

Chapter 2

Controversies and Texts

The traditions of the discourse arts take controversy to be the proper subject matter for a critical discussion; it functions as a prerequisite and is treated as a motivating exigence. Indeed, one of the central purposes of the tradition has been to train participants to resolve problems and issues; it explicitly aims to adjudicate controversies. But for all of its attention to resolution, the tradition tends to background the problem of how a controversy comes to be an exigence in the first place. When this problem is acknowledged, it is presented as something a participant must resolve during the invention or discovery process, through, for instance, the use of topoi and/or the system of stasis. This emphasis on adjudication and resolution contributes to the central dilemma in Goodnight's Glen Mills mystery (Goodnight 1991, pp. 1–2). Some larger, poorly defined conflict that motivates a process of problem solving needs to already exist in order for the methods of resolution, such as a decision-making dialogue, to become productive and relevant. This is why the subject of controversy itself has remained so fundamental but simultaneously so opaque. While controversy is a prerequisite for a critical discussion, explaining it is not a central goal. The emphasis on training participants in best practices with the goal of resolving controversies is consistent with the normative and critical orientation of the discourse arts. In this they take a kind of clinical stance toward discourse (Barth 1985, p. 377). In many of its guises, the rhetorical tradition is a long standing program for verbal hygiene (Cameron 1995, p. 29). It has sponsored a centuries-long handbook tradition dedicated to a clinical goal – improving the student's argumentation and communication skills. The clinical perspective has kept the focus on the challenge of resolving controversies, on training participants to resolve them or critiquing participants who fail to resolve them or address them in the most productive ways, but has made it difficult to address the challenge of explaining them.

The staged decision-making dialogue has played a central role in the repertoire of interventions for resolving controversies, serving as a pragmatic location that situates participants and provides procedural constraints on their discourse in order to ensure the quality of contributions and of decisions. Because it is a prerequisite of the decision-making dialogue and because such a dialogue aims to resolve rather than explain it, we need to look at and beyond the dialogue in order to explain

controversy. Indeed, some have used the terms of staged decision-making dialogues in order to define controversy negatively, as a violation of logical, dialectical, and pragmatic norms. From this perspective, controversy is a “failure of dialogue” where participants “turn their backs on arguments” (McKeon 1990, p. 26). Or it is “vicious” featuring “endless ‘procedural’ debates about framing” and “passionate rhetoric” (Dascal 1990, p. 84). These are examples of the ways that controversy is experienced as lying upstream from, or as a motivating exigence for a decision-making dialogue without being part of it, a troublesome and pathological condition whose very purpose lies in its ability to be resolved by clinical discourse. If this approach shows us what controversy is not, how can we explain what it is? A positive explanation of controversy will need to explore the territory beyond the staged decision-making dialogue.

The relationship between texts and events is one of the issues that has perpetuated the thorniest problems with controversy. Bringing a normative framework to descriptive research about controversy has occluded certain basic questions about the object of study. Controversy remains a mystery because we do not know where to look. How do investigators locate and access it? The following sections draw some distinctions among common attitudes that investigators take in researching controversy as an event, the supportive, the distortive, and the constitutive. In addition, they explain why news discourse is relevant to research on public controversy and why the traditions of the discourse arts may have downplayed its importance.

2.1 Descriptive and Normative Aims of the Discourse Arts

The discourse arts has generally looked within its own traditions, with their attendant normative and pedagogical emphases, for both its objects of study and methods of analysis. Jacobs identifies the fundamental confusion of descriptive and normative goals in the traditional approach, a tension that gives rise to a characteristic treatment of texts. He writes, “There is a decided tendency to describe what *is* being said in terms of normative models of what *should* be said or else to ignore it altogether. Either way, non-argument and bad argument (the distinction is fuzzy) tend to get ignored when messages are described in presumptive model form” (Jacobs 2000, p. 265). Critics tend to draw from only those parts of texts that provide examples that are recognizable through normative models, or those parts that can charitably or generously be made to fit logical, dialectical, and rhetorical norms, while ignoring the other parts. It is in this way that the normative models come to limit descriptive goals. The object of study is demarcated by the critical norms. Nowhere is this more plain than in Jacobs’ point about the fuzziness of the distinction between non-argument and bad argument. In addressing this lacuna, he calls for some productive methodological distinctions between critical and descriptive projects: “Our descriptive

procedures cannot be limited to using analytic categories prescribed by an ideal model of argumentative form and conduct. Departures from the model need to be noticed” (Jacobs 2000, p. 272). A constitutive approach to controversy responds to this need for descriptive procedures that are not limited to or isomorphic with the normative models of the discourse arts.

Disentangling the descriptive from the clinical project creates at least one new problem. What is the object of study in an analysis of controversy? In the traditional clinical approach this question is somewhat hidden or may seem irrelevant because the object of study is contained in the critical framework itself. If controversies are the iniquitous and incontinent kinds of speech event that many researchers seem to think they are, then there is good reason to expect that normative models, based as they are on ideal or best practices, would necessarily miss much of their complexity. As a clinical project will tend to equate its normative model with its object of study, when it considers an actually occurring controversial event, it is only those utterances, standpoints, or contributions that can be framed in the terms of the model and the larger goal of resolution that will be recognizable as an object of study, parts that can be given structure and procedure by re-locating them, for instance, to a coherent, normatively bounded, staged decision-making dialogue. For a more squarely descriptive project, the question about the object of study is non-trivial. It may not necessarily involve a staged decision-making dialogue bounded by universal logical, dialectical, and pragmatic norms, for instance, or at least not the sort that is envisioned in many normative models, where interlocutors meet with one another face-to-face and speak on behalf of their own commitments, addressing one another through brief turns that remain relevant to previous turns and to the larger purpose of the discussion. If it does happen to be located in some sort of dialogue, it may not be strictly limited to or wholly defined by it. Whatever the case, the methods of analysis the investigator marshals need to be distinguished in some way from the object of study if a descriptive project is going to proceed. Among other things, this means that the particular limitations and jurisdictions of the method will need to be accounted for and along with it the particular relationship the investigator is establishing with the object of study.

If the object of study is not isomorphic with a normative model – for instance that of a decision-making dialogue, an event at which interlocutors meet with one another and argue in turn about a shared, central issue – then where is the object of study? Without first constructing a normative model of speech events, how can the investigator even begin? One solution is to take particular stretches of talk or text as the object of study, the sources that the critic might otherwise consult to learn about and reconstruct some controversial event. If the sources do, in fact, seem to take a form that is isomorphic with a normative model of a speech event, then it may make good sense to describe them in the those terms. If they do not, then the challenge for the investigator in a descriptive project is to learn more about the structure and norms of those particular stretches of talk or text. By making texts the object of study, the investigator remains open to the possibility, for instance, that he or she will witness some departures from a normative model.

Investigators routinely consult texts even as their declared objects of study are events. This means that there is an inevitable slippage between the analysis of a controversy, for instance, and the data that the investigator consults in order to access that controversy. Even with field work, where the investigator would seem to have direct access and experience with events, this slippage exists. The investigator could stage or attend an event – perhaps one that features an argumentative exchange between two speakers who take brief turns directly addressing each other and a commonly agreed upon issue or question – and could record it and then transcribe it in order to use this as data. Research on conversational argument, for instance, uses field work to identify adjacency pairs that sharpen disagreement in relatively spontaneous conversation (Jacobs and Jackson 1982, p. 222). With field work, the investigator creates his or her own texts about the event, in the form of field notes and transcriptions, and usually has the advantage of occupying the role of participant-observer. But even in this case where the investigator has very direct experience with the event, it is important to distinguish between the event and the object of study. Transcripts of spoken discourse are the outcome of a process of entextualization, as are, perhaps more conventionally, professionally written, edited and published texts such as books and articles. Entextualization is the process by which we impose boundaries on discourse, identifying beginnings and endings, for instance, and deciding which parts are relevant to include or preserve in the form of, for instance, a manipulable, visual text artifact and which are not (Silverstein and Urban 1996, p. 3). Transcription of spoken discourse is necessarily incomplete and selective and run through with inclusions and exclusions that reflect the researchers own goals and theories. Therefore, the fit between the event and the object of study is by no means a perfect one. With this in mind, researchers need to attend to the fact that their object of study is the transcription rather than the event, that the transcription is the data under analysis (Ochs 1979, p. 44). Investigators often operate as if their object of study were the event, and that texts were conduits or surrogates for the event, an assumption that tends to hide the limitations involved in transcription (Ochs 1979, p. 44). While necessary for analysis, transcriptions inevitably reduce an event in manifold ways, typically through a bias toward verbal and away from non-verbal behavior (Ochs 1979, p. 44). In the discourse arts there is a specific preference for argumentative, verbal behavior over the non-argumentative, verbal and non-verbal sorts. Stretches of talk and text that do not display chains of reasoning, do not function as assertions or propositions, or represent committed argumentative standpoints by human agents tend to be neglected (Blair 1998, p. 326; Jacobs 2000, p. 264). The limitations inherent in any particular text will hide certain aspects of the event it claims to represent, and with this in mind, there remains an important difference between the event and the text that represents it. Even transcriptions from audio or video recordings, however rich in their detail, hide some features and highlight others. It is for these reasons that, whether acknowledged or not, texts are the objects of study in most controversy analysis. Explaining some of the ways investigators navigate this state of affairs is the central concern of this chapter.

2.2 Journalist as Participant

One of the outstanding problems in argumentation research is determining who counts as a participant in a given argument event (Walton 2004, p. 205). The traditional solution has been to identify or nominate ratified participants in classical speaking situations while ignoring others. The classical speaking situation tends to assume a traditional participation framework for discourse, a kind of “primal scene” that features a dyad with participants who seem to act as individual agents who simultaneously perform the roles of animator, author, and principal, acting as the ones who deliver, who script, and who are committed to and responsible for the larger standpoint of their discourse (Goffman 1981, pp. 137, 141, 226). The focus is on “ratified” participants, rather than on “adventitious participants” or “bystanders” (Goffman 1981, pp. 131–132). While using the classical speaking situation as a model can help to simplify the problem of determining who is a participant in an event, it also has significant limitations for an empirical or descriptive project (Walton 2004, p. 205). Not all discursive events take place in the classical speaking situation and not all speakers and writers are ratified participants. By constructing classical speaking situations, however, it is possible to structure events as in such a way as to allow only these kinds of participants.

By adopting these kinds of boundaries, argument analysis often assumes that the relevant speakers and writers in a discursive event will be those who present committed argumentative standpoints in a decision-making dialogue designed to resolve a common issue. Less attention tends to be paid to those responsible for structuring the event itself, whether they be institutions which programmatically stage discursive events bound by explicit norms or texts that give shape to such events through their description and narration. In the philosophical dialogue genre, for instance, the classical speaking situation and its participants who are represented in the story of the text may overshadow other important participants, such as the writer who denotes the event and the auditor who learns about it in a reading situation. It is in at least this sense that journalists are participants in controversy. Like other writers and speakers, they shape and control events for an audience (Kaufer and Butler 1996, p. 12). In particular, journalists shape news events for public audiences. In this role, journalists are not canonical participants speaking to others of a similar role in a classical speaking situation. In fact, it is central to the objectivity norm of the profession that journalists occupy a footing that clearly distinguishes them and their commitments from those of their sources. Since the canonical participant in the classical speaking situation is one who seemingly acts simultaneously as principal, author, and animator, journalists programmatically fail to occupy this role by virtue of their professional training and through their consistent, responsible adoption of professional writing standards. They maintain a role that positions them primarily as author on behalf of the commitments of others, acting as professional reporters of the statements of their sources, embedding those in their texts, and working on behalf of the commitments a news organization (Bell 1991, pp. 40–41). In this role, however, they remain participants who shape events they describe in their texts. Among other things, they construct dialogues among interlocutors in controversy reporting, a phenomenon that is explored in detail in Chap. 5.

2.3 Supportive, Distortive, and Constitutive Attitudes

As sources, texts like news articles present a paradox of sorts for investigators: In some situations they are treated as veridical depictions of events; in other situations, they are treated as fatally distorted depictions. To treat an account as veridical is to proceed as if its depiction of an event is that event (Tuchman 1980, pp. 191, 203). Traditional historians and social scientists sometimes use news discourse to support an account about the nature of an event or the character of public opinion and in doing so background the work of participants such as journalists, editors, and news outlets in producing it (Tuchman 1980, p. 191). In Fishman's analysis of crime waves, for example, he consults news texts in order to, among other things, report a veridical account of a particular historical event, a crime wave in New York City (Fishman 1978). In Condit's analysis of abortion arguments, for instance, she consults news texts in order to, among other things, report a veridical account of an evolving historical event, the US abortion controversy, tracing the public and professional arguments in the US about abortion as they change across a series of historical stages (Condit-Railsback 1984). The tendency to treat sources as veridical is at the heart of what we might call the supportive attitude toward texts. In the supportive attitude, (cf. Fig. 2.1) the investigator consults texts about a **CONTROVERSY** (or some other event) and then takes for granted the existence and shape of the controversy, treating a text as a veridical depiction. Fig 2.1 illustrates the relationships among the ostensive controversy, the investigator, and texts in the supportive attitude.

The investigator consults texts in order to compose a veridical account of the **CONTROVERSY**. This process of consulting is an important feature of the supportive approach as it indicates the attitude of the investigator toward the texts. They are not under analysis; the particular choices of the speakers and writers and the process of entextualization are not emphasized. Instead, they function as conduits to the **CONTROVERSY**, and the investigator consults them in order to gain access to it and thereby reiterate the (presumably veridical) depiction presented in the texts. In the supportive attitude, the investigator composes a veridical account of the **CONTROVERSY** on the basis of this presumed access to the event. This is more an act of replication than an act of response (Urban 1996, p. 40). The primary concerns here tend to be matters of authoritativeness of the texts consulted and the completeness of the coverage represented by those texts, where the epistemic authority of the investigator's account depends to at least some extent on the authority of the sources. This is consistent with the treatment of texts in the supportive attitude. If the texts are conduits, then ensuring their authoritativeness (e.g. their ability to count as veridical themselves) and adding more of them should increase access, in the way that increasing the diameter of a pipe and eliminating blockages from it increases the capacity of water than can flow through it, or the way that increasing an aperture and cleaning its lens and increases the amount of light that can flow through it. Journalists themselves conventionally adopt a supportive attitude toward their sources, seeking out the most authoritative speakers and writers to cite in order to report a veridical account of news events.

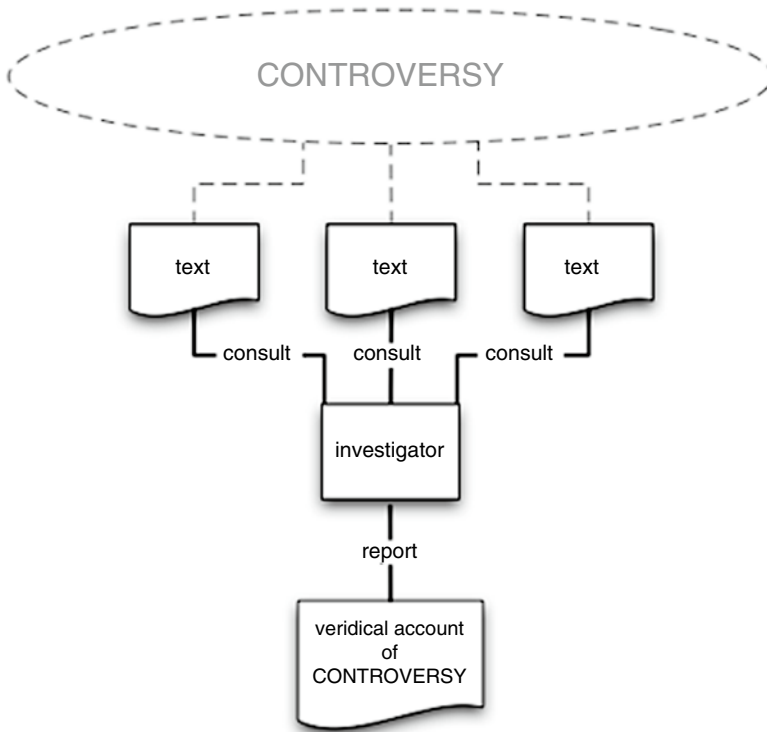


Fig. 2.1 The supportive attitude

The grey, dotted lines in Figs. 2.1–2.3 indicate that the boundaries of a given **CONTROVERSY** are ostensible, suggesting that while the texts about it may refer, for instance, to some actually existing human beings, actions, and utterances, the shape and boundaries of **CONTROVERSY** as an event remain negotiable and contingent. This is an effort to acknowledge the state of affairs faced by any investigator who aims to account for a given event, the problem of choosing from among some uncountable number of utterances, movements, locations, and frames of reference at many scales of abstraction which might, in principle, qualify as relevant context (Dijk 2008, pp. 19–20; Irvine 1996, p. 157; Schegloff 1997, pp. 165–166). Writing or speaking about a **CONTROVERSY**, as a matter of course, involves choosing some of these and excluding others through a series of relevance judgments which often remain tacit. To the extent that a **CONTROVERSY** is made up of talk and writing, those who aim to depict it select various stretches of others’ discourse and treat these stretches as a texts, detaching them from their contexts and recontextualizing them toward new purposes and in new places (e.g. in the texts or utterances that they are producing). By entextualizing a particular stretch of discourse, detaching it from its local context, especially the details of its production, speakers and writers make it easier to replicate, rendering it more shareable and therefore more

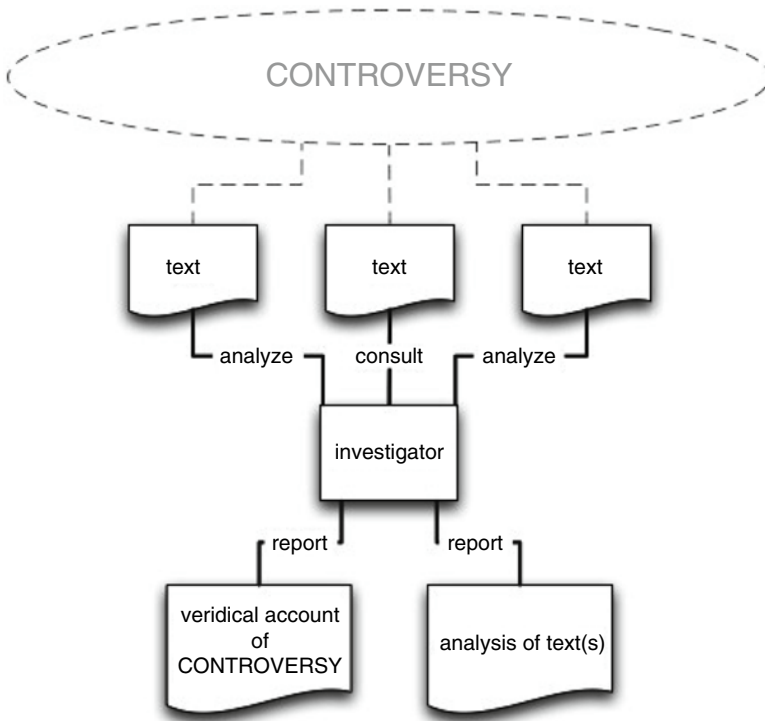


Fig. 2.2 The distortive attitude

amenable to be taken to be part of culture (Urban 1996, p. 21). Some kinds of discourse are better candidates for this than others: those that carry explicit markers of detachment and decontextualization tend to make better culture (Urban 1996, p. 40). The shape of a **CONTROVERSY** as an event is ostensible; the texts which depict it serve to give it shape and trace its boundaries. The texts about a **CONTROVERSY** that carry explicit markers of detachment and decontextualization will tend to be more amenable to replication and will be those that are the best positioned to function as culture, to function as if they transcend all local contexts and participants. This kind of discourse would seem to be a valuable resource for a speaker or writer seeking to compose a veridical account of a **CONTROVERSY** because markers of detachment and decontextualization could contribute to an impression that the account is objective and transparent and therefore amounts to an unobstructed conduit to the event.

The aim of the investigator in a supportive attitude is to produce a veridical account of a **CONTROVERSY** by consulting authoritative texts that themselves may qualify as veridical. In the distortive attitude (cf. Fig. 2.2), the investigator extends this by treating some of the texts that he or she consults as veridical while singling out others for criticism. These are the texts that he or she has difficulty endorsing as veridical depictions. In colloquial terms, the analyst might see these sources as “biased” or

accuse them of failing to remain “objective.” Fig. 2.2 illustrates the relationships among the CONTROVERSY, the investigator, and texts in the distortive attitude.

The investigator consults some texts in order to produce a veridical account of the CONTROVERSY and analyzes others in order to produce a critical account of those texts. While the terms of analysis may vary, the texts are often compared critically against the veridical account of CONTROVERSY, which functions as a standard or norm. In the distortive attitude, then, some texts or parts of texts are replicated and others receive a response (Urban 1996, p. 40). In Dubin’s discussion of the Brooklyn Museum controversy, for example, he consults some news texts in order to report a veridical account of the event on the one hand, while analyzing other news texts in order to produce a critical account of them (Dubin 2000). Based on his analysis he concludes that the controversy was invented by journalists, and was a classic “pseudo-event,” crafted for the mere sake of publicity. Used as a critical device, the notion of the pseudo-event epitomizes the distortive attitude: It rests on a programmatic distinction between authentic and inauthentic events, where the former is “spontaneous” and firmly grounded in “the underlying reality of the situation” and the latter is a false or mere construction of the writing and speaking of journalists and their sources (Boorstin 1971, p. xxi). In van Eemeren and Grootendorst’s general theory of argumentation, for example, they direct investigators to consult texts in order to report an account of an underlying controversy in the form of a “critical discussion” based in “argumentative reality” (F. H. V. Eemeren 2004, p. 95). To make these kinds of comparisons requires a veridical account of events which can be used as a standard of authenticity against which other accounts can be criticized. Though they both place a value on veridical accounts, the supportive and distortive attitudes differ on the range of roles for texts: one treats them generally as conduits to the CONTROVERSY, and the other distinguishes between texts that are conduits and those that are obstructions. In a distortive attitude, some texts are consulted and some are analyzed; the role of discourse in shaping CONTROVERSY is effaced in some cases and highlighted in others.

Using texts as veridical accounts collapses the distinction between their discourse functions and the events that they report. Texts are treated as conduits to or surrogates for events (Harris 1980; Reddy 1979). This is not routinely identified as a problem because it harmonizes with our common sense notions about how language and texts work; it is part and parcel of the reflectionist perspective on language and related language ideologies (Silverstein 1979, p. 196). In the case of news, the problem may be particularly difficult to see because of the degree to which the objectivity norm is entrenched in the profession of journalism and in the general apprehension of news. Many features of the news article genre itself act as catalysts for this, like its informational register and its genre features that index objectivity. Among the problems with treating a news article, or any other source, as a veridical account of an event is that the act of speaking or writing, for instance by using language to report on an event, is inherently selective and reductive. Even the most authoritative or detailed accounts suffer from this basic limitation; this is the basis of Ochs’ points about the limitations of transcription. In order to successfully treat a text as a veridical depiction, the investigator must overlook these limitations and the larger process of entextualization.

While the supportive and distortive attitudes both depend on overlooking these limitations in their treatment of (at least some) texts, the constitutive attitude highlights them. In the constitutive attitude, the investigator takes for granted that sources are inherently selective and reductive, that texts do not serve as a surrogates for or reflections of a **CONTROVERSY**. It differs from the supportive and distortive attitudes primarily in the role ascribed to texts. Rather than acting as conduits or obstructions, texts help to constitute **CONTROVERSY**. In this, texts might be said to denote and index **CONTROVERSY** in any number of ways. Through the use of indexical features of language, writers may point to a **CONTROVERSY**; to the extent that they name it and introduce it to readers, for example, they help to establish or create the social and contextual dimensions that can be indexed by that name (Silverstein 1979, p. 207). While this can provide opportunities for others to later draw on these as established presuppositions, it is agnostic about the relationship between the indexical features and the “real” spatio-temporal world (Silverstein 1985, p. 220). There are at least two important implications to this: First, the investigator does not assume that texts are veridical accounts since this depends on a conduit relationship between a **CONTROVERSY** and the texts about it. Second, texts, rather than the reported **CONTROVERSY** event, are the primary object of study. So the investigator identifies the discourse about **CONTROVERSY** as the data. Fig 2.3 illustrates the relationships among the **CONTROVERSY**, the investigator, and texts in the constitutive attitude.

The investigator analyzes texts in order to report the results of that analysis, and those texts are the object of study (rather than the **CONTROVERSY** that they may denote). To adopt a constitutive attitude is to acknowledge that speaking and writing does not reflect discrete, material, extra-rhetorical entities but instead helps to shape our experience of them (Charland 1987, p. 134). Rather than aiming to analyze or criticize the **CONTROVERSY**, the researcher analyzes the texts about it, attempting to explain why they are shaped in their particular ways and how they contribute to the shape and delimit the boundaries of the **CONTROVERSY**. In this way, determining the shape of the **CONTROVERSY** as it is narrated by texts is a research problem that leads us to the particulars of texts rather than to theoretical prerequisites for analysis. The constitutive attitude makes it difficult to assume from the outset or to maintain an a priori definition of **CONTROVERSY**. It imagines that there very well may be no universal, formal definition and it does not aim to change this.

An account functions as veridical to the extent that it can be used as a surrogate for a **CONTROVERSY**, to the extent that we take its depiction of an event to be that event. Because they rest on veridical accounts in certain respects, the supportive and distortive attitudes tend to focus more on the **CONTROVERSY** event than on texts, taking the **CONTROVERSY** to be the object of study. In a constitutive attitude, the **CONTROVERSY** is something that writers and speakers help to shape through their texts. In this way, investigators in supportive and distortive attitudes are in a position to share an object of study with speakers and writers of the texts that they consult. In other words, in some attitudes, the **CONTROVERSY** functions as a focal event. Since focal events have a high degree of salience, it is tempting for investigators to treat them as if they have a natural autonomy and to dedicate most of their attention

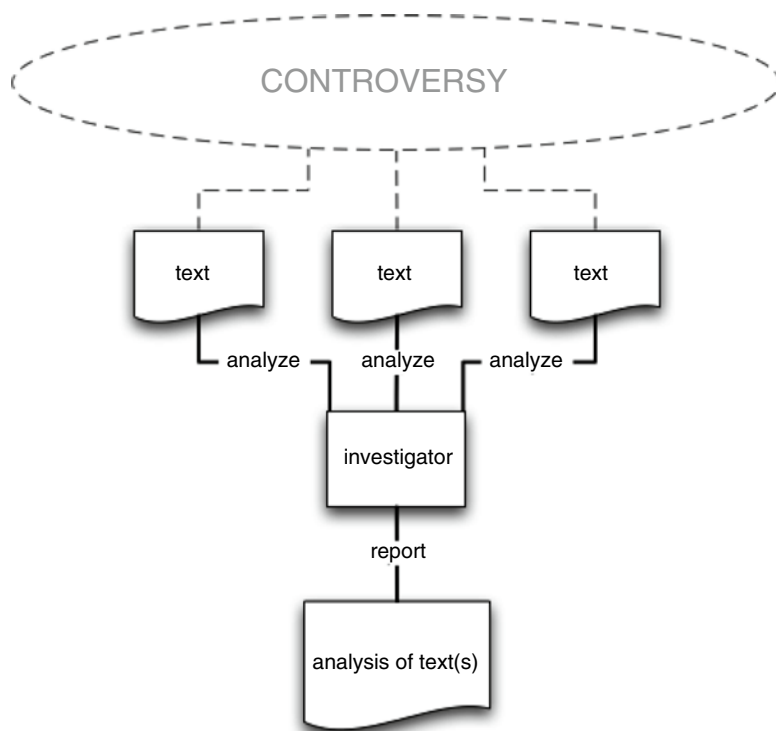


Fig. 2.3 The constitutive attitude

to them while treating less salient parts of the situation as mere background or support material (Ochs 1979, p. 44). The details of the texts that the investigator consults about a **CONTROVERSY** are sometimes treated as less salient parts. Note that by focusing on these texts, and by acknowledging that they help to shape a focal event in a constitutive attitude, we are only examining an important and sometimes overlooked aspect of its complexity, not engaging in some kind of totalizing critique that would utterly reduce it to these texts. Doing this would amount to an effort to craft a universal, formal definition out of an extremely limited and particular perspective and reading experience.

Each of these attitudes, the supportive, distortive, and constitutive, represents an orientation toward texts, and each has its value and purpose for investigators, among other writers and speakers. The supportive attitude consults texts in order to deliver a authoritative, veridical account of an event. The distortive consults texts and leverages a veridical account in order to critique a specious one. And the constitutive analyzes texts in order to explain how they are shaped and how they might contribute to our experience of events. In the constitutive attitude the investigator is concerned not only with the participants in the events of the world denoted by the text as part of a focal event, but is equally or more concerned with those of its interactional world, the participants involved, for instance, in writing and reading events, who design,

author, deliver and audit the texts. As an auditor, for instance, the investigator is one of these participants. Each of these attitudes represents a prototypical stance that investigators seem to take, and in practice, few analyses of **CONTROVERSY** thoroughly exemplify one of them in their every turn. The list of three should not be taken to suggest a comprehensive catalog of possible attitudes one might take toward texts (There could be a fourth, fifth, or nth possibility.) or to suggest that the three discussed here are indivisible (There could be any number of finer gradations among them.). In approaching a given text, writers and speakers surely shift among attitudes and approaches depending on their needs and purposes.

In order to address the kinds of questions raised in the constitutive attitude, researchers need a method like discourse analysis that encourages them to describe features of communication and text at many levels. By focusing on discourse, the investigator attends to many levels of concern in the analysis of a particular textual artifact or utterance, levels that could involve structure, medium, participants, and purpose, among many others, and attends to these in attempting to determine why a particular text or utterance is shaped the way that it is (Johnstone 1996, p. 24). Discourse analysis is by no means a monolithic method, nor one that tends to insist on an a discrete a priori framework of top-level theoretical generalizations. It is especially useful as a way to deliver detailed descriptions of small amounts of textual data and to support conclusions about the particular qualities of that data (Johnstone 1996, p. 23). Discourse analysis offers **CONTROVERSY** investigators who adopt a constitutive attitude a systematic way to describe the texts that are their objects of study.

2.4 Propagatio: The First Draft of History

Journalists are among the most widely published participants in public controversies, and they conventionally adopt a supportive attitude toward texts. Constrained by the norms of the profession and the news article genre, journalists are expected to deliver veridical accounts of controversies, among many other sorts of events. Many readers, including scholarly investigators, treat news texts as key locations at which they encounter public controversies. With the development of journalism as a profession at the end of the 19C, mass societies began to depend on journalists to function as brokers between entitled political actors and their mass audiences (Smith 1978, p. 163). Over time, journalism's professional standards, in particular the objectivity norm and the news article genre, have helped to shore up the identity of the profession as a civic institution.

Chapter 3 presents some of the central features of the news article as a genre, especially its purpose of reporting events, its standards of objectivity, and its informational register. It also positions the news article historically in its parallels with the development of the scientific research article. Journalism's objectivity norm and informational register owe much to the late 19C professionalization of journalists and the contemporaneous professionalization of scientists. However, as much it

echoes a its standards and its register, news writing is not scientific writing. The news is primarily concerned with reporting events at a scale that, traditionally, fits into a daily cycle. Its concern with the particularity of significant events places news in the company of history and rumor. Journalists themselves have called their writing “the first draft of history” and have thought of themselves as professional witnesses to history (Edy 1999). There are many historical precedents underpinning the overlap between news writing and history making, especially in traditional societies (Aitchison 2007). In this overlap, journalists recognize their common concern with historians, a concern with characterizing significant past events. Of course, while journalists are typically focused on a daily, weekly, or monthly scale, historians often deal in centuries and epochs. In this, journalism tends to focus on isolated events, and history, by contrast, develops longer causal narratives (Park 1955, p. 77). Journalists may see themselves as writers of the first draft of history because they are often the first professional writers to publish authoritative accounts of many events that sometimes later qualify as historically significant. And to the extent that we refer to their textual artifacts as veridical accounts for the writing of history, we would seem to confirm journalists’ claim to the role.

If such an overlap exists, how might journalists contribute to the writing of history? If they participate in an event that eventually becomes authorized as historically significant, like a war, a moon landing, or a revolutionary invention, then they would be contributing to *res gestae* (Harris 2004, p. 172). If they were in the business of writing and publishing accounts of *res gestae*, then they would be contributing to *historiae*. Contributors to *historiae* typically do not witness the events of *res gestae* despite the fact that they deliver authoritative accounts of it. Traditionally, *historiae* describes the professional writing of the historian (Harris 2004, p. 172). Finally, if they participate as onlookers, people who recognize and comment on historically significant events in myriad everyday conversations and interactions that are not professionally authorized and are not recorded for posterity, then they would be contributing to *opinio* (Harris 2004, pp. 172–173). Contributors to *historiae* form by far the smallest group of history makers, and contributors to *opinio* the largest (Harris 2004, p. 172). Journalists do not fit neatly into any one of these roles. They would seem to contribute to a fourth category of history making, *propagatio*, a role that, at its most effective, combines the authority of *historiae* with the information cycle of *opinio*. Though they are usually in closer proximity in time and space to *res gestae* than historians, journalists generally do not witness events themselves even while they publish accounts of them. And though the small scale of many news events and the quick turnover of the news cycle resonates with the myriad everyday comments and conversations of *opinio*, journalists are by comparison authorized chroniclers whose accounts are valued and preserved through publication. At the same time, journalists report on many events that never reach the historian’s threshold of significance, and their accounts are not always valued by historians as accurate or adequate, qualities that associate their epistemic authority more with *opinio* than *historiae*. If contributors to *historiae* form the smallest group of history makers, and contributors to *opinio* the largest, then contributors to *propagatio* would seem to form a group that is larger than the former but smaller than the latter.

Rumor is perhaps the least authoritative kind of *propagatio*. Though it shares with news the top-level purpose of reporting events to the minute, hour, and day, rumors display lower epistemic authority, by traditional definition, than the published accounts of journalists. Despite the epistemological boundary between the two, policed in part by professional journalists and editors, their common purpose sometimes overshadows their differences, especially in times of crisis and disaster when formal news outlets are unable or too slow to respond (Shibutani 1966). The bombing of Hiroshima and the shooting of John F. Kennedy, for example, are situations that were ripe for rumor, where the demand for information greatly outstripped the ability of professional news outlets to deliver it (Shibutani 1966, p. 62). In this way, rumor is a less professional, less institutional, more improvised form of news (Shibutani 1966, p. 62). Internet-based forms of *propagatio* have provided new genres and channels for improvised news. Rumor is traditionally considered a corrupt, pathological form of communication, despite the fact that it can be used to realize productive news purposes. Traditional perspectives define it negatively and in terms that primarily focus on its lack of epistemic authority, comparing it implicitly to the standards of professional journalism; it is characterized by its distortions, its tendency to cause alarm and to raise unwarranted expectations (Allport and Postman 1947, pp. vii–viii). The propagator of rumor is assumed to communicate in a face-to-face, spoken mode, deal in beliefs rather than facts, and therefore to command no standards of evidence for his or her accounts (Allport and Postman 1947, p. ix). Professional editors, journalists, and news organizations have a self-interest in policing the definitional boundary between news and rumor. News distinguishes itself in part by its objectivity norm, a standard that is institutionalized through the professionalization of journalists, and indexed through its informational register and its literate mode. Whether delivered in a print, online, or broadcast medium, it is a kind of crafted, edited, and published text, subject to explicit professional epistemic norms of production, some qualities that index its higher authority. This status is in part due to language ideologies (e.g. scriptism) that ascribe special authority to planned, written, published discourse and may contribute to the impression that rumor, by virtue of its traditional association with spontaneous, spoken forms of communication, is pathological and circumspect (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994, pp. 65–66). Many internet-based forms of *propagatio* upset and refigure these traditional boundaries between news and rumor, particularly where both are delivered in the substantially similar medium of the electronic text, something that has caused purveyors of professionally edited news to reconsider some of their time-tested ways of distinguishing the epistemic authority of their product from the vagaries of rumor.

2.5 Controversies and Discourse in Particular

In investigating a controversy, we often take its autonomy as an event for granted, proceeding as if it has a particular shape and particular boundaries independent of the discourse that has contributed to it, including the texts which have aimed to

account for it. The particular speech events that help to constitute a controversy and their associated acoustical and textual artifacts, many of these are relegated to mere background or support status. From this perspective, a controversy functions as the focal event in an investigation, owing to its higher degree of salience when compared with many of the particular speech events which might be said to make up its larger context. In supportive and distortive attitudes toward texts, this focal event-context distinction is not a problem but is endemic to the investigation. The autonomy and salience of the controversy is a prerequisite. It is treated as the object of study, and particular texts and stretches of discourse, especially veridical accounts, are treated as conduits to it or surrogates for it. In a constitutive attitude, however, the particular utterances or texts that would often otherwise be treated as background or support are considered as objects of study. This difference in perspective leads to a difference in the set of problems faced by the investigator. What kind of event is it (e.g. a controversy)? Where does it take place? Who are the participants? When does it take place and how long does it last? These are the kinds of questions that an investigator in a constitutive attitude attempts to answer in the terms of and through an analysis of particular stretches of discourse. They are not perfunctory questions to be answered by the investigator before beginning the analysis but function instead as open-ended research questions he or she attempts to answer by analyzing particular stretches of discourse.

If particular stretches of discourse are the objects of study in a constitutive attitude, then the conclusions drawn from the analysis will be most revealing of those stretches of discourse. While we conventionally attribute considerable public power and influence to the writing of journalists, for instance, an analysis of their textual artifacts in a constitutive attitude will not reveal the shape and boundaries of events like public controversies or attitudes like public opinion. It may, however, reveal something about the shape of journalists' textual artifacts. Beyond this, it could motivate speculations about how news discourse might contribute to our experience of events like public controversies. Journalists, of course, are only one sort of writer or speaker whose texts might be fruitful objects of study for an investigator interested in approaching public controversy from a constitutive attitude. Dinner tables, press conferences, courtrooms, barber shops and beauty parlors, laboratories, legislative sessions, pubs, virtual online environments, and city buses – discourse from all of these places and many, many others could be relevant to the study of controversy in a constitutive attitude.



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