contain taped excerpts that incorporate audience responses (Heritage and Greatbatch, 1986: 110). Indeed, those segments of a speech that are applauded are more likely to receive media coverage than those that receive no response (Atkinson, 1984a: 124-163; 1986: 45-47). Accordingly, the ability to generate applause has been implicated in the genesis of charismatic reputations (Atkinson, 1984a: 86-123; 1985) and electoral outcomes (Grady and Potter, 1985). Audience members thus have the capacity, through their conduct, to advance or hinder a speaker's policy agenda and political career.

What follows is a study of collective audience responses to political speech. More specifically, it is an analysis of *disaffiliative* responses—primarily booing and derisive laughter—in the 1988 U.S. presidential debates. My objectives are, in part, descriptive: to identify the principal forms that audience disaffiliation may take, to examine how these responses are organized with respect to an ongoing speech, and to determine what rhetorical maneuvers are vulnerable to various forms of disaffiliation. More generally, I wish to expand our understanding of oratorical discourse by looking beyond individual speakers, their rhetorical strategies, and their sociohistorical circumstances, to examine oratory as an emergent interactional process in which the audience plays an active role. I will begin by reviewing previous research on audience responses and will suggest how such research can illuminate the oratorical process. I will then proceed to an empirical analysis of audience disaffiliation in the 1988 debates, first in overview and then by examining the specific forms of disaffiliation in turn.

### THE STUDY OF SPEAKER-AUDIENCE INTERACTIONS

The study of oratory has been strongly influenced by the fields of rhetorical criticism and analysis. As a consequence, the predominant approach to the analysis of oratory focuses on the rhetorical contribution of the speaker. The speaker-centered approach is institutionalized in the form of transcription procedures that preserve the public figure's remarks while filtering out the applause, laughter, booing, jeering, heckling, and other audience behaviors that occur as speeches unfold. This purified text is typically analyzed for its rhetorical content, the manner in which it is shaped by larger sociohistorical circumstances (eg., Bitzer, 1968), and in turn shapes and transforms those circumstances (eg., Branham and Pearce, 1985).

Within this framework, the audience has been of interest either as a locus of communicative effects or as one factor that orators ponder abstractly when composing their remarks. That speakers tailor their remarks to particular audiences informs a wide range of rhetorical studies. In one influential programmatic statement, Wichelns [1925] (1980: 55) observed that speakers gear their remarks "to the immediate audience, whose convictions and habits of thought, whose literary usages, and whose general cultural background all condition the work both of writer and speaker." While this perspective recognizes an important role for the audience, it treats the audience primarily as "a figment of the speaker's imagination" (Goodwin, 1986: 205). It thereby excludes from analysis whatever active role the audience may play in the oratorical process.

Recently, however, researchers have begun to examine how audiences interact with speakers by producing collective responses such as applause (Atkinson, 1984a, 1984b, 1985, 1986; Brodine, 1986; Grady and Potter, 1985; Heritage and Greatbatch, 1986; Keith and Whittenberger-Keith, 1988/9). While these interactive moments may seem rather distant from the traditional concerns of rhetoric and public communication, their analysis can yield novel insights into the production and reception of public speech. In terms of the speech production process, each audience response constitutes a substantive contribution to the speech event in which it occurs. Moreover, audience behaviors can influence the subsequent trajec-

tory of a speech. Atkinson (1984a: 99–105; 1985) has shown that speakers monitor such behaviors as they occur; and they often delay, augment, or revise what they are saying so as to facilitate, inhibit, or otherwise deal with the audience response.<sup>1</sup> Thus, until we begin to examine carefully how speeches unfold in relation to the stream of audience behavior, we will not know the extent to which speeches result from interactional processes and not merely from the thoughts of individual speakers.

Moments of interaction can also yield insight into how speeches are incrementally received and understood (Atkinson, 1984a: xiv–xv; 1984b: 370–71). When audience members collectively respond to some part of a speech, they provide tangible evidence that, minimally, they are paying attention to what is being said at that juncture. In addition, the specific character of the response conveys their immediate substantive reaction: whether they endorse what is being said, or find it objectionable, or humorous. Since much of what a public speaker says elicits no response, those statements that do get a reaction have a special status. It is safe to assume that, for the respondents, those items are indeed persuasive, contentious, or witty, and are delivered in a manner that facilitates a coordinated audience response. Moments of interaction can thus be an important methodological resource for making otherwise elusive audience understandings and reactions available for empirical scrutiny.<sup>2</sup>

Max Atkinson and his associates initiated such research in a series of studies of applause (see especially Atkinson, 1984a; 1984b; Heritage and Greatbatch, 1986). As a result of these investigations, we now know a great deal about the specific message characteristics that facilitate the production of applause in the course of an ongoing speech. We also know some of the general principles that explain how individual audience members coordinate their actions so as to respond collectively, principles that should be applicable beyond the domain of applause. Thus, it has been proposed that audience behavior is constrained by the general tendency for individuals to avoid social isolation when expressing their views (Asch, 1951; see also Noelle-Neumann, 1984). When an audience member is deciding whether to respond to a given remark (eg., by clapping or booing), the expressive benefits of outwardly supporting or rejecting it must be balanced against the potential costs of perhaps being the only one to do so. These considerations explain why collective applause ordinarily lasts for an extended period while isolated clapping is quickly aborted (Atkinson, 1984a: 17–21; Heritage and Greatbatch, 1986: 111–112). They also explain why applause tends to occur after assertions that are formatted in such a way as to recognizably “invite” a response from the audience (Atkinson, 1984a; 1984b; Heritage and Greatbatch, 1986).

Thus far, research has focused on applause, which is quintessentially an expression of approval and affiliation. Disaffiliative responses, by contrast, have not yet been examined systematically. The present study seeks to extend this line of research by examining various forms of audience disaffiliation in a prominent oratorical context. By *disaffiliation* I mean those responses (eg., booing, derisive laughter, and the like) which are unfavorable, which express disapproval or derision, and which are used by audience members to disassociate themselves from speakers and their views.

THE 1988 PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES AND AUDIENCE BEHAVIOR:  
AN OVERVIEW

The primary data for this study are the three ninety-minute general election debates that were held between candidates for the U.S. presidency in 1988. Two involved George Bush and Michael Dukakis; one involved the vice-presidential candidates Lloyd Bentsen and Dan Quayle. Some 169 speech segments elicited some type of audience response. These were fully transcribed, and the findings reported here are based on a comprehensive analysis of these cases. Some additional materials were also examined for comparative purposes, including presidential debates from previous years, U.S. congressional floor debates, speeches at British party political conferences, meetings of Parliament, and television talk shows involving a live studio audience.

In many respects the 1988 presidential debates differ from other oratorical settings. Most obviously, the spoken discourse here occurs in a modified debate format in which a panel of journalists ask questions of the candidates in turn, allowing the opposing candidate the opportunity for a rebuttal. Nevertheless, within this format the candidates speak at some length (two minutes for initial position statements, one minute for rebuttals) on the issues of the day, and an audience is present which can and often does actively respond to what is being said.

This setting is also distinctive in the composition of the audience and its arrangement within the auditorium. Many political speeches are delivered to predominantly supportive audiences, while others involve heterogeneous audiences whose members represent a wide variety of divergent and contrasting points of view. The audience for a presidential debate, by contrast, contains neither a uniform homogeneity nor an undifferentiated heterogeneity of opinion, but rather a bipolar division with most members supportive of one side or the other. Moreover, among televised presidential debates the 1988 series had a distinctly partisan audience because roughly two-thirds of the tickets were distributed by the campaigns themselves to their staunchest supporters. This is a major increase over 1976 (the year of the first televised debates since the Kennedy-Nixon confrontation of 1960), at which time less than 25% of the tickets were distributed by the campaigns (Morrison, 1988). Hence, most audience members in 1988 were deeply committed to one candidate or the other, and the audience as a whole was evenly divided along party lines.

The structured ideological composition of the audience was paralleled and reinforced by the arrangement of audience members within the auditorium. The audience was laterally segregated by party, so that each candidate faced his own supporters. This arrangement probably encouraged the already-partisan audience to express its approval or disapproval of the candidates' statements and rebuttals, for they could be fairly confident that those nearby would concur and perhaps join in.

Another force operated to inhibit audience activity, however: the moderators in each debate urged audience members to restrain themselves. Admonitions to "please hold it down," "please keep your responses as quiet as possible," and the like were not uncommon.

The actual rate of response presumably represents a compromise between these

countervailing forces, in conjunction with the candidates' actual performance. As Table 1 indicates, the response rate increased over the course of the debates.<sup>3</sup>

TABLE 1  
Total Audience Responses in Each Debate

Bush-Dukakis 9/25/88	38
Bentsen-Quayle 10/5/88	41
Bush-Dukakis 10/13/88	90
Total	169

With only thirty eight responses in the first ninety-minute debate, the rate of response began somewhat lower than that observed by Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) in their study of applause in British party conference speeches, perhaps reflecting the fact that responses in the U.S. case were officially discouraged. Interestingly, however, this rate rose slightly in the second debate and more than doubled in the third despite moderators' efforts to contain it. Moreover, in comparison to televised presidential debates from previous years, it is apparent that this pattern is part of a larger historical trend: the rate of response has increased steadily from 1980 to 1984 to 1988. It would appear that the studio audience is becoming an increasingly active and important player in presidential debates.<sup>4</sup>

While the audience was generally active and vocal, they were much more likely to affiliate with a speaker (usually by clapping) than disaffiliate. Of 169 audience response episodes, only twenty four involved some form of disaffiliation. As Table 2 indicates, these consisted primarily of booing and disaffiliative laughter. A few episodes of laughter were equivocal as to their affiliative/disaffiliative character. Other disaffiliative responses were almost entirely absent in the debates; jeering and hissing did occur on rare occasions, but only in conjunction with booing and not as isolated actions.

TABLE 2  
Disaffiliative Responses by Response Type

Booing	8
Disaffiliative Laughter	12
Equivocal Laughter	4
Total	24

The fact that disaffiliative responses in general were relatively infrequent indicates that audience members were comparatively selective when expressing dissatisfaction. What sorts of things actually prompted some in the audience to take an openly disparaging stance? We will address this question for each of the primary forms of disaffiliation in turn.

### BOOING

Because booing conveys disapproval of something a speaker has just said, it enables audience members to disaffiliate momentarily from a speaker and from the

position that he or she has advanced. When episodes of booing are examined individually in relation to the speeches to which they were responsive, it is apparent that booing was systematically restricted to a limited range of rhetorical environments. Without exception, booing followed hostile remarks in which a candidate was criticizing the opposition.

This pattern can be seen in the following examples. (See Appendix for transcription symbols.) In the first, Quayle criticizes the Carter grain embargo as having hindered U.S. access to foreign markets, and this criticism is subsequently booed (arrowed).

(1) [Bentsen-Quayle: 0:36:25]

DQ: Senator Bentsen talks about recapturing the foreign markets. .hh Well I'll tell ya one way that we're not gonna recapture the foreign markets 'n that is if in fact we have another Jimmy Carter grain embargo. .hh[hh Jimmy-

[x x x-xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx[xxxxxxxx-x-x-x-](3.2)

AUD:→ [bbbbbbbBBBBB]=

→=[BBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBbbbbbbb]bbb (3.6)

DQ: [Jimmy Carter- Jimmy Carter grain embargo]

Jimmy Carter grain embargo set the American farmer back. . . .

And in the following, an episode of booing (arrowed) follows a similar criticism by Bush, one also directed at the damaging effects of the Carter grain embargo.

(2) [Bush-Dukakis 2: 1:03:50]

GB: . . .And I believe the answer to the agricultural economy .hh is not to: .h get the government further involved, but to do what I'm suggesting. .hh First place never go back to that democratic (0.2) grain embargo. .hh That liberal (.) democrat (.) grain em[bargo .hh that k- kn(h)o(h)cked the markets=

AUD: [h-h-h-h-[h-h (1.1)

AUD:→ [b-b-b-b-b (0.9)

GB: =.h right out from under us 'n made Mister Gorbachev say to me when he was here, how do I know you're reliable suppliers. . . .

Since the grain embargo was imposed by a Democratic president—Carter—this action can be associated with the opposing party and, by implication, with Dukakis and Bentsen. Both speakers take steps to highlight this linkage by formulating the embargo as the “Jimmy Carter grain embargo” (in example 1) or the “liberal Democrat grain embargo” (example 2). The speakers are thus criticizing a policy that they have identified with the opposing candidate's party, and it is this criticism that is subsequently booed.

More generally, every instance of booing in the debates follows similarly derogatory statements designed to criticize the opposing candidate's policies, qualifications for office, party, or other associated characteristics. This regularity is noteworthy because nothing in the semantics of booing would prevent its intelligible use in a wider range of contexts; audience members could conceivably boo speakers when they are discussing their own opinions, accomplishments, or qualifications.<sup>5</sup> Yet

here booing only appeared in response to attacks on the opposition. This suggests that, in the context of the presidential debates, the audience adopted a strictly defensive posture with respect to the use of booing. That is, audience members systematically refrained from initiating the sort of interpersonally hostile action that booing embodies, but they did take such actions to register disapproval of hostilities initiated by a speaker.

### *Direct Booing Versus Counteraffiliative Booing*

Not every derogatory remark prompted the audience to boo; many were allowed to pass unchallenged. Accordingly, while we have established a general class of speech environments to which booing was restricted—namely, criticisms of the opposition—we have not yet isolated the features that distinguish those criticisms that were booed from those that were not.

To this end, consider that in the previous two examples booing is not a direct response to the speaker's remarks. In each instance the booing only begins *after an affiliative response was underway*, applause in example 1 and affiliative laughter in example 2. More generally, five of the eight booing episodes are similarly organized, with booing initiated only after an affiliative response was in progress.

This pattern strongly suggests that some audience members may be encouraged to boo a given critical remark when others have begun to respond favorably to it.<sup>6</sup> There are several reasons why this might be so. First, an ongoing affiliative response seems to multiply the benefits associated with booing. In addition to conveying disapproval of what the speaker has said, booing in this environment also has the effect of competing with the approving response. More specifically, audience members may be moved to boo in part to offer a countervailing assessment of what was said, to indicate that support for the speaker is not universal, and perhaps also to drown out those who are expressing approval. Moreover, an initial affiliative response may also lower the potential costs of booing that derive from the fear of responding in isolation. Individual audience members may be more willing to boo in this environment because the ongoing supportive response will make any individual action on their part less conspicuous.<sup>7</sup> These explanations are at present somewhat speculative, but they do account for the recurrent pattern of [affiliation + booing] found here.

Whatever its motivation, counteraffiliative booing comes across as distinctly competitive, and this competitiveness is strikingly displayed in the following example (see lines 12–18).

(3) [Bush-Dukakis 2: 0:14:03]

- 01 GB: And so I'm still a little unclear as to whether  
 02 he's for or against a tax increase, .hh I have  
 03 been all f- for the taxpayers bill of rights all along.  
 04 .hh And this idea of unleashing a whole bunch  
 05 an ARmy a conventional force army of  
 06 IRS [agents, into everybody's k(h)itchen, I=  
 07 AUD: [h h h  
 08 GB: =mean [he's against m:ost defense matters 'n now=  
 09 AUD: [h h  
 10 GB: =he wants to get an army of





act exclusively because of the speaker's action, and not because of what other audience members were doing.

Since noncompetitive booing is a comparatively strong display of disapproval, we might expect such booing would be reserved for rhetorical maneuvers that are particularly objectionable. Although it is difficult to assess the offensiveness of the candidates' criticisms of one another independently, there is some evidence to suggest that noncompetitive booing tended to follow criticisms that could be regarded as somehow "excessive," "uncalled-for," "below-the-belt," or otherwise "improper."

For instance, consider extract 4 above, in which Bush ridicules Dukakis' Bostonian origins. The derisive reference to Boston is embedded within a recitation of the foreign policy accomplishments of the Reagan-Bush administration. Bush quotes Dukakis as having characterized administration policy toward Angola as "phony," a term that Bush caustically describes as "one of these marvelous Boston adjectives" (lines 03–04). In effect, Bush embeddedly treats Dukakis' association with Boston and Bostonian culture as a characteristic worthy of derision. While the audience does not begin to boo until Bush completes the sentence containing this reference, Bush's rejoinder indicates that he hears the booing in just this way, as directed to the Boston reference (lines 07–08). Bush's remark is rather unusual in that it is only tangentially related to substantive political matters. While the candidates frequently criticize one another, they normally restrict their criticisms to politically relevant characteristics: the opponent's policies, qualifications, performance in office, and the like. Occasionally, however, candidates will take jabs at nonpolitical traits or characteristics, as in the Boston reference above, and it is noteworthy that such a remark received one of the very few noncompetitive booing responses. Apparently, audience members see such comments as sufficiently objectionable to warrant an unmitigated display of disapproval.

Another instance of an "improper" criticism that elicits noncompetitive booing occurs when Bush derisively comments on Dukakis' "liberalism." Recall that a central strategy of the Bush campaign was to portray Dukakis as a leftwing extremist. This allegation became an issue in the first debate, and Dukakis objected strongly to the tactic. In the second debate the issue arose once again, and Dukakis reiterated his complaint at length: "the Vice President called me a liberal two or three times," "this is something the Republicans have used for a long time, they tried it with Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and John Kennedy," "I don't think these labels mean a thing," "let's stop labeling each other and let's get to the heart of the matter which is the future of this country." Later on, however, Bush ignores this objection by using the complained-about term (line 07) and he is promptly booed (line 09).

(5) [Bush-Dukakis 2: 0:54:20]

01 GB: . . . I don't have any litmus tests. (0.2) But what I  
 02 would do (0.8) is appoint people to the federal  
 03 bench (0.5) that will not (0.3) legislate (0.2) from  
 04 the bench. (0.6) Who will interpret (.) the  
 05 constitution. (0.6) I do not wanta see us go to:  
 06 again an' I'm using this word (0.3) advisedly, .hh  
 07 a l::i:beral majority,

08 [h that is going [to legislate from the bench: ]=  
 09 AUD: [(aw:::)] [bbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbss (2.1)]  
 10 GB: =.hhh They d(h)on't like thuh use o' the word,  
 11 but may I remind his stro:ng supporters  
 12 that only last year in the primary to  
 13 capture that Democratic nomination, he said  
 14 I (.) am (.) a (.) progressive L::IBeral::,  
 15 (0.2) Democrat. I won't support d- judges like  
 16 that, . . .

Bush displays marked caution when using the term this time (in line 06: "I'm using this word advisedly"), thus implicitly acknowledging that it may be perceived as improper. Moreover, when the booing subsides he defends himself (11–16) by noting that Dukakis had previously categorized himself in similar terms. Unlike the preceding example, where the impropriety derived from the remark's tangential relevance to politics, here the opponent had previously complained about the booed item and had thereby explicitly defined it as out of bounds. In both cases, however, audience members can plausibly view the speakers as having gone "too far" in their remarks; and it is on this basis that they negatively sanction the speakers with noncompetitive/unmitigated booing responses.

The argument thusfar is that noncompetitive booing is a comparatively strong display of disapproval which was usually reserved for speaker hostilities that can be regarded as in some sense improper. Moreover, by booing immediately upon the completion of such remarks, audience members can propose that a speaker has indeed gone beyond the bounds of propriety. Direct booing thus constitutes a negative sanction. And insofar as speakers wish to avoid potentially damaging audience reactions, booing especially in its direct form enables audience members to exert a modicum of control over a speaker's future conduct.

As in most arenas of social life, however, the bounds of propriety here are fuzzy and negotiable. Hence, audience members may attempt to sanction speakers for actions that are less obviously "improper," and when that happens speakers can counter with sanctions of their own. In the only remaining instance of a noncompetitive booing (reproduced below), Bush is criticizing Dukakis' pollution control efforts when he is booed. Unlike the previous two examples, this issue is politically relevant and has not previously been the object of complaint; on these grounds it seems to be a fair target for criticism. Yet the audience responds with strong noncompetitive booing. This prompts Bush, in turn, to register a complaint with the moderator about the audience response (arrowed).

(6) [Bush-Dukakis 2: 1:06:30]

GB: . . . And so: .h I d- I refuse to- to mea::sure one's  
 commitment .h as to whether you're gonna double the  
spending. .h That is the same (.) old (.) argument that's  
gotten us into the trouble .hh on the deficit side.  
 .hh So I'll just keep saying I am one, .hh I:: uh I'm not  
 gonna go .hh down there 'n try to dump the sludge from  
 Massachusetts off the beaches off of uh New Jersey=  
 AUD: =bbbb[bbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbb]b-b (2.2)  
 GB: [I'm not gonna do that .hh eh-]  
 (2.0)

GB:1→That boo was excessively loud can ya add five  
[seconds Bernie]

AUD: [h h-h-hhhhhhh]hhhhh[hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh]hhhhhhh=  
[outta fairness come on.]

AUD: =[-h-h-h-h-h-h-h-h]-h-x-h=

GB: [gimme f(h)i(h)ve]

AUD: =[-x-h-x-h-x-h-x-h-x-h-x (6.1)]

GB:2→ [I mean this guy this is too much down there.  
.hhh but- but I'm not gonna do that, I am an  
environmentalist. . . .

After the booing ends, Bush protests to the moderator that “that boo was excessively loud” (arrow 1) and he later complains that “this is too much down there” (arrow 2) before resuming his prior line of argument. Accordingly, although booing represents an important resource for audience members attempting to control a speaker’s conduct, it cannot be used freely or with impunity, for the sanctioners can themselves be sanctioned.

In summary, booing normally occurred in response to rhetorical maneuvers that had the following characteristics: 1) they involved some reference to the opposition, 2) they were critical in character, and 3) they had already received an affiliative response or, alternatively, could be judged as somehow “improper.”

#### LAUGHTER

While booing is a straightforward display of disapproval and disaffiliation, the semantics of laughter are considerably more complex. Fundamentally, audience laughter treats an antecedent utterance as “laughable” and thus conveys appreciation of something “humorous” or “nonserious” therein (cf., Jefferson, 1979). While laughter in this context generally functions as a humor-appreciative display, it may also accomplish a variety of more specific actions depending on the particular context in which it occurs (cf., Jefferson, 1984; Jefferson, Sacks, and Schegloff, 1987). A given burst of laughter may be either affiliative or disaffiliative depending on what specifically has evoked it. To understand disaffiliative laughter, then, we must first consider its opposite, laughter that accomplishes affiliation.

##### *Affiliative Laughter*

Sometimes audience members laugh when candidates attack or criticize their opponents. This rhetorical environment is formally similar to that which elicits booing, and this is consistent with the fact that these responses sometimes occur together in competition (see example 3 above). But the criticisms that receive laughter are of a particular kind: they are designed to be manifestly “humorous” in tone. In the environment of a transparently humorous criticism of the opposition, audience laughter is an expression of affiliation with the current speaker.

For example, in the following excerpt Dukakis suggests that Bush’s promises concerning federal spending, taxation, and deficit reduction are overblown and economically unrealistic. He does this by first enumerating elements of Bush’s budget plan and then comparing Bush to “Joe Isuzu” (arrowed), a television



senses of the term “clarity” to criticize Dukakis’ answer. (The simile also enables Bush to take a sideswipe at the Massachusetts Governor’s environmental policies.) Hence, audiences do not laugh at all critical remarks, but predominantly at those marked as humorous by either explicit or implicit means.

Moreover, there is some evidence that the speakers are expecting laughter from the audience. Instead of proceeding with the substance of their remarks, each speaker instead produces nonsubstantive vocalizations (“.hhh uh:::” in example 7 and “.hh now uhm” in example 8). These items function to delay the development of the speech and thereby provide space for a possible audience response, but they do so in an interesting and strategic way (cf., Atkinson, 1984a: 70–71; 99–105). Unlike mere silence, which would display a clear expectation that a response should occur (and which could be disastrous if no response were forthcoming), these items make way for a response but they do so “off-record,” under the guise of routine inbreaths, hesitation markers, and other preliminaries to continuation.

While these derogatory remarks have a transparently humorous dimension and thus seem to be “inviting” laughter, they also raise substantive and familiar campaign issues, and in this sense they remain genuine criticisms of the opposition.<sup>8</sup> After such criticisms, laughter displays appreciation of the humor in what was said, and thus shows the audience to be “laughing with” the speaker at his adversary. It is on this basis that such laughter may be understood as an expression of affiliation with the current speaker.

Consistent with this analysis, these episodes of laughter both dissolve gradually into applause. Indeed, affiliative laughter is often followed by applause (although this does not happen with disaffiliative laughter, which ordinarily stands on its own; see examples 9–10 below). These two responses work in concert to support the speaker, thus differing sharply from mixed responses that are in competition (see examples 1–3 above involving competitive booing).

The progression to applause represents a trajectory toward a purified display of support. Consider that the affiliative character of laughter is a secondary consequence of an action that in the first instance appreciates the humor in a derogatory remark. Although laughter plainly implies affiliation in this context, it is possible that some may be laughing because they appreciate a good joke and not because they support the speaker. Cautious journalists and political commentators may note such equivocalities when they discuss audience reactions. Applause, in contrast, has affiliation as its sole objective and is thus a purified expression of support.<sup>9</sup>

Given that affiliative laughter is followed by applause with some regularity, could it be that the first action somehow encourages or facilitates the second? This is very likely the case, since both are at root displays of support for the speaker. But what mechanism links these two actions? Recall that clapping is ordinarily done in concert with others and not as an individual act, undoubtedly because people generally seek to avoid social isolation when expressing their views (Atkinson, 1984a: 17–21; Heritage and Greatbatch, 1986: 111–112). The prospective clapper thus faces the problem of identifying those points within a developing speech that will be likely to generate applause from other audience members. This is why applause has been shown to occur disproportionately in response to specific rhetorical formats that recognizably “invite” audience members to clap (Atkinson, 1984a; 1984b; Heritage and Greatbatch, 1986). These considerations explain how affiliative laughter can



action, laughter in this context displays disbelief or derision. But like booing, laughter here takes on a clear disaffiliative quality.

While disaffiliative laughter generally follows noncritical self-talk, not all such talk generates disaffiliative laughter. Indeed, since only twelve instances of disaffiliative laughter occurred throughout the debates, it is clear that the candidates were usually able to discuss their policies and qualifications without being laughed at. If certain statements are judged by audience members to be inadequate and hence laughable, what makes them so? One possibility is that audience members find some statements to be inadequate by consulting their own prior knowledge of public affairs in conjunction with abstract standards of truthfulness, logic, coherence, political correctness, and the like; by reference to such considerations, some statements simply fall short and are laughed at. This explanation is plausible, but it is incomplete as an account of the processes that generate disaffiliative laughter. It does not explain why certain statements receive laughter at one point in the course of a speech, but when repeated or reformulated at another point they are treated seriously. For example, Quayle's claim to have a strong environmental record receives laughter at one juncture (see example 10 above), but when he makes similar statements later on in the same turn, the audience remains silent (arrowed).

(11) [Bentsen- Quayle: 0:13:07]

DQ: . . . I have voted for the ma:jor pieces of  
environmental legislation that have come down.

→(0.8)

and been voted on in the United States Senate.

→(2.0)

:

:

. . . We are committed (0.8) to the environment.

→(1.0)

I take my children. (1.0) hiking and fishing.

→(1.3)

walking in the woo:ds in the wilderness.

→(1.0)

Believe me, we have a commitment to preserving:

(1.1) the environment.

→(1.3)

:

:

. . . Who has the environmental record, (0.8) who  
has the environment in interest? (0.9) George

Bush and I do.

→(1.8)

If successive versions of a given statement are treated as laughable at one point but not at another, the laughability of a statement must derive in part from the immediate rhetorical and interactional context in which it appears. Accordingly, instead of judging isolated statements by consulting *a priori* judgemental standards, audience members inevitably encounter statements in some specific context, and





ment, some audience members may have been primed to hear this claim subversively as referencing an environmentally *destructive* record. Accordingly, given the journalist's damaging information and the advance skepticism it presumably fostered, it is perhaps not surprising that some audience members laugh at this point. Later in the same turn, after Quayle enumerates specific pro-environmental votes, opinions, and activities, his subsequent claims to be an environmentalist (in extract 11 above) are taken more seriously.

A similar sequence of events—[fact-based hostile question + initial answer + disaffiliative laughter]—occurs in the following extract. Here the journalist first details Bush's opposition to abortion (01–02), and notes his support for a constitutional amendment to outlaw abortion (03–04). The journalist then asks Bush if he thinks that women who have abortions and the doctors who perform them should go to jail (05–09).

(13) [Bush-Dukakis 1: 0:42:25]

- 01 JRN: . . . You now say that you support abortion only in cases  
 02 of rape, .h incest, or: threat to a mother's li:fe,  
 03 .hh and you also support a constitutional amendment  
 04 (.) that if ratifi:ed .hh would outlaw most abortions.  
 05 .hh But if abortions were to become illegal again.,  
 06 .hh do you think that the women who defy the law:,  
 07 .hh and have them anyway:, as they did before it- (.)  
 08 w:as (0.2) okayed by the Supreme Court, (.) and the  
 09 doctors who perform them, .hh should go to jail.  
 10 GB: .hh I- I haven't sorted out thuh penalties. But I do  
 11 know:: (0.7) [I do know]  
 12 AUD: [h-h-h-h-h]hhhh[hhhhhhhhhh (2.5)]  
 13 GB: [that I opPOSE::] a bortion.  
 14 .hh an' I favor adoption. . . .

Given the preliminary information, the question that follows is clearly built to expect an affirmative response. Embedded within the question, then, is an implicit accusation that Bush wants to impose jail sentences on those who participate in abortions. Bush's initial response ("I haven't sorted out the penalties") (10) is noncommittal and can be seen as evasive, particularly when he quickly moves to shift the topic ("But I do know. . ."). As soon as it appears that this may be his only response to the penalty issue, the audience laughs. Unlike the previous example, where the initial response to a fact based accusatory question was to deny it without attending to the counterevidence, here the response is to evade it. But in both cases the speakers can be judged to have responded inadequately, and it is on this basis that the audience laughs.

More generally, disaffiliative laughter in the debates commonly occurs after a similar sequence of events: after a candidate initially attempts to respond to a fact-based hostile or accusatory question. Following such questions, candidates' responses can appear unconvincing (as in example 12), or evasive (as in example 13), and are sometimes vulnerable to subversive counterinterpretations, resulting in laughter. Indeed, fully half of the instances of disaffiliative laughter (6 out of 12) occurred in precisely this sequential environment. Two others occurred when the candidate was responding inadequately to an accusation voiced earlier by the

opposition.<sup>10</sup> It would appear that fact-based accusatory questions, and substantive accusations more generally, make speakers vulnerable to disaffiliative laughter.

However, such talk does not, by itself, ensure that a candidate will be laughed at. The outcome depends in part on how the candidate deals with the issue at hand in his initial response. While attempts to evade the accusation or to deny it baldly (without first dealing with the counterevidence in some way) may evoke laughter, responses which begin by directly and decisively confronting the evidence in concrete terms are treated seriously. A clear example is when Bush was asked about his environmental record. This question is quite similar in both content and structure to one that Quayle received (compare Bush's question below with Quayle's in example 12 above); prior to the question proper (18–20 below) is a list of specific anti-environmental actions (05–17).

(14) [Bush-Dukakis 2: 1:04:44]

- 01 JRN: . . . You have d- s:aid (.) in this campaign  
02 eh: I am an environmentalist, and [described=  
03 GB: [Mhm  
04 JRN: =yourself as having zero tolerance for polluters.  
05 .hhhh And yet your record does seem to suggest  
06 suggest otherwise. .hhhhhh When you were head of  
07 the:- (0.4) president's task force on regulatory  
08 relief .hh you did urge EPA to relax  
09 regulations involving the elimination of lead from  
10 gasoline:, I th- believe you urged suspension of  
11 rules requiring industries to treat toxic wastes  
12 before discharging them in sewers, .hhhh and your  
13 group al:so urged OSHA to weaken the regulations  
14 requiring that workers be informed of dangerous  
15 chemicals at the worksite. .hhhhhh Finally I believe  
16 you did support the President's veto of the clean  
17 water act. .hhhhhhh (1.5)  
18 And my question is::, uh- (1.0) aren't you:: uhm:::  
19 (0.3) how do you square your campaign: (0.5) rhetoric  
20 (.) with thus- this record?  
21 (1.0)  
22 GB: Ninety per cent (0.3) reductions in l:ead h.h  
23 since I chaired that regulatory task force,  
24 (.) ninety percent. It's almo- ya remember that  
25 expression get the lead out:t? (0.2) It's almost  
26 out. .h [Almost go:ne. [.hh uh:: clean water?]=  
27 AUD: [h-h-h [x x x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x]-x-x (1.6)  
28 GB: =I'm for clean water. (.) But what I'm  
29 not fo[r:, .hh WHAT I'M NOT FOR:, is measuring=  
30 AUD: [h-h-h-h-h-h-h-h (1.3)  
31 GB: it the way the d- the Democratic Congress does. . . .

Bush's initial response (22–23) is to offer concrete evidence in support of the notion that he has, in fact, taken action to reduce air pollution. This directly contrasts with Quayle's strategy of abstractly claiming a strong record on the environment without

dealing with or even acknowledging the damaging counterevidence. While Quayle was laughed at, Bush delivers his initial response unfettered (he even gets appreciative laughter and applause (27) in response to a subsequent joke on the matter). Notice, however, that when Bush later makes a more abstract pro-environmental claim (“I’m for clean water”) (28) without addressing the journalist’s damaging counterevidence (see lines 10–12, 15–17), that receives disaffiliative laughter (30).

In summary, disaffiliative laughter followed rhetorical maneuvers that: 1) showed the speakers to be talking about themselves, 2) were noncritical and often supportive in character, 3) were not marked as laughable, and 4) appeared unconvincing, evasive, or otherwise inadequate, particularly in the context of prior talk. Such statements were treated as laughable, and at the same time they constitute an environment in which such laughter is hearably disaffiliative.

#### *Some Equivocal Instances*

There are some speech environments in which laughter falls short of being a full-fledged display of disaffiliation, although it retains certain disaffiliative elements. Such laughter may be characterized as equivocal with respect to the polarity of affiliation/disaffiliation. Two of these will be examined briefly in turn.

*Laughter Following Speech Disfluencies.* Sometimes speakers fall victim to slips of the tongue, memory losses, and related problems that create disfluencies in their talk. These may evoke laughter in which the speaker is the manifest target. For example, in the following Bush is attempting to enumerate those weapons systems that will require “tough choices,” but he has difficulty producing “MX” (see lines 03–04). After a few tries he gives up (“whatever it is”) and starts to go on (05). A moment later he remembers the name and vocalizes it (05), but this generates a further disfluency because he then must abort the new utterance currently in progress (“we’re gonna have to-”) in order to introduce the previously-sought item.

(15) [Bush-Dukakis 1: 0:56:19]

- 01 GB: . . . We are gonna make some changes and some tough  
 02 choices before we go .hh to deployment on the  
 03 Midgetman missile or on thuh .hh  
 04 on thee uh Minute- ma’=whatever it is.  
 05 (.) we’re gonna have to=the MX[:  
 06 AUD: [hhhhhhhhhh. . .

Here the audience appears to be laughing derisively at the speaker. However, in this type of speech environment it is less clear that disaffiliation, in a political sense, is at issue. Although audience members do seem to be treating “the speaker”—understood here as the person deploying mental and vocal equipment to produce talk—as an object of derision, they are not necessarily disassociating themselves from the political persona that inhabits that vocal apparatus. This is an important distinction, because it seems less likely (though still possible) that political commentators or others will interpret such laughter as a rejection of the candidate. Accordingly, such laughter may be regarded as derisive, interpersonally disaffiliative, and hence undesirable, but it is not necessarily disaffiliative in a political sense.

*Laughter Following Humorous Self-Deprecations.* On occasion speakers make critical or derogatory remarks about themselves, often in a plainly “humorous” way. These

can receive laughter which has both affiliative and disaffiliative elements. For example, after Bush suffers from the disfluency described above, and while the audience is still laughing at him, he comes back with a self-deprecatory remark that contains a reference to a previous oratorical blunder (“It’s Christmas”) (09).

(16) [Bush-Dukakis 1: 0:56:19]

01 GB: →. . We are gonna make some changes and some tough  
 02 choices before we go .hh to deployment on the  
 03 midgetman missile or on thuh on thee uh minute-  
 04 ma' = whatever it is. (.) we're gonna have to =thee  
 05 MX[.:  
 06 AUD: [h-hhh[hhhhhhhhhhhhhhh-h-h-h-h-h-h-h-h-h]=  
 07 GB: [MX. we're gonna hafta do that. .hhh]  
 08 AUD: =h-h-h-h-[h-h-h-h-h-h-h-h-h]h-h-hhhHHHHHHHHH[HHHHHHHHH=  
 09 GB: → [It's Christmas ] [It's Christmas  
 10 AUD: =HHHHXHXHX-HXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXx

While the meaning of this may be unclear now, its humor was transparent and widely appreciated at the time; notice (line 08) that the audience laughs significantly harder after this remark. The humor is deeply embedded in events that preceded the occasion of the debate. Eighteen days earlier, on September 7th, 1988, Bush was giving a campaign speech and mistakenly referred to that day as the anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Since Pearl Harbor was actually attacked on *December* 7th, Bush was premature by exactly three months. That incident received much press attention and was widely discussed as an example of Bush’s rhetorical clumsiness. Returning to the occasion of the presidential debate, that event took place on September 25th. By smiling and saying that it is Christmas, Bush deliberately and jokingly makes a similar three month error, thereby evoking a widely-known incident to display recognition of the oratorical weakness that has now become the target of laughter. This receives an intensified burst of laughter that dissolves into applause.

From the standpoint of the content of the utterance, which is a humorous criticism of candidate Bush, the audience can be characterized as laughing derisively at him. In this sense the laughter has a disaffiliative dimension. On the other hand, since it is Bush himself who has made the remark in a self-deprecatory spirit, the audience can also be characterized as laughing with him and hence affiliating. That applause follows is consistent with an analysis of the laughter as affiliative. Still, because the speaker himself remains the target of criticism, the resulting laughter is somewhat less than an unequivocal display of support.

#### A NOTE ON INDIRECT DISAFFILIATION

In addition to the direct responses examined thus far, disaffiliation may also be accomplished in an indirect manner. Audiences can distance themselves from a candidate by expressing approval when the candidate is criticized by someone else. When a journalist, for instance, makes critical or accusatory remarks within a challenging question, an approving response at that point is disaffiliative in relation to the candidate who is the target of criticism. For example, in the following the audience laughs and applauds when a journalist, before asking Quayle the first

question of the debate, quotes former Secretary of State Alexander Haig to the effect that “your pick was the dumbest call George Bush could’ve made.”

(17) [Bentsen-Quayle: 0:2:00]

JRN: .hhhh Senator you have been criticized as we all  
know:: for your decision to stay out of the Vietnam  
War::, (0.3) for your poor academic record, .hhhhhh  
But mo:re troubling to so::me are some o’thuh  
comments that’ve been made by people in your own  
party. .hhh Just last week former Secretary  
of State Hai::g. .hh said that your pi:ck. (0.2)  
was the dumbest call George Bush could’ve  
ma[:de.

AUD: [h-h-hhxhxhx[hxxxxxxxxXXXXXXXXXX]=

JRN: [Your leader in the Senate]

AUD: =XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX[XXXXXXXXxxxxxxx (5.8)]

JRN: [Your leader in the Senate] Bob

Do:le said that a better qualified person could have  
been chosen. .hhh other republicans have been far  
more critical in private. .hhhh Why do you think  
that you have not made a more substantial  
impression on some of these people who have been able to  
observe you up clo:se.

(1.5)

DQ: .hhhhhh The question goe::s (1.0) to whether

I’m qualified (1.1) to be vice president, . . .

Similarly, the opposing candidate may also register criticisms and accusations, and an approving response from the audience is disaffiliative in relation to the criticized candidate (even as it is affiliative in relation to the candidate who is mounting the criticism). In the following, after Quayle claims to have a strong environmental record, Bentsen refers sarcastically to Quayle’s “late conversion” to environmental consciousness, and this derisive retort receives supportive laughter and applause.

(18) [Bentsen-Quayle: 0:14:30]

DQ: . . . Who has the environmental record, (0.8) who has the  
environment in interest, (0.9) George Bush ‘n I do.

(1.8)

MOD: Senator Bentsen?

(1.1)

LB: Ah this late conversion (0.2) is interesting to me.

AUD: h-h-hh hhhhhHHHHHXXHXHX-

HXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX-x x (5.3)

Such disaffiliation may be characterized as indirect because, instead of responding negatively to the candidate’s own remarks, audience members here are endorsing a third party’s negative assessment of the candidate. Moreover, the disaffiliation is being expressed through the medium of an action that is, in an elemental sense, affiliative.

Within the debates, indirect expressions of disaffiliation occurred more frequently than direct forms. Indeed, most of the remaining audience responses are indirectly

disaffiliative in the sense described above. Correspondingly, Heritage and Greatbach (1986: 120–121) found that in party conference speeches most applause occurs in the environment of attacks on external or internal opponents.

Moreover, indirect forms of disaffiliation occurred in a wider range of speech environments. This is perhaps clearest when booing, the “purest” form of disaffiliation, is compared with episodes in which the audience disaffiliates indirectly by applauding a criticism. Recall that booing was always restricted to environments in which the candidate is criticizing the opposition; and even then, booing followed only when others had begun to affiliate with the remark or when the remark could be regarded as somehow “improper”; audience members systematically refrained from booing a candidate when he was talking about his own opinions, policies, qualifications, or experiences. In contrast, when the same candidate was criticized by a third party, such criticisms were often applauded regardless of what specifically had become the target of criticism. Thus, on both quantitative and structural grounds, indirect expressions of disaffiliation occurred more freely than their direct counterparts.

This asymmetry indicates that audience members display a preference for expressing disaffiliation indirectly rather than directly.<sup>11</sup> This preference is evident in the sequence of events in example 13 above. As Quayle finishes arguing that he (and Bush) have a strong environmental record, a 1.8 second silence follows during which the audience remains silent; no booing or laughter occurs at that point. However, as soon as Bentsen derisively rejects Quayle’s claim, the audience laughs supportively and applauds. It would appear that when given the choice, audience members generally prefer to express disapproval indirectly through actions that are, in the first instance, affiliative.

#### CONCLUSION

The preceding analysis indicates that various rhetorical maneuvers in the 1988 presidential debates were vulnerable to different forms of audience disaffiliation. Candidates’ statements about themselves, especially those that were responding inadequately to a fact-based criticism or accusation voiced earlier, were vulnerable to disaffiliative laughter. Candidates’ criticisms of the opposition, especially those that received an initial affiliative response, were vulnerable to booing. When such criticisms could be perceived as somehow “improper,” they were vulnerable to noncompetitive and hence unmitigated booing.

The low frequency of disaffiliation strongly suggests that the audience was highly restrained when engaging in interpersonally hostile responsive actions. However, the specific nature of this restraint cannot be determined from aggregate counts of audience behavior considered in isolation from the courses of argumentation to which they were responsive. The present study, by examining sequences of speaker-audience interaction on a case-by-case basis, demonstrates that the audience systematically avoided adopting an independently hostile or adversarial posture. Their disaffiliative responses were restricted to speech environments that had already become explicitly adversarial. For example, booing only occurred when a candidate was overtly attacking the opposition. Correspondingly, disaffiliative laughter usually occurred only when the candidates were responding defensively to hostile remarks made earlier. Finally, indirect expressions of disaffiliation occurred as a

byproduct of the audience affiliating with hostile remarks made by others onstage. Accordingly, the audience generally refrained from initiating hostilities of its own accord, and it thereby declined to cast itself as an independent adversary in relation to either candidate. However, when adversarial disputes emerged between the parties onstage, audience members were quite willing to align with one side or the other.

Future research in this area might fruitfully pursue a number of relevant topics. One issue is the extent to which patterns of disaffiliative audience behavior remain constant or vary in different oratorical contexts. Although the findings reported here represent a comprehensive summary of audience disaffiliation in the 1988 presidential debates, this setting has a number of distinctive characteristics. The fact that it involved multiple participants in confrontation makes it unlike most single-party political speeches. Also distinctive is the ideological and spatial segregation of the audience, which ensured roughly equal "cheering sections" for each participant. Finally, these presidential debates were more formal than most other public speaking events. They were televised live, involved candidates for the highest public office in the United States, and audience responses were officially discouraged. These various factors probably combined to restrict the forms of disaffiliation and the environments in which occurred. Less formal settings that involve a single speaker and a predominantly oppositional audience might yield substantially different patterns of audience conduct. Further comparative analyses of audience behavior are plainly needed, in part to document variations, but also to isolate those common sequential patterns that characterize speaker-audience interactions across diverse oratorical contexts.

Other avenues to explore are the possible consequences of audience conduct for the manner in which speech events are reported by the mass media, and for the developing course of public opinion. While existing research on the journalistic and political consequentiality of applause is highly suggestive (Atkinson, 1984a: 1985; 1986; Grady and Potter, 1985; Heritage and Greatbatch, 1986), much remains unknown. This is as it should be; it is appropriate that the description and analysis of speaker-audience interaction have developed in advance of research on effects. The study of effects by means of opinion surveys, laboratory experiments, or other methods presupposes a comprehensive understanding of the various forms of conduct the effects of which are to be assessed. Thus, descriptive analyses of speaker-audience interactions are a prerequisite to studies which seek to chart the diverse consequences of particular interactional events.

In the end, however, the interactional dimension of public speech constitutes a rich and fruitful topic in its own right. In this respect, the present study should foster an expanded understanding of the contingencies that attend the use of speech for strategic political ends. In addition to factors resulting from larger social and economic events and from the existence of media analysts and political commentators, public speakers are also subject to forces operating within the speech event itself. Public speeches are, necessarily, interactional events. The copresent audience has the first opportunity to comment publicly on what is being said, and their collective assessments may be either supportive or damaging. Let the orator beware; the audience is poised.

## NOTES

*Steven E. Clayman is an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology and is affiliated with the Communication Studies Program at the University of California-Los Angeles. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the University of Wisconsin in 1989 and at a conference sponsored by the International Institute for Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis in Amsterdam, 1991. The title of this paper was inspired by the title of a manuscript by Gail Jefferson (1981). The author would like to thank Doug Maynard and members of the conversation analytic work group at the University of Wisconsin, Wayne Beach, Wayne Mellinger, Martha Solomon, the anonymous reviewers at QJS and especially John Heritage and Manny Schegloff for advice and assistance.*

<sup>1</sup>This insight concerning consequentiality of recipients' behavior has been inspired by studies of conversational interaction, which have demonstrated that units of discourse as large as extended story-tellings (Schegloff, 1982) and as small as individual sentences (C. Goodwin, 1979; 1981; M. Goodwin, 1980) are actually realized through, and are in some respects shaped by, the concerted actions of the interactional coparticipants, including those previously understood as passive "hearers" (see also Duranti, 1986; Duranti and Brenneis, 1986).

<sup>2</sup>Max Atkinson (1984a; 1984b) is primarily responsible for calling attention to the methodological importance of audience responses for speech analysis, but the basic principle underlying this observation has an established heritage in the study of interaction. Thus, in the form of inquiry known as conversation analysis, Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974: 728–29) observed that the turn-by-turn or "sequential" character of spoken interaction can be a crucial methodological resource for the analysis of turns at talk. Because contributions to interaction—that is, turns at talk—are to some degree responsive to antecedent turns, each subsequent turn provides some indication of how the preceding turn was understood by the responding party. Hence, the analyst can examine the response evoked by a given turn at talk as a "proof procedure" for determining what the focal turn is "doing" from the standpoint of the interactional coparticipants themselves. This methodological principle is widely applicable to the analysis of interaction, and it has also informed ethological studies of communication among nonhuman species (for an overview, see Smith, 1977: Chapter 10).

<sup>3</sup>For the purposes of this table, a response was defined as any continuous episode of audible audience behavior produced in reaction to something a candidate said or did. Thus defined, a "response" could consist of applause, booing, laughter, or other behaviors, alone or in combination. Isolated claps or laugh particles were not counted. Responses to the journalists on the panel were also not counted.

<sup>4</sup>The possible explanation for the trend toward increased audience activity merits study. To date, audience behavior has been neither described nor explained in historical accounts of presidential debates, and a comprehensive history of audience behavior within the debate context has yet to be written. In an otherwise thorough study of presidential debates, Jamieson and Birdsell (1988: 94–99, 120–22) devote some attention to the fact that the television audience for such debates has steadily declined, but they make no mention of the *studio* audience and the possible impact of audience behavior on the course of a debate or its outcome. The same can be said for more recent studies of the 1988 presidential debates appearing in a special issue of the *American Behavioral Scientist* (1989).

<sup>5</sup>Audience members do appear to boo more freely in other contexts. In British party conferences, for example, booing can be observed in response to non-hostile expressions of a speaker's own policies. For example:

[Tory Party Conference: 10/13/81: Mike Truman: 0:2:50]

MT: . . .Thuh first responsibility must be to reDUCE  
unemployment by carefully chosen government  
financed projects.  
(0.6)

AUD: ((mixed boos, jeers, and some light applause)) (5.0)

The fact that booing is less restricted in some British party conference speeches does not necessarily reflect differences in British and American national cultures. More immediate situational factors may account for the difference. In the British setting, speeches containing less restricted booing each involve speakers expressing views that were widely recognized as unpopular within the party. For example, in the preceding episode the speaker's call for additional government spending on social programs is clearly at odds with the dominant Tory policy. Thus, while the American presidential candidates expressed views that were supported by a roughly equal share of the audience, the more heavily booed speakers in the British context were expressing views supported only by a minority in the audience. Accordingly, audience members may feel more free to boo even non-hostile statements when they know that virtually everyone around them would concur.

<sup>6</sup>The onset of counteraffiliative booing cannot be explained by any intervening nonvocal action on the part of the speaker. Inspection of the videotapes shows that the speakers do not engage in any marked behavioral displays, gestures, or facial expressions in the period between the onset of affiliation and the onset of booing. Booing thus appears to have been triggered by the supportive reaction of other audience members.

<sup>7</sup>I am grateful to John Heritage for pointing this out to me.

<sup>8</sup>The exaggerated-but-serious statements that receive affiliative laughter have a parallel in ordinary conversation: teasings. As Paul Drew (1987) has noted, teases are marked as intendedly humorous by the inclusion of exaggerated characterizations, but at the same time they address real interactional transgressions.



"Observe that laughter precedes applause in these examples. As it turns out, this is an invariant pattern throughout the present data. Its persistence may be due in part to the underlying physiological characteristics of these respective actions. Laughter may perhaps be initiated a bit more quickly than clapping because the former requires only a slight inbreath while the latter requires that the hands be lifted and moved apart before they can be clapped. Correspondingly, Atkinson (1984a: 23) has observed that cheering commonly precedes applause, and he offers a similar explanation, referring to the "unavoidable time-lag involved in starting to clap one's hands."

But in addition to this anatomical-physiological explanation, there is a social-interactional account which is uniquely relevant to the case of laughter and has to do with the fact that laughter and applause differ as meaningful social actions. Laughter is commonsensically regarded as properly a "visceral," "involuntary" response which, in the context of a joke, displays understanding and appreciation of the humor in what was said. As a visceral display of understanding, laughter should ordinarily follow immediately upon completion of the laughable item; any significant delay can reflect negatively on the sophistication of the recipient or the humorousness of the joke (Sacks, 1974: 347-53). Applause, by contrast, is a wholly voluntary display of approval, and as such it may be withheld and started up at will. Accordingly, if laughter is to convey affiliation unproblematically, it may be constrained to occur promptly upon completion of the laughable item. Although this explanation is at present speculative, it is consistent with the general pattern that laughter is nondelayed in relation to other audience responses: 1) when affiliative laughter and applause co-occur, the onset of laughter always precedes applause rather than the reverse; and 2) disaffiliative laughter, unlike booing, never appears as a delayed counteraffiliative response (contrast examples 9-10 with examples 1-2).

<sup>10</sup>The 4 remaining instances of disaffiliative laughter involve remarks whose laughability appears to be more heavily content-based. These may be glossed as follows: 1) Dukakis' claim to be "very tough on violent crime" (example 9 above); 2) Quayle's statement that the most important formative experience in his life occurred when his grandmother told him that "you can do anything you want to if you just set your mind to it;" 3) Quayle's statement that because the U.S. is now making Hondas and exporting them to Japan, the U.S. has become "the envy of the world;" and 4) Dukakis' argument that he can be trusted to make wise Supreme Court appointments because, unlike Bush, "I've appointed over 130 judges so I have a record." These remarks all received disaffiliative laughter.

<sup>11</sup>The terms "preference" and "dispreference" do not refer to the subjective feelings of the audience. They refer instead to the manner in which audience members differentially treat direct and indirect forms of disaffiliation in their actual responsive conduct. Thus, audience members may privately want to boo speakers directly, but their responses display a marked preference for indirect forms. This notion of preference as a publicly displayed orientation is heavily indebted to research in conversation analysis; see Heritage (1984: 265-280) for an overview.

## APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPT NOTATIONAL CONVENTIONS

The speech excerpts in this paper were transcribed with notational conventions adapted from the standard conventions used in conversation analysis, with additional symbols developed for audience responses (see also Atkinson, 1984a: 189-190). The transcripts are designed to capture the details of speech and audience behavior as they naturally occurred, although the excerpts in this paper have been slightly simplified to enhance readability. Below is a guide to the transcription symbols used here; for a more detailed exposition, see Atkinson and Heritage (1984: ix-xvi).

### *Symbols Denoting Characteristics of Speech Delivery*

S:	<u>That's our policy.</u>	Underlining indicates that an item was stressed.
S:	That's our po:policy.	Colon(s) indicate the prior sound was prolonged.
S:	THAT'S our policy.	Capital letters mark increased volume.
S:	That's our- our policy.	A hyphen denotes a glottal stop or "cut-off" of sound.
S:	.hhh That's our policy. So hhhh in conclusion	An "h" marks audible breathing. The more "h's," the longer the breath. A period preceding denotes inbreath; no period marks out-breath.
S:	That's (.) our policy. (1.3)	Numbers in parentheses mark elapsed silence in tenths of seconds; a period denotes a micropause of less than 0.2 seconds.
AUD:	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx	

S:	That's our policy.=	Equal signs indicate that one event followed the other with no intervening silence.
AUD:	=xxxXXXXXXXXXXXXxxx	
S:	That's our [policy.]	Brackets mark the onset and termination of simultaneous activities.
AUD:	[xxXXXXxx]xx-x	
S:	That's our ( )	Parentheses indicate that the transcriptionist was uncertain. Items appearing in parentheses represent a best guess as to what was heard.
	So (in conclusion)	

### *Symbols Denoting Audience Responses*

xxxxxxxxxx	Applause
bbbbbbbbbb	Booing
hhhhhhhhhh	Laughter
ssssssssss	Hissing
x x	An isolated response; single claps or laugh particles
h h	
b-b-b-b-b-b	A light response; hyphenated lower case letters
h-h-h-h-h-h	
bbbbbbbbbb	A moderate response; lower case letters
hhhhhhhhhh	
BBBBBBBBBB	A heavy response; upper case letters
HHHHHHHHHH	
bbbBBBBbbbbb-b (1.4)	The number of letters roughly corresponds to the length of a response, and numbers in parentheses following a response provide a more accurate and readable characterization of response length. Elsewhere, numbers in parentheses indicate silence (see above).
hhHHHHhh-h (0.9)	
hhhhhxhxxhxxhxxxxx	A mixed noncompetitive response: first laughter, then laughter and applause simultaneously, then applause only
xxxxxx[xxxxxxxx]	A mixed competitive response: first applause, then applause and booing simultaneously, then booing only. Brackets mark the onset and termination of competition.
[bbbbbbbbb]bbbb	

### *Datum and Speaker Identification*

(6) [Bush-Dukakis 1: 1:08:45]	Datum Identification: The line heading each example contains the number of the example in parentheses (6). In square brackets is the debate in which it appeared (here the first Bush-Dukakis debate), and its approximate location within the debate (this one begins 1 hour, 8 minutes, and 45 seconds into the debate).
MOD: The next question is for Governor Dukakis.	
JRN: Governor, how do you plan to deal with the budget deficit?	
MD: With great difficulty.	
AUD: hhHHHHHHHHhhhhh-h	Speaker Identification: Candidates are identified by their initials, while "MOD" denotes moderator, "JRN" denotes journalist-questioner, and "AUD" denotes audience.

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