"This is Roosevelt's World" - FDR as a Cultural Icon in American Memory

Polak, S.A.

Chapter 3: Creating An Iconic Image: FDR's Autofabrication, 1932-1945

Introduction

Roosevelt publicly expressed himself in many ways and through many channels, both verbally and through visual images. The body of these public expressions is large and although it is hard to establish what precisely was authored by FDR personally, I propose to consider all these public expressions as forms of autofabrication (Winfield 13-14). FDR had a range of advisers, cabinet members, and ghostwriters who helped to produce the public FDR voice. This FDR voice, seemingly paradoxically, was perceived as authentic, even if audiences knew that it was in a sense a collective production. This chapter sets out to understand the collective rhetorical production of that authentic voice. I consider three basic rhetorical modes of Roosevelt's voice: first, Roosevelt had a voice in a narrow, literal sense, that is, the sound waves emanating from his chest, including his elocution, tone and accent. This constitutes the *synecdochic* voice, contained in his body and representing him as a body and as a person. Second, I distinguish his voice in a *metonymical* sense: the mass-mediated Roosevelt voice, including a set of narratives and political convictions that were commonly communicated through that voice. This is close to 'voice' in the narratological sense of "the sensibility through which we *hear* [a] narrative, even when we are reading silently" (Abbott 243). It is fortunate that Abbott stressed "hear", because particularly in FDR's case, the metonymical voice often came through the radio and was therefore literally heard. The third way in which I want to consider FDR's voice is as an autofabrication effort carried out by a collective that together produced the public FDR voice. This collective authoring of his speeches, images, and other presentations constitutes FDR's *indexical* 'voice', that is, it indexes him – it is associated with him because it points in his direction.

I will argue that what made these various rhetorical modes of FDR's voice come across as one coherent and omnipresent, yet authentic whole, successfully autofabricating the private person as well as the president in an integrated manner, is the fact that the different modes of voice constantly intermingle in complex ways. For example, the professionally ghostwritten speeches could have functioned as merely indexing his voice – that is, the political convictions his administrations stood for – but they became his metonymic voice because he fine-tuned the text, and ad-libbed during its delivery, and synecdochic because he spoke it in his own literal voice. And, conversely, the famous fake tooth FDR used to avoid whistling through his front teeth during radio addresses aesthetically improved the quality of his synecdochic voice, but using it was a conscious and considered choice made by the team who professionally created FDR's indexical voice (Tully 100).

FDR was the perfect performer of the public Roosevelt voice, entangling various modes of voice, so as to lead the autofabrication of his larger-than-life public image. Many scholars have

tried to analyze to what extent Roosevelt authored his speeches, often analyzing manuscript versions with scribbled additions and deletions in Roosevelt's hand.[1] Although I am interested in the dynamic that produced them, I do not contribute to the debate about to what extent Roosevelt was really author of his speeches, because I regard any help Roosevelt had from ghostwriters as part of his indexical voice. He was not the sole author of the speeches but definitely endorsed the texts he spoke and owned the voice, both in the sense that he chose what texts to speak or sign and in the sense that nobody else could assume this metonymic or synecdochic voice.

Having set out the basic theoretical framework and assumptions in the previous chapters, I will in this chapter and the next concentrate on the concrete autofabrication strategies Roosevelt used. These are broadly divided in two categories: FDR's autofabrication that created his public voice and image as president (chapter 3) and his autofabrication for the future, that is, his attempts to acquire a degree of agency over his remembrance (chapter 4). The current chapter is divided in three subsections, discussing firstly the people – spin doctors, staff, ghostwriters – who helped Roosevelt to create his public voice and, thus, image, in mostly indexical ways; secondly the media Roosevelt employed to fabricate a voice and image metonymic for himself; and finally the press and public opinion polls that kept Roosevelt in touch with the electorate, metonymically but also symbolically.

Most of the evidence in this chapter consists of well-known facts and quotations from public speeches. Roosevelt's, and others', private words in conversation, letters, or elsewhere are no direct part of his creation of his own public image unless published or used publicly. These are nonetheless sometimes important sources for this chapter, because Roosevelt and his correspondents do refer in private to their efforts in making and influencing Roosevelt's public image.

Spin Doctors, Advisers, Staff, and Ghostwriters

Next to Eleanor, the most important of the people representing Roosevelt to the public in the years leading up to his first election as president was Louis Howe (Maney 16). Louis McHenry Howe was Roosevelt's closest friend and most devoted political adviser. They first met in 1911, when Howe was covering Roosevelt's campaign for state senator as a journalist. Howe became a key figure, both in repairing the break between Franklin and Eleanor, following Eleanor's discovery of her husband's affair with her secretary Lucy Mercer in 1918, and in getting FDR back into politics after his bout of poliomyelitis in 1921. Howe was above everything else a political strategist, who, from the very first, believed that Roosevelt could and should become US president, and made it his personal crusade to get Roosevelt there (Rollins 3, Stiles 4). Though

1 E.g. Houck 98, Rollins 418, Levine 19.

Howe did not at all aspire to being in the limelight, he has become something of a celebrity in his own right – an enigmatic, cunning, and powerful, but physically slight man, whose endlessly recurring epithets are "ghoulish" and "gnome-like."[2] This is relevant because he did more than produce the indexical Roosevelt voice – he even on occasions replaced Roosevelt physically, a tradition started in 1912, when FDR was ill in bed throughout his campaign for the State Senate (Smith 92).

In early 1933 Howe was made chief of Roosevelt's White House secretarial staff and main adviser, especially on matters of public opinion, until his death in 1936. Alongside Howe, Roosevelt employed two secretaries, Marvin McIntyre and Steve Early, both also personal friends of the President who had also performed important roles in Roosevelt's 1932 campaign. Marvin McIntyre was appointments secretary until 1938, when he became ill, and later returned as correspondence secretary. Steve Early was press secretary throughout the Roosevelt presidency (Schoenherr 1). With the growth of the media landscape and the development of modern communication, public relations and marketing, the presidential secretariat had also grown, and under Roosevelt became larger and more professionalized than ever before. Howe, McIntyre and Early were not only clerks, but important political figures in the Administration, making wide-ranging policies in their areas of expertise (Schoenherr 40).

Samuel Rosenman was Roosevelt's main speechwriter and also editor of his *Public Papers and Addresses*, and as such he was most consciously occupied with representing Roosevelt to future generations (Hand, *Counsel* 118). Other important figures are his private secretaries, Grace Tully and Marguerite LeHand, and the ghostwriter of Roosevelt's First Inaugural Address, Raymond Moley. All these people, and indeed many more, were occupied daily with aspects of FDR's autofabrication, each at least for part of his long presidency. Many have also taken a large role in the furtherance of his posthumous status as a cultural icon by publishing their memories of Roosevelt in diaries, memoirs, or Roosevelt biographies, and by remaining active in other ways, for instance, in commissions to create Roosevelt memorials.[3]

Roosevelt started to seriously expand the apparatus of his autofabrication in the months leading up to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in January 1932, gathering around himself two more or less separate teams, one of political campaign managers, headed by Howe and James Farley, Chairman of the New York State Democratic Committee, and a group of intellectuals occupied not primarily with the campaign itself, but with developing Roosevelt's policies (Freidel 66). This group was headed by Samuel Rosenman and Raymond Moley, and included FDR's former law partner Basil O'Connor, Adolf Berle, and later biographer Rexford

2 E.g. Smith 82, Maney 16, Rollins 63.

3 E.g. Samuel Rosenman later published *Working With Roosevelt*; Grace Tully wrote *F.D.R. My Boss*; brain truster Rexford Tugwell's entire career after 1945 was dedicated to writing political biographies of FDR; cabinet member Frances Perkins published *The Roosevelt I Knew*.

Tugwell. Journalist James Kieran referred to the group as "FDR's brains trust" in *The New York Times* for the first time in April 1932, and that has since been its nickname (Rollins 331). As part of developing and articulating Roosevelt's policies, they wrote his speeches, and initially indexically, but eventually metonymically represented FDR's brain. The only one who was really involved in both teams was Louis Howe – sometimes to the chagrin of the brain trust, because Howe, a former editor, was wont to rewrite speeches at the very last minute, and use the power he derived from having more information than the others (Rollins 329-332).

Howe basically orchestrated Roosevelt's first nomination and campaign (Stiles 166). There are many examples of how politically astute and intuitively brilliant he was at sensing what would work in terms of image-making. For example, following John Mack's speech nominating Roosevelt in Chicago, while the candidate himself was at home in Albany, the organ played "Anchors Aweigh", Roosevelt's own choice. When Howe sensed the effect of this mournful song, he gave orders to switch immediately to "Happy Days Are Here Again", which has been the standard Roosevelt campaign song ever since (Rollins 342). Once Roosevelt was nominated, he famously took an airplane to the Convention immediately to accept his nomination in person – an entirely new feat, technologically and otherwise, arranged by Howe. It formed a dramatic break with the tradition that a candidate would receive his formal nomination at home weeks after the event, and officially accept it from there. In his acceptance speech Roosevelt addressed these "foolish traditions", making clear that he was not only the Democratic presidential candidate, but also a party reformer – or as Raymond Moley wrote to Louis Howe on November 12, 1932: "You and Jim [Farley] have done more than elect a President. You have created a new party that ought to hold power for twenty-five years." (quoted in Rollins 349). Although the acceptance speech – including such climactic policy promises as "I pledge you, I pledge myself to a new deal for the American people" – was a collective product of the brains trust, the show as a whole was devised by Louis Howe.

One of Howe and Farley's key campaign strategies was to write thousands of letters to Democrats all over the country, keeping in very close touch with campaigning party members at the local level. This letter-writing strategy had been Roosevelt and Howe's favorite before, and it remained useful later, when Roosevelt as president wanted to keep in seemingly personal touch with American citizens, both because it offered him insight into public opinion, and because it created a sense of proximity between the President and the people (Sussmann 60). Moreover, various campaign biographies were written, mostly under the direction of Howe and focusing on FDR's life story. The most serious of these was Ernest Lindley's *Franklin D. Roosevelt: a Career in Progressive Politics* (1931), but Howe's staff also helped FDR's mother Sara Delano Roosevelt to write her memoir *My Boy Franklin* (Rollins 313).

A special case was Earle Looker's book *This Man Roosevelt* (1932). Looker was a Republican journalist who wrote celebratory biographies about him from that vantage point, including a

now famous investigation into FDR's physical health. Rollins speculates that Howe may have set Looker up to start this investigation, and in any case Howe ordered 50,000 reprints of the *Liberty* article Looker published about it. This in turn led to a secret arrangement between Howe, Looker, Roosevelt and the magazine, by which Looker published a 400-word article over Roosevelt's signature every two weeks (Rollins 313). Thus, Looker turned from a contributor to FDR's indexical voice – indexing him across an unusually large political rift for a campaign biographer – into a writer of his metonymical voice. It seems likely that Looker was never really opposed to Roosevelt's candidacy – he was rather too easily "converted" – but the shift from opponent to ventriloquist typifies the building and consolidation of Roosevelt's autofabrication apparatus.

Roosevelt's first inaugural address, delivered on March 4, 1933, at a time of extreme national despair, is one of the most obvious defining moments in shaping his public persona and image. Roosevelt began by establishing explicitly the mutual expectations and the relationship between himself and the American citizens.

> My friends, this is a day of national consecration. And I am certain that on this day my fellow Americans expect that on my induction into the Presidency I will address them with a candor and a decision which the present situation of our people impels. This is preeminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly. (…) This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself – nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance. In every dark hour of our national life a leadership of frankness and vigor has met with that understanding and support of the people themselves which is essential to victory.[4]

By far the most famous phrase of this passage – quoted and otherwise invoked by the majority of later Roosevelt representations – is "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Presumably, most Americans will have come across it in various forms of public history and popular culture. If any single phrase supports the hypothesis that Roosevelt's own attempts to manage his public image have a continuing influence on Roosevelt representations, it is this one. In this inaugural address – the quintessential first impression for a newly elected president – Roosevelt clearly casts himself as a friend of the people – "My friends", "my fellow Americans" – and a brave and honest leader in hard times. He stresses the word 'frank', using it twice – "frankly", "frankness" – in his first few sentences as president, associating himself implicitly with the characteristics that name suggests. "Frank" works metonymically and by means of association; it forges a link between text and person, and is constative as well as performative. "I am Frank" could on the one hand be paraphrased as "I am fortright" and on the other hand resonates on the level of informal

4 http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/3280

intimacy and personal contact – FDR's actual friends called him Frank. This new suggestion of intimacy was further strengthened by the fact that for the first time ever, Americans listened to an incoming president's inaugural address gathered around their radios (Craig 154).

In terms of content the First Inaugural Address is both full of metaphors and imagery – "the unscrupulous money-changers stand indicted in the court of public opinion", "we must move as a trained and loyal army" – and at the same time relatively concrete statements, broadly outlining the New Deal and all but threatening Congress into granting him "broad executive power to wage a war against the emergency." The leading metaphor is that of a nation at war, which both implies that an unusual level of unity, discipline and personal sacrifice is asked of the people, and that Roosevelt will have to be granted unusual executive power, all this whilst giving the general impression of a courageous, and avoiding that of a dictatorial president. Also, it contains a number of fairly direct attacks on Hoover – "Stripped of the lure of profit, by which to induce our people to follow their false leadership, they have resorted to exhortations, pleading tearfully for restored confidence"[5] – and to be sure, Roosevelt's inaugural address did restore public confidence much more than any of Hoover's recent efforts had done (Houck 10-14). Thus, the First Inaugural Address casts Roosevelt as a strong, frank and fearless man, sensitive to his fellow Americans' hardship and ready to take action against it, at the expense of a largely unidentified group of "money-changers", with Hoover as the only individually recognizable outsider. This worked all the better because between his election and inauguration Roosevelt had been pointedly silent, while the crisis rapidly increased (Houck 130).

The First Inaugural Address was not written by Roosevelt alone. Unlike most of his addresses, however, this one was not circulated widely before it was delivered. Davis Houck relates in his book *FDR and Fear Itself: The First Inaugural Address* (2002) how Roosevelt commissioned Columbia University professor Raymond Moley to draft the address. Moley – selected for the job by Louis Howe – had previously written speeches for Roosevelt, and traveled with Roosevelt throughout the presidential campaign to write and adapt speeches for him. On a few occasions they brainstormed together and Roosevelt gave his ideas for the inaugural address and possible metaphors to use in it. Moley, however, came up with the first draft, which they discussed again on the night of February 27/28 (103). This discussion changed the draft extensively, and it was changed further by Louis Howe. Otherwise, according to Houck, only Eleanor and – unbeknownst to Franklin – her friend, Associated Press reporter Lorena Hickok, read it (134).

Despite the fact that Moley wrote the main drafts for the inaugural address he remained relatively unknown. According to Houck this was by specific design of Roosevelt, who copied Moley's draft of the address in his own hand, in order to 'own' the speech in the eyes of history by making

5 Herbert Hoover was projected, particularly by the Roosevelt campaign, but also more generally, as extremely hands-off, opposing federal efforts to halt the Depression. He tried to restore confidence in the economy through speeches, which Roosevelt – like many contemporaries – perceived as counterproductive (Carcasson 349–65).

it seem metonymic and, through the hand, synecdochic (98). Houck goes to great lengths to explain how Moley understood this to be necessary and even, in a dramatic gesture, threw the draft in his own typescript in the fire at the end of his last discussion of it with Roosevelt in the night of February 28 – keeping, however, his notes and diary, so that Houck's book could still be written. While some of Houck's claims seem somewhat speculative, especially given the fact that he largely bases himself on Moley's archive and ego-documents, *FDR and Fear Itself* is a minute reading and discussion of the various remaining drafts of the inaugural address. Perhaps Moley exaggerated his own role in devising the speech as much as Roosevelt later tried to understate Moley's importance. However, the inaugural address was clearly not widely disseminated before it was held and comparatively few people worked on it.

More speech writers were involved in drafting Roosevelt's famous radio addresses. He was aided in writing the Fireside Chats by about twenty people over the years, though usually not more than five to seven at the same time (Schoenherr 109). Roosevelt usually made changes and additions to their drafts, in his own hand on paper as well as during his live radio delivery. Indeed, while he seems often to have asked various speechwriters to draft one Fireside Chat for him, he eventually combined them, borrowing their ideas and phrases (Levine 19). One speechwriter, Charles Michelson, remembered that Roosevelt had asked him and two others to prepare a speech. Roosevelt listened to all three of their drafts and then:

> …stretched himself on a couch and with his eyes on the ceiling dictated his own version, occasionally using one of our phrases but generally culling the best ideas that had been submitted and putting them in his own way. So far as I know, this was the practice with every speech… Take it from one rather experienced in the formation and presentation of speeches: Franklin Roosevelt is a better phrase maker than anybody he ever had around him. (cited in Buhite and Levy xvi)

Whether or not Roosevelt was as good a phrasemaker as Michelson would have him, he was certainly extremely good at recognizing potentially great phrases. Through this collective process of writing, followed by Roosevelt's vocal dictation, the indexical voice was intermingled with the synecdochic. Michelson's emphasis on Roosevelt's bodily positioning and "his eyes [focused] on the ceiling" contribute to the corporeality of Roosevelt's voice, even as it is collectively produced. Rosenman even goes so far as to argue that:

> the speeches as finally delivered were his – and his alone – no matter who the collaborators were… No matter how frequently the speech assistants were changed through the years, the speeches were always Roosevelt's. They all expressed the personality, the convictions, the spirit, the mood of Roosevelt. No matter who worked with him in the preparation, the finished product was always the same – it was Roosevelt himself. (5-6).

The assertion that "the finished product … was Roosevelt himself", and the idea that the speeches "expressed the personality, the convictions, the spirit, the mood of Roosevelt", implies that the speeches were entirely metonymical, to the point of erasing the professional speechwriters around FDR, whom he suggests are entirely interchangeable. Indeed, it is part of the professionalism of a speechwriter to deny that he did any work at all, and the eradication of his own voice is necessary to enable ventriloquism. At the same time, Roosevelt as an individual was very receptive to autofabrication for a large audience by a team, because he could transform a collectively produced indexical voice to a metonymic and synecdochic one. His public voice spoke carefully and collectively produced texts to which he contributed his unique physical voice, presentation and improvisation talent, particularly over the radio.

Media

> I never saw him –
> But I knew him. Can you have forgotten
> How, with his voice, he came into our house,
> The President of the United States,
> Calling us friends…[6]

Author and poet Carmer here refers to a sentiment that seems to have been extremely widespread in the United States between 1933 and 1945: the sense that Americans knew President Roosevelt well on a personal basis, as a result of his "coming into their houses", as a family friend through the radio. This poem, published two days after Roosevelt's death, refers to the Fireside Chats, Roosevelt's most famous and most puzzling media expressions. Between March 12, 1933 and June 12, 1944 Roosevelt addressed the American people in thirty-one radio speeches. The term Fireside Chat was coined by CBS's Harry Butcher in 1933, and was picked up immediately by the rest of the press (Levine 17). Roosevelt himself soon also adopted the name, particularly liking the informality suggested by "chats", or "talks", rather than "addresses", though he did stress that the coinage was not his own invention. The Fireside Chat of June 24, 1938 begins:

> I think the American public and the American newspapers are certainly creatures of habit. This is one of the warmest evenings that I have ever felt in Washington, D. C., and yet this talk tonight will be referred to as a fireside talk.

This beginning is of course a joke, but the joke is on the American public and newspapers, and seems to deny that "fireside talk" is a term his own administration endorsed. Roosevelt was known as and admired for being an easy jester, and this joke is particularly successful: through its benignant mockery, it attributes the association with the fireside to the public and

6 Carl Lamson Carmer, "April 14, 1945"

press, rather than to himself. Roosevelt implies he is not speaking by his own fireside, his fellow Americans may be by their firesides, or by the modern replacement of a fireside as the center of familial gathering, the radio. Roosevelt's quip stresses various implicit assumptions: firstly that Roosevelt, through his synecdochic and metonymic voice, visits Americans in their family homes, and secondly that it is the people's own feeling that the heart of the family home is the most appropriate place for talks with the president. In jokingly distancing himself from the term, Roosevelt transfers responsibility for using it to his audience. Successfully so: it has remained one of the most popular phrases in relation to Roosevelt and his presidency, and there are many widespread conceptions and misconceptions about the speeches – that they were held weekly, that they were intimate – which seem to have been inspired or supported more by the name Fireside Chats and other aspects of form than by their content. As Henry Fairlie described it in *The New Republic*:

> Radio sets were not then very powerful, and there was always static. Families had to sit near the set, with someone always fiddling with the knobs. It was like sitting around a hearth, with someone poking the fire; and to that hearth came the crackling voices of Winston Churchill, or George Burns and Gracie Allen, and of FDR. The fireside chats… It was not FDR who was at his fireside… it was we who were at our firesides.[7]

While focusing on the reception side of the Fireside Chats – families had to sit near the radio, fiddling with it was like poking the fire – Fairlie here also stresses the metonymical quality of a radio voice. Realizing that FDR was not the one at his fireside, Fairlie nonetheless shows how FDR's radio voice brought others to stoke their fires in a metaphorical sense.

There is some discussion as to the number of Fireside Chats, caused by the fact that Roosevelt used the radio to address the nation more often than the thirty or so addresses that are counted as Fireside Chats. *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt* lists 83 radioed addresses, of which 27 are considered Fireside Chats. However, in 1973, tape recordings of all but three of the Fireside Chats were issued by Mass Communications, Inc., which asserted that there were actually thirty-one of Roosevelt's radio addresses that should be considered Fireside Chats (Buhite and Levy xv). These were defined as informal presidential addresses of 15 to 45 minutes, not only broadcast via the radio, but expressly written to be presidential radio addresses, and broadcast throughout the United States at the same time, as close to prime time as possible. Radio was the first mass medium that could achieve temporal simultaneity in that way, and therefore a strong force in creating an imagined community. It created what Hadley Cantril called "the largest grouping of people ever known." In a series of articles she wrote on radio for the *New York Times Magazine* in the spring of 1932, political correspondent Anne O'Hare McCormick spoke of "the incredible audience," "millions of ears contracted into one ear and

7 January 27, 1982, cited in Levine 1.

cocked at the same moment to the same sound." (Levine 1) Here again, the synecdochic "ears" contracted into one metonymic national "ear" works to elide the difference between countless physical ears, the listeners they belong to, and the collective of a nation listening together to the same voice, which in turn is both synecdochic of the corporeal FDR and metonymic of his radio presence and message.

Roosevelt was not the first president to be broadcast on the radio. Both Warren Harding and Herbert Hoover had the technology available, and used it, though neither with very much awareness of the specific needs and qualities of the medium, nor with much measurable impact. Other contemporary leaders, such as Hitler or Stalin, were broadcast on radio, but did not have a specific radio style. Their speeches were aimed primarily at large gatherings of their party members, and while they, to some extent also work when heard over the radio, they have none of the specific intimacy and awareness of the private sphere they enter, that Roosevelt's speeches did have, and they do not work on three rhetorical levels at once. Churchill did develop a radio broadcasting style of speaking that did work somewhat similarly, but only later, during World War II. Roosevelt was among the first generation of very successful and specifically talented radio speakers, together with figures such as W. K. Henderson, Father Coughlin and Walter Winchell.

Radio in the 1930s became by far the most accessible and most widely used mass medium in the United States. In the course of the 1930s more than 80% of American households acquired a radio set and some Fireside Chats are estimated to have been heard by more than 85% of the adult population (Levine 17). Hadley Cantril and Gordon Allport estimated in the mid-thirties that "our countrymen spend approximately 150,000,000 hours a week before the [movie]screen, but nearly 1,000,000,000 hours before the [radio] loud-speaker." It is striking that they and other commentators in the 1930s thought of radio in particular as a means of mass education and as a strong agent in further democratization. As Levine and Levine note: "Lew Sarett and William Trufant Foster compared radio to the ancient Greek Acropolis: 'a place from which the Elders might speak to all the citizens at once'" (Levine 1). The perception of radio as "a place from which the Elders … speak to all the citizens at once" prefigures Jacques Lacan's theory of radio: Lacan understood radio as a super-egoic voice. "Radio transforms the voice into aural material that shakes us up because it seems to be audible everywhere, all at once" (Liu 258). Thus, in Lacan's view, radio divorces the synecdochic voice from the body, transforming it into, not just a metonymic, but also a symbolic force, a kind of superego, coming both from outside and from within the listener.

This is at odds with the supposedly innate democratizing effects of the radio – as are Hitler's inflammatory speeches, which, though not primarily meant for the radio, were also effective as radio broadcasts. German theorists such as Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin have both argued in the 1930s that radio was too one-sided a medium to be democratic or to establish meaningful contact between speaker and audience. Brecht particularly focused on the unilateral

quality of radio: "Der Rundfunk hat eine Seite, wo er zwei haben müsste" (130)[8], disabling the possibility of audience response or debate between sender and receivers; Benjamin equally felt that radio did not allow for real contact to be established between performer and audience, but rather stressed the impossibility for the sender to receive feedback from the audience, instead having to blindly reach "the consumers who constitute the market." However, "[t]his market, where he offers not only his labor but also his whole self, his heart and soul, is beyond his reach" (Redmond and Holmes 27). While Benjamin might have been surprised by FDR's success in reaching his "market", he evidently did grasp the metonymic and synecdochic potential of radio.

Roosevelt partly evaded these problems of radio's one-sided quality by inviting his listeners to respond to his Fireside Chats in writing, and consequently received an unprecedented amount of mail from American citizens. This combination of a new medium and an old one, contributed to the democratic image of radio in America and the correspondence had the advantage of seeming extremely personal (Craig xvii). Although Roosevelt did not answer most letters personally, many letter writers – at least those who were positive about the Administration and its policies, or at least friendly – did receive a response from the White House. These responses were often short and mostly formally acknowledged the letter rather than answering it, but a great effort was nonetheless made to give the letter writers the feeling they were being heard. Bunches of the letters were selected by the staff and ER for FDR to read, and both Roosevelts did also respond personally to some letters (Levine 8).

In many of his radio addresses Roosevelt explicitly invited particular groups of listeners to write to him to share their thoughts, or to fill out and return surveys the government held.[9] This strategy helped to create a sense of intimacy and personal contact between Roosevelt and his listeners, and provided information about the public opinion. Radio networks often invited audiences to write in response – indeed, in the early days of radio, this was the only way available to radio stations to glean the listeners' reactions to their programs. So Roosevelt was not the only radio speaker who did this, his requests built on a custom, which he made "a central part of this process" (Levine 5). Indeed, "Roosevelt's radio speeches helped to make participants – even activists – out of his audience." (5) This led to an unprecedented flow of letters to the President – in some weeks following Fireside Chats, more than 450,000 letters would be delivered to the White House. As Ira Smith, the White House Chief of Mails, remembered, especially after the first few Fireside Chats people "believed that he was speaking to them personally and immediately wrote him a letter. It was months before we managed to swim out of that flood of mail" (Smith and Morris 213-4). When, however, the volume of the mail to the White House decreased, Smith recalls, "we could expect to hear from him or one of his secretaries, who wanted to know what was the matter – was the President losing his grip on the public?" (151).

8 "The radio has one side, where it ought to have two." (my translation).
9 E.g. amongst the unemployed, as in FC11.

Yet, despite the democratic image of radio, Roosevelt could also be argued to have used it to side-step Congress, traditionally regarded as the most democratic body in the federal government and the most immediate representative of the people. Journalist Stanley High noted about the Fireside Chats:

> The spirit, even more than the content, of his "My Friends" speeches was something new in the annals of our democracy. There is a latch-string-is-always-out quality about them. They invite familiarity. … [The nation] sends its orders to its Congressmen. But it talks things over with its President. (37-8)

This sense that radio, the Fireside Chats in particular, could contribute to a more direct democracy was especially useful to Roosevelt, since he was often unhappy with the way he and his policies were mediated by the press. Roosevelt had a good relationship with many journalists, but strongly believed that most newspaper owners disliked him, and unfairly accused him of trying to manipulate them (White 28).

In that light it makes sense that Roosevelt felt the need to address the public directly, not mediated by a radio program or the possibly hostile newspaper press. The way the Fireside Chats were broadcast – simultaneously by the two competing nationwide radio broadcasters at the time, NBC and CBS – ensured that FDR had great power over the broadcast, so that the medium seemed neutral, and therefore amplified, metaphorically as well as literally, Roosevelt's voice as a leader who stood above partisan politics. He felt that "…I was able to accomplish reform and progress only because the public was ready for them, wanted them, and was willing to help me carry out the people's will." Because of this he could go "over the heads of the Legislature and sometimes over the almost united opposition of the newspapers of the State" (PP&A Vol. 1, 8). All in all Roosevelt was convinced the radio had been an important medium of communication for him since his governorship: "The use of the radio by me in those days not only to appeal directly to the people, but also to describe fully the facts about the legislation which were not always given by many press reports, was the beginning of similar use of the radio by me as President in what have come to be known as 'Fireside Chats'. The radio has proved to be a direct contact with the people which was available to only two presidents before me. It has been invaluable as a means of public approach" (PP&A Vol. 1, 8). Clearly, Roosevelt was very aware of the agency radio gave him in his autofabrication, not only in terms of how the public viewed him, but also in the sense that it effectively helped him as a politician to strengthen the presidency at the expense of the legislative power.

It is hard to be definite about how conscious Roosevelt and his staff were about the autofabricating qualities of the Fireside Chats. Did they deliberately merge indexical, metonymical and synecdochic modes of Roosevelt's voice to enhance its rhetorical force? There are only a few direct clues that provide evidence of a strong consciousness of the autofabricating qualities, but the extreme care with which the addresses were made and broadcast does suggest a great

awareness of and interest in their effect on Roosevelt's public image. Despite the consistent impression that Roosevelt held his Fireside Chats weekly, or otherwise frequently and regularly, he was, for instance, very aware of the need not to appear on the radio too often. Many letters in reaction to the Fireside Chats asked and advised the President to address the nation in this way more often, but as Roosevelt wrote in a letter in March 1942: "Sometimes I wish I could carry out your thought of more frequent talking on the air on my part, but the one thing I dread is that my talks should be so frequent as to lose their effectiveness." A week later he wrote in another letter: "For the sake of not becoming a platitude to the public, I ought not to appear oftener… I am inclined to think that in England Churchill, for a while, talked too much, and I don't want to do that."[10] Both of these statements suggest that Roosevelt was consciously orchestrating the effects of his radio addresses on his public image.

When reading the texts of the Fireside Chats they strike as content-heavy: they seem to concentrate more on policies, programs and problems that Roosevelt and the nation encountered, than on Roosevelt's person or the relationship between him and the Americans. However, in terms of form, the Fireside Chats were extremely carefully set up and organized. Roosevelt's Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins has suggested that Roosevelt relished the ease with which he could manipulate his radio appearance, presumably because it synecdochically represented him, without any risk of unduly exposing his wheelchair. His synecdochic voice was clearly that of a patrician, but that seems not to have alienated the listeners – many probably felt that that was entirely suitable for a president. Most Fireside Chats were broadcast from a professional studio in the White House, where he did have a small audience present to create an atmosphere of intimacy (Perkins 110).

Although the content and tone of most of the Fireside Chats is businesslike and even castigatory, Roosevelt famously began practically each Fireside Chat with "My friends" or "My fellow Americans." From the enormous number of letters and telegrams Roosevelt received from "ordinary Americans" (his phrase) after each Fireside Chat was broadcast – most notably, after the first one on the Banking Crisis, on March 12, 1933 – the impression arises that he was regarded by many of the letter-writers as a kind of older brother or friend. Many writers stress that they have never felt inclined to write to their president, but do so now, because Roosevelt in his address has taken them so seriously and has addressed so exactly their most pressing worries (Sussmann 59). In 1933 the radio audience was still "young" – the medium was relatively new – and therefore perhaps naïve in their perception of radio as a medium approaching personal communication. However, listening to the Fireside Chats was not their first or only experience of radio entering the private sphere, and the Fireside Chats did clearly stand out to many listeners as particularly intimate and moving.

---

10 FDR to Russell Leffingwell, March 16, 1942, in *Franklin D. Roosevelt: Selected Speeches, Messages, Press Conferences, and Letters,* ed. Basil Rauch, 310-11; FDR to Mary Norton, March 24, 1942 in *FDR: His Personal Letters, 1928-1945*, ed. Elliott Roosevelt, 2: 1300.

"Intimate" has ever since remained one of the most popular qualifications for the Fireside Chats, even though this qualification does not really do justice to the content of the texts. Many have argued that the Fireside Chats were more accessible than other presidential speeches, and that this has contributed to the sense of intimacy and contact between Roosevelt and "the common man"[11], but rhetorician Elvin Lim argues in "The Lion and the Lamb: De-mythologizing Franklin Roosevelt's Fireside Chats", using content analysis, that this is a misconception. According to his analysis, the Fireside Chats are not easier to understand or more intimate than other presidential speeches. However, whether a misconception or not, the idea that the Fireside Chats are intimate and easy is overwhelmingly present in films, documentaries, popular biographies, and more general academic writing about Roosevelt. Lim spends a great deal of attention addressing and defusing the misconceptions he sees, aiming to assess how the Fireside Chats should really be understood, rather than to understand how the alleged or real misconception evolved.

The use of content analysis and other quantitative techniques is helpful in convincing one that the Fireside Chats are neither intimate on a textual level nor particularly accessible in their discourse to a general audience. As Lim shows, in the Fireside Chats Roosevelt used more words like "prices", "banks", "money", "recovery", "wages", and "coal", and other economic terms than he did in other public addresses, or than presidents before and after him did, and used many multisyllabic words of Latin origin, long sentences and unusual style figures. Lim also convincingly argues that the Fireside Chats are not the entirely novel media performances they were and are sometimes taken to be, but in fact build on a long tradition of presidential soapbox oratory. It is true that the Fireside Chats are both in tone and content more confrontational and castigatory than one might expect on the basis of their informal-sounding name and their reputation. Roosevelt repeatedly refers to political opponents as "a few selfish men" (FC3), "money changers", "prophets of evil", "petty chiselers" (FC4), "self-seekers", "theoretical die-hards", "doubting Thomases" (FC5), "enemies of American peace" (FC13), "rumor mongers" (FC18), "noisy traitors", "betrayers of America", and "would be dictators" (FC19). The comparison with stump speeches is justified – indeed Roosevelt seems at times to emulate his uncle, an expert in the genre. It is, however, not enough to simply state that the Fireside Chats were not intimate. They were perceived as such by their listeners, as phrases in letters to Roosevelt like "Having just heard your most loving, clear voice… I cannot help, but to try and express my feeling" attest, and still are (quoted in Levine 3). While the public opinion may simply have been misguided, it makes sense to take the public reaction seriously. If the public reaction to the Fireside Chats is not a straightforwardly 'correct' assessment of them, where does this supposed miscommunication come from?

The Fireside Chats may have been perceived as intimate because they were listened to in the private sphere. Of course this is true of all radio, but Roosevelt's special success lay in transforming an indexical voice to a metonymic and synechdochic one, as the "most loving clear

11 E.g. Winfield 105, Schoenherr 110.

voice" the letter writer refers to, attests. Stump speeches, despite their often aggressive tone also had an intimate quality, deriving from the fact that speaker and audience were in the same space, and thus also gave room for audience reactions, which the letters to the President may be seen as a, mostly symbolic, substitute for. Moreover Roosevelt's name-calling is always aimed at "a few selfish/scared/evil people", who are of course not the "fellow Americans" which the Fireside Chats address, thus defining an outgroup (Tajfel 67). The outgroup functions as an Other to be distinguished from Roosevelt and his audience – "my friends" – strengthening the ingroup sentiment of fellow Americans, who are all listening to their president on the radio at the same time. Thus Roosevelt's name-calling is not in itself intimate, but it does help to create a sense of connection between those who do not consider themselves to be one of the "few selfish people", that is, presumably most of the listeners. This sense of connectedness was available across the millions of individual firesides and thus a factor in creating an imagined community that clearly did feel intimate. Moreover, Roosevelt thus cleverly played to the wish of his listeners to belong to the ingroup of his fellow Americans. Using that phrase over and over, throughout the twelve years that he held Fireside Chats, rhetorically helped to rid him of partisanship and create a sense that the dissenters were only very few. That was of course not the case, indeed he needed to create that idea probably because he encountered so much political resistance, but the strategy worked to a large extent.

Stanley High's argument that the strength of the Fireside Chats was in "the spirit, even more than the content" is thus, after all, more relevant than Lim's analysis of the contents. Although Lim's argument that the Fireside Chats were in terms of content anything but intimate holds true, the form was intimate in a number of ways: the setting in which they were heard, Roosevelt's voice and presentation, his creation of a sense of community through excluding opponents, through phrases like "my friends", and through his efforts to stimulate response and to take this seriously. Roosevelt seems to have been especially astute at creating a sense of intimacy and personal contact, not by being soft-hearted or personal in what he said, but rather in the way he said it. Frances Perkins, Roosevelt's Secretary of Labor, remembered being present in the room while Roosevelt gave some of his Fireside Chats live on air:

> His voice and his facial expression as he spoke were those of an intimate friend. After he became President, I often was at the White House when he broadcast, and I realized how unconscious he was of the twenty or thirty of us in that room and how clearly his mind was focused on the people listening at the other end. As he talked his head would nod and his hands would move in simple, natural, comfortable gestures. His face would smile and light up as though he were actually sitting on the front porch or in the parlor with them. People felt this, and it bound them to him in affection. (72)

Here again the intimacy is stressed upfront. The situation Perkins describes is somewhat odd: she heard these performances as a member of a small audience of people engaged in FDR's

autofabrication. One might think these people were called up to act as a live audience to help FDR talk more naturally, but it does not seem to work as such. The live audience is in fact an almost ghostly presence – which makes sense in that they are co-producers of FDR's content and indexical voice, but the act he performs here is to transform that to a synecdochic voice, helped by the gestures and smiles, a metonymical one, through the "focus on the people listening at the other end", and a Lacanian symbolic voice, allowing listeners to feel "bound…to him in affection."

Although voice works in the first place on an aural level, another medium through which Roosevelt could present himself as an articulate, frank, informal and energetic leader, was photography. The issue of what does and what does not constitute autofabrication in photography is complex. With texts, one needs to figure out who wrote what, and who had the final say over a text – in this case, the answer is Roosevelt – literally. Photographs have a congruent, though less manageable dynamic. Who posed for a photograph? Who composed the picture as a whole? Whose idea was it to take a particular photo? What are its implications? Who can choose to publish particular photos and not others?

Roosevelt often took time to pose for press photographs, and Stephen Early made many photos available to the press and others, in both of which cases they may be considered as part of Roosevelt's autofabrication. However, many pictures were also taken by press photographers without Roosevelt's active awareness or participation, in the same way as there appeared articles about him. Even then, Roosevelt did have a hand in what pictures were taken, and which could be published, as his famous 1932 words "No pictures of me getting out of the car, boys" attests (Schoenherr 148). Roosevelt's autofabrication in photographs, thus consists on the one hand in his staff taking and publicizing official photographs, and on the other in his posing for press photographers and trying to manage which pictures they would and would not shoot or publish (Winfield 114). He did not, however, have anything approaching real control over which pictures of him were published, and it is in most cases impossible to know to what extent precisely he or his advisers managed this, although it is clear that they did to some extent and it is clear that hardly any photos of FDR in his wheelchair ended up being published (Schoenherr 145).

Previous presidents had dealt with journalists wishing to photograph them in various, relatively haphazard ways. Wilson disliked being photographed and thought it the duty of photographers to stay away from him. Coolidge on the other hand, felt he ought to make himself available to be photographed, and was as a result sometimes used by photographers who wanted to picture him in silly or embarrassing situations (Schoenherr 17). Both Wilson and Coolidge had presidential secretaries, but these were primarily clerks; no one actively managed how the President would or might be photographed, other than the President himself. Steve Early – like secretaries Howe and McIntyre a former newspaperman – on the other hand, did not only manage Roosevelt's press relations and organize press conferences, he also made and guarded policies surrounding Roosevelt's radio and camera appearances (Winfield 109-110).

Photography had, by the 1930s, gained considerable impact, mainly through magazines such as *Time* and *Life*, which printed many photos and were distributed nationwide, and Roosevelt was a photogenic man, keen to give the press photographers surrounding him "something to shoot" ((Winfield 114-5, Schoenherr 139). His informality and vivid facial expressions made for striking pictures, in a period when technology had advanced far enough to allow photographers to take pictures with short exposure times and little preparation, and to allow papers to print these quickly in high quality. Roosevelt was more conscious than Coolidge of the impression particular photos might make and more restrictive towards photographers, who did however know that they could always take engaging pictures of him. There are counterexamples to the statement that Franklin Roosevelt was the first US president to smile in photos, but these are few; he seems to have been the first to make it a habit. While exposure times for pictures had been very short for some decades already, so that it was physically easy to appear smiling or laughing in a photograph, it was hardly considered appropriate for the president for a long time. FDR, however, seems to have been aware of his own ability to appear confident and congenial through his photos. Other visual elements that Roosevelt was the first president to be photographed with – and which have stuck to his image in the long term – are his cigarette holder – often described as "at a jaunty angle" – a cocktail, his fedora hat, and his car. The association with "Happy Days Are Here Again", enhanced by his ending of Prohibition, is another example of a practically metonymical link between Roosevelt and a particular atmosphere of relaxed confidence that contributed to the image of a confident, modern and informal man.

Steve Early's role in regulating the press in a sense created the circumstances in which Roosevelt could easily be pleasant with journalists and photographers. Early set the conditions for journalists to be around the President or to attend press conferences, giving them detailed rules about photographing. While he did not forbid members of White House staff to take informal pictures, he required those to remain private. After a birthday party for Roosevelt in 1934 he sent around pictures taken by a White House photographer, asking that:

> The photographs made at the birthday dinner this year are given to each member of the gang with the understanding that each of the pictures shall be safeguarded against duplication… It is respectfully requested that none of these photographs be exhibited or that their existence be discovered by an outsider (cited in Schoenherr 146)

Attempts such as these to control the dissemination and publication of pictures of Roosevelt have been extremely successful, partly because Early was resolute to punish offending members of the press, for instance by exclusion from the presidential press conferences. Other reasons why candid photos were not often published were that it was still relatively hard technologically to take real snapshots, and that photographers themselves were respectful of the president's privacy. For instance, in one oft-cited case, when a Republican newspaper cameraman tried to

picture Roosevelt being carried, colleagues blocked his view and moved his camera, so that the picture could not be taken (Schoenherr 148).

FDR's autofabrication strategies in many ways actually resemble the formal language of Hitler and Stalin – as do his use of public works projects, his architectural projects to ensconce himself firmly in the American landscape, and his personalization of the political field. However, unlike Hitler and Stalin, who also used cinema for their autofabrication, with Eisenstein as Stalin's and Riefenstahl as Hitler's marionette film directors, Roosevelt seems to have been relatively reticent in using film to have himself portrayed. That he was aware of the potential of cinema, and used it to get across his aims and accomplishments, becomes clear from Pare Lorentz's films about New Deal projects, which Roosevelt commissioned.

Pare Lorentz, made films which – in Roosevelt's words – "show America as it really is" (Lorentz 34). After seeing Lorentz' film *The River* about the southern states, Roosevelt put Lorentz on the payroll of the WPA – Works Progress Administration, one of the largest public works programs – and made sure that his film was distributed on a large scale to movie theaters. Later Roosevelt commissioned Lorentz to make thirty 3-5 minute films about pending New Deal public works programs. These reached an enormous audience at the time, and some of them are still available in the educational section of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, aptly called the Pare Lorentz Center. At a public dinner Roosevelt introduced Lorentz as "my shooter" (Lorentz 55). Thus, while Lorentz did not directly make propaganda for Roosevelt, it is clear that Roosevelt realized that Lorentz' work promoted his public image. It is striking, in this context, that FDR did not engage a "shooter" or film crew to film himself, his speeches or other public performances. He was clearly aware of the potential of cinema, but did not think of it as an appropriate medium for presenting himself in the body. It is tempting to assume that Roosevelt did not use cinema to assert himself as an iconic figure because he was not keen to expose his disability through the moving image.

However, there were newsreels which showed Roosevelt. Newsreels blur the boundary between autofabrication and portrayal by others in ways comparable to photography. The Roosevelt clips in newsreels are practically all of parts of public addresses or other public appearances, so of situations in which Roosevelt was well aware that he was watched and filmed. In that sense they are visual registrations of Roosevelt's well-considered performances. However, the editing of the reels – in which the storytelling happens – was not monitored. Roosevelt had no hand in which parts of his performances were eventually shown, whether, how and from what angles they would be filmed, what the voice-over comments would be, or how the news story would be framed in general. Therefore, the newsreels do not add very substantially to Roosevelt's autofabrication, beyond the texts that he spoke in them and acts like his "walking" to the rostrum.

Press and Polls

Roosevelt is famous for his excellent contact with journalists and the press. Historian John Tebbel writes that "he understood the press as no president has before or since."[12] Betty Winfield in *FDR and the News Media* conjectures that Roosevelt "may have publicly personalized the presidency so much through his astute use of the existing mass media that he created unreasonable expectations for those less personable and less talented presidents who followed him." (2) "Publicly personalizing the presidency" through the use of mass media is clearly essential in Roosevelt's public expressions in general, and particularly important for his dealings with the news media. Although Roosevelt's easy bantering with the press is perhaps more a part of his public image than the actual essence of his administrations' press contact, he was personally on excellent terms with many members of the press, which decreased its watchdog role and therefore increased Roosevelt's political leeway (Winfield 28). Citing a reporter's surprise at the general enthusiasm Roosevelt aroused among his colleagues, Richard Polenberg argues that "Roosevelt made so favorable an impression on the working press largely because of his informal, colloquial manner." (44) While Roosevelt of course proclaimed the press to be a strong element in democracy,[13] he did not actually encourage their watchdog capacity. Rather, he wanted to secure space in the news media for White House news from his perspective. He would not personally have said so publicly, but his press secretary acted on that basis, among other things by organizing press conferences twice per week, which obviously created a regular expectation of White House news.

Roosevelt opened his first presidential press conference with "It is very good to see you all and my hope is that these conferences are going to be merely enlarged editions of the kind of very delightful family conferences I have been holding in Albany for the last four years."[14] The suggestion that press conferences should, or even can, be delightful and familial has remained an important notion since. The press conference as an institution, set up by Theodore Roosevelt, who used it very successfully for influencing the news directly, had been languishing throughout the previous three presidencies. Roosevelt, who had already had success with press conferences as governor of New York, revived it and was the first president to employ a former newspaper man, Stephen Early, as press secretary, and give him responsibility for the public relations and media policy of the White House, rather than regarding it as a merely administrative job (Schoenherr 40-41). Roosevelt was active, and often successful, in influencing the press, mostly because he strategically provided them both with large amounts of information, and with good, though non-committal quotes, photographs and other materials. Roosevelt's belief that the press disliked him despite his efforts to be accessible, is only partly justified. Many newspapers were

12 Tebbel, *The Media in America*, New York: Mentor Books, 1974.
13 "The constant free flow of communication among us – enabling the free interchange of ideas – forms the very bloodstream of our nation. It keeps the mind and body of our democracy eternally vital, eternally young." – FDR, Radio Address to the New York "Herald Tribune" Forum, October 24, 1940, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=15884&st=&st1=
14 Roosevelt, Press Conference, 9 March 1933: http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=14672

indeed critical of the New Deal, but also gave a great of attention to Roosevelt and the White House news he chose to present to the press (White 50-52).

Stephen Early's role was difficult at times because he both had to ensure that the press had good access to White House and executive news stories, and had to protect the privacy of the First Family and the public image of the president. Early was widely known as particularly fair and respectful to journalists; he was liked as a former colleague, despite difficulty he had protecting Roosevelt against the press and, conversely, defending his colleagues from Roosevelt's conviction that the press disliked him. His attitude was ambivalent, sometimes even hypocritical. It is telling that Roosevelt, who greatly profited from the new photo magazines, was deeply chagrined when Henry Luce, owner of the most important one – *Time*, *Life*, and *Fortune* – established a foundation to study the freedom of the press, out of worries about government control over the American mass media (Winfield 232).

Early himself was less negative about the intentions of the press, and particularly attempted to give all news media equal chances at obtaining news stories and photos. Thus, the practice was established that Roosevelt would give press conferences twice a week, once on a Tuesday afternoon, and once on a Friday morning, so as to give reporters for morning and evening papers equal chances at news scoops. He also prepared the conferences, discussing with Roosevelt what might be asked, and what Roosevelt might want to say. Few notes were taken during these meetings – Roosevelt generally discouraged note-taking in meetings, in itself a form of obscuring his autofabrication – but Early did make presidential quotes on paper available for the press, which they were allowed to cite. While they were allowed to ask questions at press conferences without submitting these previously, as had been the habit under previous presidents, they were not free to quote what the President said during those conferences, most of what was said was "off the record" or "as background", and might not explicitly be attributed to Roosevelt. Moreover, despite Roosevelt's claims to delightfulness and familiarity, Early set up a rather intimidating process for the press of waiting and being checked before they were allowed to enter the Oval Office in which the conferences were held. (Schoenherr 45) This created an ideal setting for Roosevelt to be apologetically late, and to do what he was good at:

> In twenty minutes Mr. Roosevelt's features had expressed amazement, curiosity, mock alarm, genuine interest, worry, rhetorical playing for suspense, sympathy, decision, playfulness, dignity, and surpassing charm. Yet he said almost nothing. Questions were deflected, diverted, diluted. Answers – when they did come – were concise and clear. But I never met anyone who showed greater capacity for avoiding a direct answer while giving the questioner a feeling he had been answered. (Gunther 22-23)

Although this elusiveness eventually did harm Roosevelt's popularity with the press, as journalists increasingly understood that the press conferences were not always useful, they did

help Roosevelt to develop a public image of amiability and hospitality, and they were an excellent way to launch 'trial balloons' to test public opinion through the reactions of correspondents.

Roosevelt's personal, jovial, bantering behavior towards reporters, stands in some contrast with the kind of rhetoric he used when he addressed the larger public, as he did in his Fireside Chats. In both cases his rhetorical skill would lie primarily in the presentation – his words were generally co-authored, or at least discussed beforehand with one or more assistants – but in larger addresses to a less tangible and visible audience Roosevelt needed to be less tongue-in-cheek, and to say without cynicism what really was the key message. Thus, he became what he had once said he hoped to be, "a preaching president – like my cousin Theodore", though the actual preaching was not, as in Theodore's case, to the press, but rather to the people in his more direct addresses.[15] However, his preaching was lightened by his jolly image, and on the other hand stood out all the more clearly, because it formed a serious note amongst many more frivolous ones.

Roosevelt was good at sending messages that inspired trust and confidence, but he was also an excellent listener. He was extremely sensitive to public opinion, both in the sense that he was good at picking up the general sentiment about issues, and in the sense that he found it very important. As his speechwriter Stanley High wrote: "The President seldom goes wrong in his forecast of public reaction. He is sensitive to public opinion as some people are sensitive to weather" (quoted in Holli 64). However, as Melvin Holli has shown in *The Wizard of Washington: Emil Hurja, Franklin Roosevelt, and the Birth of Public Opinion Polling* (2002), Roosevelt did not only go by his own sentiments and predictions; he was also the first president to use and hold mass opinion polls to estimate the public sentiment on political issues. Previously public opinion had mainly been gauged during election campaigns by relying on local party members' reports on what was thought and felt in their district, a strategy Roosevelt used as well. Moreover, the *Literary Digest*, phone companies and some other organizations held polls which were generally non-representative and not random; they, for instance, only polled people with phone lines, i.e. members of the upper middle classes, and as a result their predictions were usually skewed. While the *Literary Digest* at times polled millions of people, these were all from among their own readership and therefore a biased sample. Emil Hurja, originally a mining engineer, transferred statistical methods he used for sampling raw materials to public opinion polling. On the basis of the essentially flawed data from the *Literary Digest* polls he created corrected versions, controlling for the *Digest*'s biases, which predicted election outcomes more accurately. (Holli 44)

The Democratic National Committee in 1928 did not see the value of Hurja's randomized samples, but in the months leading up to the 1932 campaign he did convince DNC chairman James Farley.

15 Schlesinger, *The Coming of the New Deal*, 558. It is striking that FDR refers to Theodore as his "cousin", here, because formerly he tended to call him "Uncle Theodore" – the closest family tie with TR was after all that he was Eleanor Roosevelt's uncle. FDR's promoting himself from nephew to cousin of TR's may have been occasioned by FDR's election to the presidency, which in a sense brought him on a par with TR.

This was partly an effect of another poll, carried out by New York democrat Jesse Strauss, which predicted that Franklin Roosevelt would win the nomination at the 1932 Chicago convention. Soon after Roosevelt's nomination many commentators became convinced that this poll had actually influenced the convention's choice for Roosevelt. Thus, the DNC became aware of the possible self-fulfilling effect of polls, in which the poll itself created a bandwagon effect, which, according to Holli, convinced the committee to employ Emil Hurja in the presidential campaign. Hurja's polls helped FDR's campaign in various ways, particularly because they determined very precisely where campaign funds could most fruitfully be spent. Roosevelt regularly spoke with Hurja about which issues he should particularly address in different areas. (Holli 46) After Roosevelt's election Hurja first became patronage dispenser in the Administration, but later returned to public opinion polling for the DNC for the 1934 congressional campaign, and for Roosevelt, to measure the public reactions to particular speeches and policies, and more general approval ratings. Holli argues that "we cannot say for certain that it was Hurja's advice that moderated the president's behavior, but … we can say … that Roosevelt was the first president to make systematic use of public-opinion polls such as Hurja's to measure reaction to his policies and speeches." (Holli 66)

Conclusion

Roosevelt generally operated on the side of public opinion, but simultaneously tried to steer and inform it, for instance in the "Arsenal of Democracy" speech, in the direction of American military intervention in the war in Europe. Thus Roosevelt used public opinion reports to navigate his course, but did not uncritically go along with their outcomes, unless something seemed to be the only decision the American electorate would accept. He received more letters from citizens than any other president, and took these seriously, as a qualitative insight into, but also as a quantitative indicator of public sentiment. As he said to Louis Howe, he especially valued personal mail from everyday folks, because it constituted the "most perfect index to the state of mind of the people."[16] He interpreted the number of letters, as he told reporters, as a clear sign of "an increasing and wholesome reawakening of public interest in the affairs of government."[17] But most importantly, the Fireside Chats and the letters written in response, constituted a form of direct contact between himself and the public. This contact seemed synecdochic, involving FDR's actual hand, and metonymic, involving his hand-writing and choice of words, but really was symbolic – an act performed mostly not by FDR but by staff members substituting him, yet creating the sense that the President was available for direct interpersonal contact. The autofabrication of FDR as an intimate and strong presence was created mainly through the combined force of these inextricably entangled rhetorical modes.

16 Louis McHenry Howe, "The President's Mail Bag," American Magazine, June 1934, 23 – cited in Levine 5.
17 *New York Times*, December 27, 1933.