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Places in the polity of rhetoric : topoi, evolution, and the fragmentation of discourse.

Benjamin James Bickel Wetherbee
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PLACES IN THE POLITY OF RHETORIC:
TOPOI, EVOLUTION, AND THE FRAGMENTATION OF DISCOURSE

By

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B.A., The University of Michigan, 2008
M.A., Miami University, 2011

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To Marilyn Wetherbee

1922 – 2015

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But the dissertation constitutes a single node in the timeline of scholarly life. I am thankful for the scholars and mentors at Miami University, The University of Michigan, Northwestern Michigan College, and Northport Public School whose efforts paved my path to this point. These people are too many to list here, but I will single out Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson for her kind and sage guidance through my MA years and beyond, and my close friend John Mauk for first pulling the rose-colored lenses of rhetorical theory over my eyes.

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ABSTRACT

PLACES IN THE POLITY OF RHETORIC:
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This dissertation integrates classical rhetoric with postmodern understandings of textual fragmentation. "Places in the Polity of Rhetoric" follows two mutually constitutive avenues of inquiry, one of which stresses the importance of understanding textual fragments as rhetorical *topoi*—that is, as generative "places" that allow writers and speakers to economically evoke larger fields of cultural meaning in the space of a single word, phrase, or image. The other stresses the evolution of rhetorical culture that emerges through the interaction between human agents, who use these *topoi* for rhetorical ends, and discursive agents (*topoi* themselves) who use human rhetors to propagate among texts. Implicit in this project is a reassessment of the term *topos* in rhetorical history; in particular, I recover and extend Aristotle's largely overlooked metaphor of *topoi* as nodes of spatial orientation. Looking toward the future of rhetorical studies, my work also relates rhetoric to theories of memes and cultural transmission.

Because *topos* remains at once the most momentous and nebulous term in this project's theoretical arc, I begin with an overview of *topos* and its variants in rhetorical history. Chapter 1 notes several points of historical confusion about what *topoi* are what

they do before advocating for an essentially functional understanding of *topoi* as "places" that economically orient audiences among matrices of cultural meaning. I revisit Aristotle's use of the term in the *Rhetoric* and the *Physics*, stressing this overlooked understanding of contextual orientation that underscores Aristotle's notion of "place"— among which the classifications of "common" and "special" places, or topics, become not a pair of binary categories, but expressions of degree. I proceed through a sort of counter-history of topical theory centered on the idea of place and orientation, noting contributions from figures like Cicero, Quintilian, St. Augustine, Francis Bacon, Vico, and Joseph Priestly, while also stressing the friction implicit in the positions of those like Boethius, Ramus, Descartes, and Hugh Blair. The chapter concludes with a comparative look at Stephen Toulmin, Chaïm Perelman, and Kenneth Burke—three figures who exemplify the current range of available positions on topical invention.

Chapter 2, "Anatomy of a *Topos*: A Terminological Symposium," places *topos* in relationship to the keywords of *trope*, *fragment*, and, most importantly, *evolution*. I craft this chapter as a theoretical and conceptual toolbox designed to aid rhetorical critics in analyzing topical fragments as they relate to texts, contexts, human agents, and to other fragments. I bookend chapter 2 with two discussions of *topoi* and evolution. The first stresses the conceptual affordances of evolution in relation to other constitutive terms of rhetorical and discursive analysis, such as "construction" and "sedimentation." The second relates *topoi* back to Darwinian ideas of change and transmission, specifically by comparing topical theory to memetics, or meme theory, as espoused by thinkers like Daniel Dennett and Limor Shifman. The intermediate sections examine how different varieties of trope and fragment interact with the evolving sphere of rhetorical culture.

Recovering the active understanding of *trope* as "turn" or "direction," I describe how tropes like metaphor and metonymy describe different vectors of motion among related *topoi*. I also describe how different categories of rhetorical fragments—archetypes, quotations, god-terms, ideographs, and ideologemes—imply different relationships among *topoi* and their cultural contexts.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine specific *topoi*. Chapter 3, "Epideixis and/as Cultural Evolution," takes up the *topoi* of "gay marriage," as used by the religious right and its political opponents, and Occupy Wall Street's "we are the 99%" to exemplify how individual fragments push and pull on cultural and political formations of discourse. This chapter reconfigures the genre of epideictic, traditionally described as the rhetoric of "praise and blame," as the rhetoric of incremental sustenance and change at the macrocosmic cultural level—that is, of cultural evolution. I describe, moreover, how deliberative (pragmatic, political) and epideictic rhetorics often alloy together in the space of a single rhetorical text; *topoi* within such texts often aid rhetors' deliberative goals while also subtly revising the larger arena of semantic space from which deliberative rhetorics draw in the first place.

I return, in Chapter 4, "The Terministic Scream," to the example of Mitt Romney's "binders full of women," as well at the adage "good fences make good neighbors," widely attributed to Robert Frost. In this chapter, I draw on Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of "internally persuasive discourse" to analyze how certain *topoi* aurally imply the voices of others. "Voice," here, becomes a deeply social phenomenon, notable for its topical utility and connotative density: the "voices" we quote in our chosen *topoi* evoke adjacent stores of cultural knowledge, as well as subtle appeals to *ethos*. I

close the chapter by reflecting on the rhetorical ethics of proliferating dominant (straight, white, and male) voices through our chosen *topoi*.

My conclusion extends such questions of ethics and rhetorical praxis, which matter especially as we accelerate further into the increasingly fragmented digital age— the era of "likes," "shares," retweets, hashtags, and Internet memes. We find ourselves, that is, in the age of Amazon-review activism. Even if one works for Avery, the faint echoes of the Romney campaign now affixed to the noun "binder" probably offer little harm. But other fragments may echo more loudly. I stress that there is nothing fundamentally new about discursive fragmentation, which is why even ancient rhetorics can assist the current inquiry. But fragments now travel with greater velocity, reach, and fecundity than ever before. We, as human rhetors, find ourselves in increasingly dynamic interaction with transitory fragments of discourse; it matters both to political progress and cultural evolution which fragments we circulate, and how.

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SHOPPING FOR A BINDER

Imagine this. You need to resupply for the new semester. You need to organize. So, you open your laptop, fire up Amazon.com, select "Office Supplies" from the drop-down menu, and plug "binder" into the search bar. And binders fill your screen: *binders ... binders ... so many binders*. After scrolling through two or three two or three dozen results, you see just what you want. Your cursor lands on a product title: "Avery Durable View Binder with 2-Inch Slant Ring."

That should do it. You click. And to ensure this the binder for you, you scroll down to customer reviews. The first review you see rates the product five stars. *Good.* The review's title? "A presidential choice is the choice for me." *Wait—what?*

I refer, here, to a real review from a real Amazon user known as "Bazinga"—and, at that, a review fellow users have vetted scrupulously in tones of high esteem. "13,162 of 13,732 people found the following review helpful," Amazon proclaims. But "helpful" probably isn't the word for it. What this statistic really tells me is that a great many readers, through intention or chance, have come across a joke they appreciate and an argument they endorse. At least 13,162 people have felt themselves "in on it" with Bazinga, even if our hapless connoisseur of affordable office supplies is not. Sometimes a binder is just a binder—but no such luck for Avery's durable, two-inch model, which found itself at least briefly swept up in a deluge of political satire.

Bazinga's short text is less a review of a binders than a brief, sarcastic polemic about institutional sexism and American presidential politics. "As a woman," she tells us, "I'm not adept at making decisions that concern me. So when I need the right choice, I turn to the presidential candidate that KNOWS." She continues: "My education, my ideas, my opinions, my choices, please PLEASE keep them safely stored away here and far away from the men that might fear them (I mean, want to use them to hire me somedaynever)." Bazinga posted her review on October 17, 2012, a day after the second presidential debate between incumbent president Barack Obama and GOP challenger Mitt Romney. Romney "lost" that debate, as the media told it, largely through the utterance of a single gaffe: "binders full of women" (see Wetherbee, "Picking Up"; Shifman 122-27; Neuman; Parker). When the Republican challenger spoke this unfortunate phrase in response to a question about gender equity in the workplace, social media positively lit up with memetic glee; "binders full of women" was suddenly born as an Internet meme and proliferated rapidly through Twitter, Facebook, and Tumblr pages, inspiring countless riffs on its central theme (see "Binders"). In one image, *Lord of the Rings'* Boromir (as portrayed by Sean Bean) exasperatedly pronounces that "One does not simply fill binders with women"—a variation of *The Fellowship of the Ring's* quote, "One does not simply *walk* into Mordor." In another, one that Bazinga actually appends to her review (see fig. 1), a tough-as-nails *Dirty-Dancing*-era Patrick Swayze warns that "No one puts Baby in a binder."

Figure 1: Screen capture of Amazon user Bazinga's review of Avery binders; retrieved 14 Sept. 2015.

Bazinga's review represents the "viral" spread of these "binders" memes beyond their immediate venues of Facebook and Twitter and into the prototypically utilitarian genre of the Amazon product review. In this case, though, it mattered little that the review has nothing to do with Avery's two-inch slant-ring binders in particular: 13,162 readers welcomed the joke in spite of (or often *because* of—the breach of genre is part of the ironic appeal) its setting. In late 2012 especially, this discursive artefact tells us,

humorously criticizing the Romney campaign mattered more than researching the quality of Avery binders.

The sort of discursive event that "binders" represents, whereby a fragment of discourse separates from its text of origin and develops an independent life through replication across other texts, demands attention from scholars of rhetoric. In 2012, a series of Internet memes— "binders," as well as Romney's reference to *Sesame Street's* Big Bird and his comment about the "47 percent" of America Republicans can't win over, plus Obama's "you didn't build that" remark and his pointed "horses and bayonets" remark about Romney's outmoded military policy—significantly influenced the political landscape and the tenor of each candidate's campaign (see "2012"). Obama won, in significant part, because he won the "meme war." Bazinga's review is illustrative of this reality. Among the reasons her review received so many positive "upvotes" was, no doubt, her lightning-quick seizure of the *kairotic* moment following the debate—but also important, I suspect, is her shrewd inventory of the "binder" meme's connotations. Without actually repeating the phrase "binders full of women" (the reference is obvious enough—or was in October 2012), she disentangles the trap Romney had sprung on himself. She voices distrust of any "confusing electronic doohickey that I couldn't possibly understand" and concludes the review by "hurry[ing] home to make dinner." What Bazinga illustrates is that "binders full of women" harmed Romney not just through its unintentionally humorous phrasing, but because this stylistically ostentatious nugget intersected coherently with a number of preconceptions about Romney and the Republican Party—preconceptions of backwardness, misogyny, and misplaced nostalgia. The image of Romney's binder—itself a metonym for the androcentric corporate world,

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the sort of place that would dismissively "file away" its female employees—seemed to contain countless damning pages on the GOP nominee himself.

We should pay attention to fragments like "binders." Rhetorical theory, I hasten to add, has long heeded the circulation of discursive fragments: think of Aristotle's *idia* or "special topics" and Cicero's commonplaces, Erasmus' stylistic copia in the Middle Ages, Vico's axioms in the Enlightenment, and the "god-terms" of Kenneth Burke and Richard Weaver's, plus Michael Calvin McGee's "ideographs," in modern rhetoric. And today, the Internet foregrounds the speed and vibrancy of the memes like "binders," which behave as a particularly potent and ostentatious breed of what Burke once termed "timely topics" (*Rhetoric* 62). What I believe we still need and lack, however, is a full, systematic look at how rhetors and fragments (what we could call human and discursive agents) interact in the context of cultural change. We need to ask how the selection and circulation of discursive fragments bears on the textual composition of human cultures— and how culture and ideology, in turn, constitute for the rhetorician the arena that provides Aristotle's "available means of persuasion" (*Rhetoric* 1.2.1355b).

In this project, I stress that rhetorically potent fragments of discourse—for example, meme-worthy phrases like "binders full of women" and "we are the 99%," ideographic terms like "freedom" or "patriot," or connotatively dense visuals like the Confederate flag—should be understood as rhetorical *topoi*. By *topoi*, I refer to generative "places" rich in cultural connectivity; many discursive fragments, I am suggesting, circulate by virtue of their economical utility to human rhetors. In late 2012, one need not pronounce that Mitt Romney is an androcentric plutocrat representing the most callously elite, laissez-faire wing of a political party known for its misogyny and

backwardness—not when "binders full of women" suggests as much, and more, in the tidy space of four words, and without the discomfort of saying what one means with quite such brutal clarity.

In the economy of rhetoric, though, fragments like "binders," though, must either evolve or die out. The title of this project, *Places in the Polity of Rhetoric*, riffs on a phrase Charles Darwin fondly repeats in *On the Origin of Species*: "places in the polity of nature" (ch. 4; 82, 84, 90, 93). Describing the analogy between the selective breeding of animals and the "natural selection" of species, Darwin comes to this phrase:

> But how, it may be asked, can any analogous principle apply in nature? I believe it can and does apply most efficiently . . . from the simple circumstance that the more diversified the descendants from any one species become in structure, constitution, and habits, by so much will they be better enabled to seize on the many and widely diversified places in polity of nature, and so be enabled to increase in numbers. (84)

"Polity"—the etymological cousin of the *polis* in whose service Aristotelian and Ciceronian rhetoricians ply their trade—here implies an epistemological parallelism, for Darwin, between nature and human culture. As John Angus Campbell has demonstrated, metaphorical and analogical thinking figured heavily into Darwin's practices of rhetorical invention ("Charles Darwin"); here, Darwin suggests a productive similarity between civic life and natural life, one that hinges on the idea of "place" as a node of functional utility and contextual purpose. Fitness, for Darwin, entails the ability to "seize on" or occupy such nodes, and evolution results from the differential fitness among competing occupants.

Topos means "place," and I will argue that the rhetorical term is best understood in a manner surprisingly similar to what Darwin suggests. To say that *topoi* evolve (and I will argue they do) is to suggest that an unstable, shifting constellation of significant "places" composes the arena of our rhetorical polity. *Topoi* evolve, and human culture evolves in part through the interaction of human actors with specific *topoi*. It may often be productive to view such processes through the metaphor of "selection" in nature, just as Darwin borrowed the metaphor artificial selection to explain his own naturalistic theories (see *Origin* ch. 4; 66). But statements about the evolution of *topoi* need not be strictly metaphorical. The Darwinian philosopher Daniel Dennett notes that evolution universally requires three "conditions"—"variation," "heredity or replication," and "differential 'fitness'"—but that "this definition, though drawn from biology, says nothing specific about organic molecules, nutrition, or even life" (*Darwin's* 343). The sorts of fragments-as-*topoi* I describe in this project do vary in form and connotation, they do replicate from text to text, and they do exhibit differential "fitness" for rhetorical utility. (This last condition explains why "binders" waned once Romney more or less retreated from public life.) *Topoi*, moreover, cluster together into meaningful sub-constellations; the evolution of individual *topoi*, therefore, bears on the evolution of larger cultural formations, and human rhetors' use of certain *topoi* affects the textual makeup of culture itself.

A disclaimer is in order: I am well aware that the banner of Darwinism flies nowhere over collegiate humanities buildings—and that, in some circles, such a banner itself circulates as a *topos* of "biological determinism" and other unsavory connotations. As a student and teacher of rhetoric and writing, though, I am a proud humanist. My

career and my livelihood lie in the humanities. This project remains rooted primarily in histories and theories of rhetoric, a humanistic discipline, though it undertakes, especially in Chapters 2 and 3, what I think is a productive dialectic with Darwinian theories of evolution and memetics, which were born outside the humanities. My intention, of course, is not to ruffle the feathers of fellow humanists or invite accusations of imperializing "scientism"—though I realize I risk both. My optimistic conviction, rather, is that the strongest relationship between the humanities and sciences is not mutual antagonism, but mutual interest in inquiry. If Darwinian ideas can, in this case, elucidate rhetorical theory, rhetorical theory can (and should) reciprocally intervene in traditionally scientific conversations such as those on cultural evolution.

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fecundity than ever before. We, as human rhetors, find ourselves in increasingly dynamic

interaction with transitory fragments of discourse; it matters both to political progress and

cultural evolution which fragments we circulate, and how.

CHAPTER 1

TOPOS AND ORIENTATION

My principal keyword in this project is *topos*, and the emphasis of this first

chapter is historical. The phrase "history of *topoi*," though, implies at least three

meanings that I should parse before proceeding. One aligns squarely with the traditional

history of rhetorical invention as defined by key figures in the received tradition—the

millennia-long struggle for rhetoric's advocates to maintain epistemic legitimacy against

philosophy, science, religious orthodoxy, Enlightenment positivism, literature, and the

other familiar foes. This history is synonymous with the age-old tug-of-war between

homo rhetoricus and *homo seriosus*, to borrow Richard Lanham's terms (*Motives* 3-6; see

also Fish, *Doing* 482-85), a narrative within which questions arise about the *status*,

esteem, *role*, and *utility* of the *topoi*. What purpose do these "places" serve in the

assembly of arguments, the fracas of civic life, the generation of knowledge? Put another

way, "history of *topoi*" here means the history of how rhetoricians might understand,

deploy, and value *topoi* in the process of rhetorical invention. This history might take up

Aristotle's insistence on the universal utility of the *koinoi topoi* (*Rhetoric* 1.2.22 1358a)

and proceed through complications, rejections, and defenses of this claim by subsequent

rhetoricians. Such a history, complex as it may be, would most likely adhere to linear

anthrocentrism: Aristotle enumerated twenty-eight common topics, which were revised

varyingly by Cicero and Boethius, rejected by Peter Ramus, salvaged by Giambattista

Vico, and so forth. In this narrative, the *topoi* tend to rise and fall alongside invention itself—as, for example, the Ramist and belletristic devaluations of invention entail a flat dismissal of the *topoi* by rhetoricians like Ramus and Hugh Blair.

A slight revision yields "history of *topos*," singular, to emphasize the dynamism of the concept itself. This second meaning complements the first, certainly, but stresses the changing nature of what *topos* contextually means and does rather than *topos'* status at the hands of historical rhetoricians. Such abstract concepts, as Foucault puts it, endure processes of "displacement" and "transformation": "the history of a concept is not wholly and entirely that of its progressive refinement, . . . but that of its various fields of constitution and validity, that of its successive rules of use, that of the many theoretical contexts in which it matured" (4). Matters of *esteem* and *utility* crop up again, but the relationship between the concept and its context takes precedence over the actions of individual human actors. In the parlance of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, this would be a "philosophical" history of *topos*, their "philosophy" dealing with concepts as "centers of vibrations, each in itself and every one in relation to all the others": "All concepts are connected to problems without which they would have no meaning and which can themselves only be isolated or understood as their solution emerges" (*What Is* 23, 16). Thus, a historian of rhetoric might trace the "vibrations" around the concept of *topos—*the extent to which it has historically intersected with the various "problems" and neighboring concepts of rhetorical invention and analysis.

Finally, "history of *topoi*" might refer not to the esteem of *topoi* and invention as debated by historical rhetoricians, nor to the concept of *topos* and its concurrent problems, but to individual *topoi* themselves. Each of Aristotle's hundreds of "special"

deliberative, epideictic, and judicial topics in the *Rhetoric*, for example, itself represents a concept abstracted from the events of Athenian civic life: A historian of rhetoric might single out Aristotle's epideictic *topoi* of "justice, manly courage, self-control, magnanimity, liberality, gentleness, prudence, and wisdom" (1.9.5 1366b), and attempt to account for how such terms came to occupy the Athenian rhetor's arsenal of ceremonial oratory, and how they intersect more broadly with Athenian *doxa*. (Connotations of the phrase "manly courage" among Athenians, for example, surely differed from those among Spartans, who probably had little use at all for appeals to "liberality" or "gentleness" in their epideictic occasions.) Here, the driving questions become "how did this *topos* become useful for this occasion?" and "what kind of rhetorical work did this *topos* do?" This is quite different from, say, simply asking how Demosthenes used censorious *topos* of over-ambition against Philip of Macedon, or how Barack Obama employed the eulogistic *topoi* of tolerance and opportunity to praise his party's vision of America during the 2004 Democratic National Convention keynote address.

Rather, the history of *topoi* I have in mind would reflexively account for what Kenneth Burke would call the "agent-agency" ratio (*Grammar* 15) between the human rhetor (agent) and the resource, the *topoi*, enabling her agency. Or, to turn the screw further, we might consider the converse: that we can analyze *topoi* as agents, that they might use human rhetors as rhetors use *topoi*. In other words, a historian of rhetoric might analyze how a the *topos* of "tolerance" has survived and adapted in the Burkean "scene" of American political rhetoric—how the word "tolerance" and the unstable, shifting concept it denotes have continually made themselves available to American rhetors through the decades. The same historian might turn theorist to speculate about what

adaptations the "tolerance" *topos* might need to make in the future, and how the

implications of its use, in turn, might ramify though American civic discourse. If history,

as the term conventionally applies, too often teleologically disembarks in the here-and-

now—in Foucault's words, history insists on "discovering or constituting a meaning in

the inertia of the part and in the unfinished totality of the present" (*Archaeology* 11)—this

is largely why I finally opt instead for the term *evolution*. My thesis later in this project

will be that *topoi* evolve, and that by studying the evolution of individual *topoi* rhetorical

critics can develop a more robust and reflexive understanding of the dynamic relationship

between human agents, available *topoi*, and ideological context, without conceiving of a

corrective totality of rhetorical knowledge as our critical terminus.

If my project is headed toward a theory of topical evolution—this third sense of

topical "history"—I will first need a more conventional history of rhetoric to get there.

This project is not simply a "recovery" of the classical *topos* nor an attempt to import

classical theory wholesale into a latter-day setting, but it must begin with history insofar

as, to again quote Deleuze and Guattari, "every concept has a *history*, even though this

history zigzags, though it passes, if need be, through other problems or onto different

planes. In any concept there are usually bits or components that come from other

concepts" (*What Is* 18). In other words, there are *many* potential histories of *topoi*

because the concept of the *topos*—in its connotations, its inflections—has historically

borrowed from and informed so many neighboring concepts. Many historical

commentaries on *topoi*—including those by William Grimaldi, Paul Slomkowski, and

Sara Rubinelli to which I refer below—are essentially corrective. They focus on classical

topical theory, primarily Aristotle's, and aim to right scholarly and historical

misconceptions about the meaning of the ancients' work. They are essentially forensic in

their implications. I, too, will begin with Aristotle, and I too take great inspiration from

his work. I, though, am finally glad to revise Aristotle—or Cicero, or Quintilian—when

doing so serves the larger purpose of my project. "The trick to writing history," advises

Sharon Crowley, "is deciding which story to tell" (Review 245). That is: while not every

story is true, even the true ones are selective and motivated. The history I begin with, in

short, is the one is the one that stirs up the material needed to revitalize *topoi* as nodes of

rhetorical orientation. This is not the only "correct" understanding of the term, but it is

the one that, in my view, offers the most fruitful contribution to rhetorical criticism today.

       What is a topos? The term has proven particularly vexing, and introductions to

topoi customarily acknowledge its ambiguity. Edward P.J. Corbett, for example, laments

that Aristotle, from whom we inherit the earliest recorded commentary on *topoi*, never

explicitly defined the term in his *Rhetoric* or *Topica* (45-46), while subsequent

rhetoricians have offered up a field of definitions that are, in John Muckelbauer's words,

"confusing if not downright contradictory" (132). Thomas Conley, in surveying research

prior to 2000, notes that common uses of *topos* vary, but remain broadly hobbled by a

Boethian/Ramist emphasis on categorization and judgement, as opposed to invention

("What Counts"). To better understand the term *topos*, one can begin with key points of

the term's internal tension. I identify four:

       1. The metaphor of place. Commentaries on *topoi* tend to note the etymologically

assured metaphor of "place": *topoi* are those "locations" where rhetors might "go" in

order to invent an argument for a certain scenario; in Quintilian's famous words, they are

"secret places where arguments reside, and from which they must be drawn forth," similar to the "usual haunts" where a hunter stalks a specific prey (5.10.20-22). But orators are not literal bowmen, and there exists little consensus as to what rhetors should hope to "find" on such excursions (or if "find" is even be the proper verb—should it be "discover," "extract," "construct"?). One question worth further pursuing, then, is how locational metaphors historically and theoretically contribute to an understanding of *topoi*.

2. Two (incompatible?) definitions. From Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, we inherit a distinction between the universally heuristic "common" topics (*koinoi topoi*) and situationally specific "special" topics (*idia*), sets of useful concepts and assumptions that Aristotle allocates to deliberative, epideictic, and judicial oratory, but subsequent rhetoricians have applied more specifically to, for example, engineering reports and literary criticism (Miller and Selzer; Fahnestock and Secor; Wolfe). From Aristotle's dual understanding of *topoi* we inherit a broader dual understanding: *topos* today might refer to either (a) an argumentative heuristic or scheme, or (b) a shared assumption, motif, or stock argument that circulates in a given culture (see also Leff, "Topics"). It will behoove rhetoricians to inquire into the worth of each definition, and into their potential points of intersection.

3. Rhetoric versus dialectic. Aristotle's *Topica* is a treatise on dialectic, designed specifically for the logic-games likely practiced in Athenian academies during the author's lifetime. The *topoi* of the *Topica*, therefore, occupy a different caste than those listed for application in the enthymemes of public discourse in the *Rhetoric*. But all are

named *topoi*—and from Aristotle we inherit a debate over which art "owns" the *topoi*, a debate entailing a familiar tug-of-war between rhetoric and philosophy.

4. *The profusion of synonyms*. Muddling the situation further is a list of synonyms for *topos*—the Latin *locus* or "seat" (*sede*) of argument, the commonplace, Stephen Toulmin's warrant—none of which are quite synonymous. Variations exist among different translations of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* alone: George A. Kennedy deliberately retains "*topos*" for the common *topoi* but generally reserves the English cognate "topic" for the special. John Henry opts for "topic" across the board while W. Rhys Roberts elects "line of argument" for the common *topoi* and "commonplace" for the special. Which terms do rhetoricians wish to claim for which purposes?

I will circle back to these points of tension at the end of this chapter. They are, in a manner of speaking, themselves a set of *topoi*—or meta-*topoi*—heuristic placeholders that provide a sense of direction to the history I wish to tell and a sense of thematic coherence as I tell it. By attending first to such controversies that we inherit from rhetorical history, we can then begin to refine our conceptual vocabulary toward modern application. Below, I trace a conceptual history of the term *topoi* and its variants from classical times to recent scholarship. Though this history, I will advocate for functional (as opposed to formal) understanding of *topoi* as discursive nodes that economically orient audiences among larger fields of cultural knowledge. This understanding of *topoi* begins with a particular rereading of Aristotle, but I trace the idea through a series of subsequent rhetorical theory as well, projecting finally toward the present.

Aristotle and His Contemporaries

"Special" and "Common" Topics

Before I come to a rereading of *topoi* as "places" of orientation, it is important to

review the complexity surrounding Aristotle's use of the term. The concept of the *topos*

almost certainly predates Aristotle (384-322 BCE): it was, in Corbett's words, "in the air

when [Aristotle] wrote his *Rhetoric*. He merely picked it up and, as he usually did,

impressed it with his own stamp" (45). It is difficult to gauge how and to what extent

Aristotle and his contemporaries might have differed on the concept, but there is little

reason to suspect that Aristotle's chief rival, the sophistic pedagogue and speechwriter

Isocrates (436-338 BCE), understood *topoi* much differently than Aristotle. Though we

have lost Isocrates' primary treatise on rhetoric, derivations of the word *topos* appear

scattered throughout his recorded orations. For instance, In the *Helen*, which slightly

predates Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Isocrates refers to *topoi* twice, but suggests a slightly

different meaning in each instance, neither of which refers to a literal "place" or "region"

(Kennedy, *On Rhetoric* 44-45). In the first example, he writes that "although [the older

Sophists] so clearly have shown that it is easy to contrive false statements on any subject

that may be proposed, [some men] still waste time on this *commonplace*" (208.5;

emphasis added). The second instance refers to Theseus' high opinion of Helen: "But lest

I seem through poverty of ideas to be dwelling unduly upon the same *theme* and by

misusing the glory of one man to be praising Helen, I wish now to review the subsequent

events also" (216.38; emphasis added). Larue Van Hook's respective translations of

topos to "commonplace" and "theme" highlight, to begin, the difficulty modern scholars

have in parsing *topos* as a concept. More important, though, the *Helen* illustrates that

topos encompassed a large conceptual ground among Athenian rhetoricians. In the first instance, the term refers to a generative procedure, the sophistic method of inventing arguments on all sides of an issue. In the second, *topos*, confusingly translated as "theme," refers to the citation of an authoritative ancient "witness," much like Aristotle describes at the end of the *Rhetoric,* Book 1 (1.15.13-17; 1375b-1376a).

In Aristotelian parlance, Isocrates' first would be a sort of "common" *topos* and his second a "special" *topos*. The common topics, or *koinoi topoi*, are for Aristotle a set of twenty-eight "elements of enthymemes"—heuristic patterns rhetors can apply to probe any situation for arguments (*Rhetoric* 2.22.13; 1396b). These are, in the order Aristotle provides, arguments from opposites; grammatical form; correlatives; more and less; consideration of time; turning an accusation back against an opponent; definition; varied or ambiguous meaning of a word; division; induction; authority; subordinate parts; consequences; opposites; accusations of hypocrisy; consequences by analogy; results to causes; contrasted choices; identification of purpose with cause; reasons for and against; implausibilities; contradictions; causes of false impressions; cause and effect; a better, alternative plan; comparison and contrast; hypothetical mistakes; and meanings etymologically implicit in in an opponent's name (2.23; 1397a-1400b). These *topoi*, in a sense, represent a condensation of the dialectical *topoi* Aristotle enumerates at far greater length in his *Topica*, a work scholars largely recognize as a textbook for the dialectic logic-games practiced in Athenian academies like Plato's (Slomkowski 9-42; Rubinelli 1-8).

Scholars have made a great deal of the *koinoi topoi*, largely because this similarity to the dialectical "laws" enumerated in the *Topica* promise universal heuristic potential

that bridges the gap between philosophy and rhetoric (Grimaldi, *Aristotle* 2: 291; *Studies* 115-35). For Grimaldi, "The change from the particular to the general topics can be viewed . . . as a change from a static to a dynamic phase of topical analysis"; Aristotle's *koinoi topoi* presage the "hypothetical form of medieval logicians" like Boethius, a form that links antecedents and consequents through generalized principles (*Aristotle* 2: 291-92). In a similar vein, the *koinoi topoi* appeal to many scholars because they bring order and heuristic continuity to the bedlam of rhetorical praxis. For example, Sharon Bracci Blinn and Mary Garrett have employed the *koinoi topoi* as tools for cross-cultural analysis, A.C. Braet has aligned them with "argumentative schemes," and Frank J. D'Angelo has likened them to both "structural paradigms" ("Paradigms," "Topoi, Paradigms") and cognitive processes (*Conceptual* 40-54; see also "Evolution"). Conley has mapped the *koinoi topoi* onto Stephen Toulmin's conceptual scheme of claim, data, and warrant ("Logical Hylomorphism"), and a number of scholars have advanced the common *topoi* as tools of pedagogy, discursive competency, good citizenship, and critical thinking (Clark and Delia; Fleming; Jost; Winterowd; Yarborough; Zompetti).

Amid such enthusiasm over the *koinoi topoi*, two points are often overlooked. The first is that it is particularly injurious to conceive the rhetorical *koinoi topoi* as a mere translation or "dumbing down" of the dialectical *topoi* because the two categories serve different ends. Specifically, while the dialectical *topoi* suit logical syllogistic reasoning, in which debaters make explicit each possible premise in a belabored debating game, the rhetorical enthymeme must economically bypass much tacitly shared knowledge while integrating appeals to *ethos* and *pathos* as well as logical proofs (see Burnyeat; McAdon, "Probabilities"). Indeed, a close look at the *koinoi topoi* can support what Eugene Garver

has identified as the primacy of character in Aristotelian rhetoric: note the *koinoi topoi* of

reversed accusation, hypocrisy, and meanings derived from an opponent's name. All

serve less to demonstrate logical proof than to impeach the *ethos* of an adversary—even,

in the final case, to revert to a sort of cultured name-calling. In discussing the reversed

accusation *topos*, for example, Aristotle stresses that the rhetor should never "[reproach]

others for [failing to do] what he does not do—or would not do—himself" (2.23.7;

1398a). Such a *topos* falls beyond the purview of dialectic because dialectic deals with

logic and ideas, not the *ethē* of the speakers and the emotional attachments of audiences

to those speakers. In rhetoric, though, logical, ethical, and pathetic appeals effectively

fuse together in the fiber of the argument. In short, the *koinoi topoi* necessitate a more

elastic understanding of the rhetorical situation than their dialectical counterparts

because, as Garver has argued, Aristotelian rhetoric merges elements of both politics and

dialectic, and thus obliges rhetors to demonstrate goodwill and credibility as they

advance arguments (77).

    The second point—more of an omission in commentaries on Aristotle than an

overt misconception—is that Aristotle actually privileges the *idia*, or special topics, over

the common. Aristotle writes,

> [The common *topoi*] will not will not make one understand any genus; for
>
> they are not concerned with the underlying subject. As to [the specifics],
>
> to the degree that someone makes better choice of the premises, he will
>
> have created knowledge different from dialectic and rhetoric without its
>
> being recognized; for if he succeeds in hitting on first principles, the
>
> knowledge will no longer be dialectic or rhetoric but the science of which

[the speaker] grasps the first principles. Most enthymemes are derived

from these species that are particular and specific, fewer from the

common. (*Rhetoric* 1.2.21-22; 1358a).

This is a difficult passage because it seems, on one hand, to uphold the familiar division

in Aristotelian taxonomy between science, which comprises demonstrable certainties, and

the artful disciplines of rhetoric and dialectic, which deal in probabilities. On the other

hand, Aristotle's use of the term "enthymeme"—which he earlier defines as a "rhetorical

syllogism" (1.2.8; 1365b)—refocuses discussion to the realm of rhetoric, and the

admission that rhetors can furtively breach the boundary between rhetoric proper and

science suggests a fissure in the traditional boundaries of Aristotelian taxonomy itself.

The same uncertainty arises again when Aristotle begins his commentary on special

political *topoi*: "Insofar as someone tries to make dialectic or rhetoric not just mental

faculties but sciences, he unwittingly obscures their nature by the change, reconstructing

them as forms of knowledge of certain underlying facts, rather than only of speech.

Nevertheless, let us now say what is worthwhile to analyze, while leaving the full

examination to political science" (1.4.6-7; 1359b). Again, Aristotle here sounds reluctant

to wander into the realm of particulars lest he sap the integrity of political science by

ceding ground to rhetoric. And yet, the majority the *Rhetoric's* Book 1—twelve of its

fifteen chapters—deals in special *topoi*, as opposed to a single chapter in Book 2 that

exclusively addresses the *koinoi topoi*. Aristotle, too, refers to his detailed discussion of

emotion and character in the first seventeen chapters of Book 2 as a set of *topoi* (1.3.17;

1380b), so it not unreasonable to argue that his discussion of the *idia* encompasses those

pages as well (Kennedy, *On Rhetoric* 124n27; see also Grimaldi, *Studies* 147-51). In any

case, the space Aristotle allots to the special *topoi* bears out his thesis that most enthymemes will derive directly from the *idia*.

Kennedy describes the *Rhetoric's idia* as a set of "knowledge about politics, ethics, and psychology at the popular level that Aristotle regards as requisite for responsible and effective argument in public address" (*On Rhetoric* 51). Book 1 of the *Rhetoric* enumerates hundreds of such *topoi*, organized primarily around their utility in deliberative, epideictic, and judicial oratory—for example, deliberative topics centered on the idea of "good" (1.6; 1362a-1363b), topics of praiseworthy virtue in epideixis (1.9.1-27; 1366a-1367a), or judicial topics about wrongdoers and doing wrong (1.12; 1372a-1373a). Most of these *idia* are "artistic" *topoi* through which the rhetor invents his own persuasive materials, but Aristotle includes the "inartistic" proofs of laws, witnesses, contracts, torture, and oaths among his discussion of the special topics of judicial rhetoric. (Isocrates's citation of Theseus in the *Helen* is an example of an inartistic special topic.)

As Carolyn R. Miller explains, the special *topoi* as a whole exist in a "vulnerable," intermediary space between what Michael Leff has termed the "materialist" and "inferential" models of topical invention (Miller, "Aristotle's" 65; Leff, "Topics" 42; cf. c.f. Virno 34-40; McAdon, "'Special Topics'"). They are Aristotle's sustained effort to validate rhetoric as both a source of heuristic epistemology—though the common topics may represent this effort in its "purest" form—and to defend rhetoric against Plato's famous "antirhetorical topo[s]" that rhetoricians occupy a charlatan's trade with no concern for real knowledge (*Gorgias* 450c-458b; Fish, *Doing* 472). That is, the *idia* are "material" in that they derive from the ideological particularities of Athenian culture,

thus illustrating the thesis that rhetoricians must stay abreast of popular developments and opinions in their own societies—a thesis later propounded more forcefully by Cicero's Crassus in *De Oratore*. But the *idia* are not just a rote litany of stock arguments, either. Like the *koinoi topoi*, they matter precisely for their heuristic potential. When Aristotle, for example, meticulously subdivides the idea of "virtue" for application in epideictic oratory, he intends to key rhetoricians into the sets of connotations stemming from terms they might use—"courage" linking to manliness and wartime heroism, "liberality" linking to wealth and generosity, "justice" to fairness under the law, and so on (1.9.5-13; 1366b). Using the best term entails evoking the proper set of emotional connotations among the audience.

There is little doubt that Aristotle valued the *idia* highly, but Miller hypothesizes that the special topics have ebbed from contemporary scholarship because they "are the victims of the academicizing of rhetoric" ("Aristotle's" 65). In other words, when one reins in rhetoric away from the arena of public praxis and into the ivory tower she obviates the *idia* because special topics apply meaningfully only in an immediate sociocultural setting. To instead highlight the *koinoi topoi*, as many recent scholars have, is to align rhetoric more with philosophy and less with cultural studies, emphasizing the universal and timeless over the immediate and ephemeral. It is, moreover, somewhat convenient to fixate on the unchanging common topics since the special topics, by nature, exist in perpetual flux, requiring the rhetorician to also dabble heavily in politics, psychology, sociology, and popular culture. This inconvenient but important point surfaces in Dudley Bailey's 1964 essay "A Plea for a Modern Set of Topoi," in which the author entreats some ambitious rhetorician to "round up the patterns that . . . inform the

coherent use of our language, to place them in some sensible order, and to discuss their

logical implications" much as one might undertake "a laborious gathering of eggs" (114,

115; see also Bilsky et al.). The word "laborious" seems most operative. Aristotle's

original drafting of the *Rhetoric*, Books 1 and 2, was probably just that: a painstaking

attempt to recall and classify all the most vital premises and procedures applying to

specific situations in Athenian oratory.

"Place" and Orientation

As will become increasingly clear, it is my contention that a "laborious gathering"

of *topoi* is more challenging than even Bailey acknowledges. My reasons, though, begin

with a conceptual understanding of *topoi* that we inherit from Aristotle, and here it

becomes necessary to pause and dwell on the actual Aristotelian definition of *topos* in

order to draw out the intricacies of the spatial metaphor implied in the term. Aristotle

notoriously declines to define *topos* in either the *Topica* or *Rhetoric*, barring their

ambiguous classification as "the elements of enthymemes" (*Rhetoric* 2.22.13; 1396b).

Such opacity has spurred many historians of rhetoric and philosophy to extrapolate

definitions from his uses of the term in the *Topica* and *Rhetoric*. Slomkowski, for

example, synthesizes work by Aristotle and his pupil Theophrastus toward the conclusion

that Aristotelian *topoi* are "hypotheses in hypothetical syllogisms" (67), while Rubinelli

prioritizes the common topics to aver that Aristotle saw *topoi* as "*strategies of*

argumentation for gaining the upper hand and producing successful speeches" (13).

And yet, as both Miller and Muckelbauer have noted, Aristotle's frankest

discussion of the term *topos* comes not in the *Topica* or *Rhetoric*, but the *Physics* (Miller,

"Aristotelian"; Muckelbauer 123-41). To be sure, the *Physics* is not a treatise on rhetoric, nor should it be read as such. But neither is it a work of "hard science" in any modern sense; like much of Aristotle's corpus, it fuses science and philosophy, supplying a window to the "imaginative background" that encompasses Aristotle's work in general (Russell 203-06). The conceptual discussion of *topos*—"place"—in the *Physics* says nothing directly of rhetoric or dialectic, but it does elucidate for modern rhetoricians the Athenians' metaphorical connotations of the term when applied to rhetorical invention. In particular, it reveals Aristotle's understanding of such connotations. In Book 4 of the *Physics*, Aristotle conceives *topos* as a concept useful in understanding both the motion of physical bodies—understood as the changing relationship between bodies and places—and spatial orientation (4.1.4-5; 210a). The matter of orientation offers an especially revelatory parallel to the common and special *topoi* of the *Rhetoric:*

> And so, too, a "place" may be assigned to an object either primarily because it is its *special* and exclusive place or because it is "*common*" to it and all other things, or is the universal that includes the proper place of *all* things.
>
> I mean, for instance, that you, at this moment, are in the universe because you are in the air, which air is in the universe; and in the air because on the earth; and in a like matter on the earth because on the *special* place which "contains and circumscribes you, and no other body." (*Physics* 4.2.31-36; 209a-209b; emphasis to *special* and *common* added)

This final phrase expresses Aristotle's definition of *topos* proper, which he later iterates more precisely as "a surface-continent that embraces its content after the fashion of a

vessel" (4.4.29; 212a). *Topos*, for Aristotle, contrasts with both the "form" and "matter" of a body insofar as matter takes no specific shape and "form determines the thing itself, but place the body-continent" (4.4.5-14; 211b). In other words, a book comprises a certain set of matter—paper, ink, binding, and so forth—arranged into a certain stable shape, its form, to which we attach the label "book." The book's place, though, is not that form but the "envelope" of space (4.4.79; 211a) by which one describes its relation to other books, the library, the city, the earth, and so on. If "book" is the object's recognizable form, the book's *topos* is that object's location in the context of other discernible locations. It seems fair to surmise that this specific, "special," *topos* immediately surrounding the book corresponds roughly to the *idia* of rhetoric, while the broader, more abstract "common" *topoi* (library, earth, air, etc.) that contextualize the relative location of special places correspond to the *koinoi topoi* (Miller, "Aristotelian" 135; Muckelbauer 128-29). Aristotle's particular phrasing indeed invites such a comparison.

Because Aristotle's discussion of *topos* in the *Physics* culminates in its articulation and defense of the definition of place proper—that is, of "special" places—it becomes apparent that the philosopher's primary concern is again with the particular. He does not, for instance, take pains to taxonomize all possible areas of large, abstract "place," and instead refers passingly to universe, air, water, and earth as they become convenient. It would, again, be reckless to attempt any one-to-one equation between physical and rhetoric *topoi*, but historians of rhetoric miss an opportunity in ignoring the *Physics*. Read alongside this treatise, the *Rhetoric's* relationship between the special and common topics becomes clearer: the difference between common and special topics is

not, as Grimaldi suggests, a matter of dynamism and stasis, but one of locational scope. The *koinoi topoi* are those "common" domains that, by Aristotle's taxonomy, categorize all the available *idia*. In this sense, Isocrates' aforementioned citation of Theseus is a special *topos* that would fall into Aristotle's "common" domain of argument by authority, and possibly into the intersecting domain of argument by attention to the time. (Many of the common domains, it seems fair to assert, will intersect other common domains.) Conversely, the common sophistic *topos* that Isocrates mentions, that of probing any situation for contrasting binary arguments, would contain a wealth of *idia* about specific circumstances. These, in fact, are detailed in the Protagorean *Dissoi Logoi*: for example, "it is bad for the ship-owner if his merchant-ships are involved in collision or get smashed up, but good for the shipbuilders. Furthermore, it is bad for everyone else, but good for the blacksmiths if a tool corrodes or loses its sharp edge or gets broken to pieces" (§1). Returning to the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle's lopsided emphasis on the *idia* suggests he wanted students first to familiarize themselves with a broad range of specific *topoi* pertinent to Athenian culture, but then develop the ability to "go looking" for additional ones in the proper "common" domains if need be.

Having clarified the relationship between the *koinoi topoi* and *idia* through the *Physics*, it becomes easier to return to questions of definition. Rubinelli's understanding of *topoi* as "strategies of argumentation" seems to privilege the common topics in a manner consonant with later rhetoricians and philosophers, but less with Aristotle himself. Slomkowski's definition of *topoi* as "hypotheses in hypothetical syllogisms" narrows the focus but retains emphasis of form, while Aristotle, again, contrasts "place" with form. The same criticism could be leveled against many other formalist discussions

of Aristotelian *topoi* (e.g. Braet; Conley, "Logical Hylomorphism"; Dyck). Against such approaches, Aristotle's understanding of *topos* might compel a more dynamic and contextual definition; if physical "places" are "envelopes" of space surrounding bodies and orienting perception to their location vis-à-vis other bodies, Aristotelian rhetorical *topoi* might be understood as discursive "places" in the cultural polity that both circumscribe rhetorical energy and orient audiences to other nodes of rhetorical significance. This definition resembles Ralph Cintron's understanding of *topoi* as culturally specific and practice-based "storehouses of social energy" that "organize our sentiments, beliefs, and actions in the lifeworld" ("Democracy" 100; see also Arthos; Leff, "Up from Theory"; Conley, "What Counts" 584). The likening of *topoi* to "storehouses" evokes Aristotle's own comparison between *topos* and "vessel" in the *Physics*—place is like "an immovable vessel" and vessel "a movable place" (4.4.15; 212a)—but Muckelbauer is quick to note, and Cintron would likely agree, that "*topos* is far more dynamic than a static vessel; it does not simply receive an object, but 'exerts an influence' and has a certain force" (130). Rather than "an effect of an external demarcating force called rhetoric or writing," Muckelbauer continues, "Aristotle indicated that *place is the demarcating force itself*" (131).

 Topos, thus, is not discursive form itself, but the place form inhabits in order to forge a coherent relationship with rhetorical culture. More than any other point—more than the division between the special and common—this understanding of *topos* as the mediator between form and cultural context is Aristotle's most valuable lesson on *topoi*. Toward clarifying this point a step further, an additional word is in order about the topical process of orientation as it applies in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, and more generally.

On the former front, the spatial metaphor of *topos* supports an expansion of what "count" as special topics in Books 1 and 2 of the *Rhetoric*. As I note above, the *idia* of deliberative, epideictic, and judicial rhetoric in Book 1 are traditionally considered special *topoi*, and some scholars defend the discussions of emotions and character in Book 2 as such too. Yet, there is good cause to view Aristotle's maxims in Book 2, chapter 21—which are rarely referred to as *topoi*—as examples of special topics par excellence (see Billig 229). A maxim is an assertion, Aristotle tells us, but one that speaks to generalized courses of action rather than particulars about individuals (2.21.2; 1394a). He quotes Euripides for the example, "There is no one of men who is free"—a maxim that becomes a proper enthymeme when followed by another premise, "For he is a slave of money or of chance" (2.21.2; 1349b). Maxims, thus, can exist as traditional "elements of enthymemes" like other *topoi* or they can "be enthymematic but not part of an enthymeme"—the sort that is "most well liked" (2.21.6; 1349b). Many maxims, in other words, *imply* complete enthymemes by economically linking to tacitly shared information or beliefs through a single, memorable statement. A latter-day maxim like "Freedom isn't free," for example, ties neatly into a set of American assumptions about our own unalienable liberties, the sacrosanct value of military service, and the connection between the military abroad and preserving freedoms at home. Such maxims are "most well liked," as Aristotle puts it, because the lay public can contribute its own knowledge and belief to complete the enthymemes they imply, thus completing a circuit of identification. By employing a single catchy aphoristic form to orient audiences amid a larger matrix of cultural-political space, Aristotelian maxims illustrate with especial

lucidity the function of Aristotelian *topoi* in general. Wherever this orienting function operates, the Aristotelian *topos* is at work.

This lesson from the *Rhetoric*, the idea that the briefest of discursive forms can carry out the important rhetorical work of orienting audiences, is worth generalizing. "Orientation," as Burke tells us, "is . . . a bundle of judgments as to how things were, how they are, and how they will be" (*Permanence* 14). Signs "orient" us, key us into these "bundles of judgments," insofar as "[e]ven a so-called 'single' sign (such as a specific pitch, or color, or form) is in reality a complex of events interpreted by the senses as a unit" (12). A saying like "freedom isn't free," in other words, coheres as "a unit," but the difference between interpreting such a maxim as a single "body" or form and interpreting it as a *topos* lies in the question of orientation, of how such a maxim also locates audiences in a larger context. So it is that Aristotelian *topoi* transcend static formalism: In the words of Richard Leo Enos and Janice Lauer, "*Topoi* . . . may appear as dormant 'places' but can also energize ideas through the socially shared understanding of . . . modes of relational thought" (81). By mislabeling *topoi* as static or "dormant," rhetoricians elide the generative ability of *topoi* to relationally link to other nodes of rhetorical importance. In this sense, the spatial metaphor is not just a convenient way to speak of Aristotelian *topoi*, but the very key to their epistemological vitality.

Roman Rhetoric and the "Material" *Topoi*

The discussions of *topoi* (*loci*, *sedes* of argument) in Roman rhetorical handbooks owes a heavy debt to Aristotle, poses important revisions to the system Aristotle offers. But these revisions, I believe, hold intact the important metaphor of spatial orientation.

The Romans' most momentous alteration to topical theory is the refiguring of *topoi* (or

"commonplaces") as discrete elements derived from the "material" of popular cultural—a

sort of expansion of Aristotle's *idia* into a comprehensive and elastic system. The

primary players as I turn to ancient Rome are, predictably, Cicero (106-43 BCE), the

lawyer, statesman, and provocative theorist of rhetoric as a broad meta-discipline, and

Quintilian (38-100 AD), the influential pedagogue and Ciceronian disciple. Cicero's

writings on rhetoric sum to both a theory of oratory that takes great inspiration from

Aristotle, seen, for example, in *De inventione* and *Topica*, and an ethical meta-theory,

seen most prominently in *De oratore* and *Orator*, that explores how rhetors can and

should responsibly deploy the strategies and devices of rhetoric. This meta-theory, as

Jeffrey Walker argues, is distinctly Isocratean in its insistence that "a rhetorical education

must include a philosophico-literary education" that deeply acquaints the orator with a

breadth of knowledge pertaining to "life and culture" (81). Cicero's Crassus, the author's

primary mouthpiece in the dialogue of *De oratore*, "advocates [what] resembles the old

sophistic *paideia*, or Isocratean *paideia*, which after Plato and Aristotle had been

displaced . . . into the more specialized subfields of the philosophic schools, leaving

'rhetoric' only the techniques of practical oratory in courts and assemblies" (Walker 81).

Thus, while Cicero, along with the anonymous author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*,

advances a more-or-less Aristotelian theory of topical invention, he asserts much more

frankly than his precursor that the responsible orator should also dutifully study literature,

philosophy, and culture. Aristotle, again, dances around this point while enumerating his

idia in the *Rhetoric*, but nowhere does he expresses it directly, perhaps for fear of

aligning himself too neatly with Isocrates and his school of quasi-sophistic rhetorical pedagogy.

Cicero's contributions to topical theory are best understood not only as an extension of Aristotle's, but also, and more immediately, an extension of the work of first-century rhetorician Hermagoras and his ideas as adopted in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, the anonymously authored earliest surviving treatise on Roman Rhetoric (Walker 59-65). Like Cicero's *De inventione*, the *Ad Herennium* concerns itself principally with judicial rhetoric, though its general conclusions extend to the deliberative and epideictic as well. Concerning *topoi*, the author makes one pivotal and influential revision to Aristotle's vocabulary: he redefines the parameters of "common" and "special": "The special topics [*loci proprii*] are those which only the prosecution, or only the defense, can use. The common topics [*locus comunes*] are those which are used now by the defense, and now by the prosecution, depending on the case" (2.9). Gone, then, is Aristotle's hard-and-fast distinction between the specific places of the *idia* and the broad regions of *koinoi topoi*, "special" and "common" instead referring to a *topos'* range of utility to different rhetors.

This lexical revision yields a pair of long-term effects: First, it pushes talk of "special topics" to the periphery of rhetorical theory, the term now denoting statements of specific utility such as the prosecutor's ethical premise that "wicked men ought not to be pitied" (2.9). Cicero, who perhaps finds the *Ad Herennium's* distinction between special and common trifling, does away with the term "special topics" altogether in *De inventione*, referring to the prosecutor's same admonishment against pitying the wicked as a sort of common topic (2.51; see also Leff, "Topics" 28). Cicero's reasoning, perhaps,

was that, although a premise like "one should not pity the wicked" aids prosecutors especially, it circulates widely enough in common Roman culture in general to warrant that label (see Leff, "Commonplaces" 446).

Second, meanwhile, the term "common topics" (or "commonplaces") comes to denote a set of such specific, culturally momentous premises that resemble Aristotle's *idia* far more than his *koinoi topoi*. Commonplaces, for Cicero, are "arguments which can be transferred to many cases" for the purposes of "amplifying" either undisputed or doubtful statements within a "probable line of reasoning" (2.48). Cicero writes:

> A speech . . . is occasionally rendered distinguished or brilliant by introducing common topics and some topic backed up by arguments when the audience is already convinced. In fact that is certainly the moment when it is permissible to say something "common," when some passage peculiar to the case has been developed with great care, and the spirit of the audience is being refreshed for what is to come, or is being roused to passion now that the argument has been concluded. (2.49)

Even in a judicial context, then, the Ciceronian commonplace plays an epideictic role. Its primary purpose is not to advance a case in terms of "pure" logic, but to ground such arguments in the cultural resin wrought of shared assumptions—again, to orient. Commonplaces work to "amplify" logical arguments, Cicero stresses, insofar as audiences will invest themselves emotionally in appeals to "common sense" more so than pure logical deduction and identify with rhetors on the basis of shared assumptions (see Leff, "Burke's Ciceronianism"). From the Romans, then, modern rhetorical theory inherits the notion of "commonplace" as a shared idea, statement, or assumption. Latter-

day definitions of the term reflect Cicero's understanding accurately: Commonplaces are, in David Bartholomae's words, "culturally or institutionally authorized concept[s]" that supply their "own necessary elaboration" (63). Or as Crowley has put it, they are "[a]rgumentative canards" or statements that circulate within ideology (*Toward* 50, 70-75; Crowley and Hawhee 96-108; see also Goss).

Much like Aristotle's compendium of *idia*, the *Ad Herennium* and *De inventione* each aggregate a set of commonplaces useful to aspiring rhetors, though the scope of the Roman handbooks is limited principally to judicial rhetoric. As such, these books tend to organize commonplaces in the style of the sophistic *Dissoi Logoi*, offering one topic useful to the prosecution and a counter-topic useful to the defense. For example: one of Cicero's common topics "attacks the villainy of a man who, attempting to arrogate the control of not only acts but words, both does what he pleases and calls his deed by whatever name he pleases" (*De inventione* 2.55). A defendant might parry this charge, Cicero advises, through "[t]he common topic . . . in which he expresses indignation that the prosecutor attempts to put him in jeopardy not only by distorting facts but even by altering the meaning of the language" (2.56). Here again, as in Aristotle's *topoi*, the importance of *ethos* and *pathos* resurfaces: Cicero's commonplaces are meant not just to advance logical arguments, but to bolster and impeach credibility, as well as stir the apt emotions. In Leff's words, these commonplaces "are complete products that integrate logical argument, emotional appeal, and style into a single structure" ("Commonplaces" 448). It becomes clear, however, that while a set of commonplaces cumulatively cohere into an ideological worldview, they map out no logically airtight set of beliefs. Rather, as Michael Billig notes, they expose the "contrary" nature of "common sense" (234).

Bearing out the either-or tradition of Protagorean logic, the *Ad Herennium* and *De inventione* tend to pair "common-sense logoi and their equally common-sensical anti-logoi," mapping out a rhetorical landscape of contradictory themes—justice versus mercy, bravery versus foolishness, and so on—for aspiring rhetors to navigate (Billig 235).

The sophistic point-counterpoint organization of Ciceronian commonplaces around the judicial matters of persons and things indicates a shift away from the dialectically inflected common topics of Aristotle: In Leff's words, "The focus of [Cicero's] system shifts from the discovery of inferential connectives to the discovery of materials for arguments" ("Topics" 29), although locational and spatial metaphors still inform Romans' discussion of topics. Cicero, in his *Topica*, refers to *topoi* as the "seats" (*sedem*) from which arguments are drawn (1.7), while Quintilian, in *Institutio Oratoria*, makes a lengthy analogy between topical regions and hunting grounds:

> For just as all kinds of produce are not produced by every country, and as you will not succeed in finding a particular bird or beast, if you are ignorant of the localities has its usual haunts or birthplace, as even the various kinds of fish flourish in different surroundings, . . . so not every kind of argument can be derived from every circumstance, and consequently our own search requires discrimination. . . . [I]f we know the circumstances which give rise to each kind of argument, we shall easily see, when we come to a particular "place," what arguments it contains. (5.10.20-22)

Quintilian, here, nods back to Aristotle's *koinoi topoi*, to the topical "region" as a heuristic tool designed to probe a given circumstance for possible arguments. But whereas Aristotle's adapted his "common" domains from the tools of dialectical debate, Quintilian organizes his "regions" or "haunts" around cultural and regional specificity in a manner consonant with the Ciceronian model of "material" topics, whereby the metaphor of "raw materials," as well as that of location, informs topical invention (*De inventione* 1.34). Particularly, it is significant that Quintilian refers to the political region of the nation-state. His metaphor emphasizes regional custom—that is, *topoi* derived from attention to the particulars of a literal place or polity—that have no necessary parallel in dialectical debate. One implication of Quintilian's metaphor is that the effective rhetor must largely construct his argument from the material *doxa* shared by his audience, again reflecting the *topos* as a cultural reflector—a device used to economically sum up the *ethos* of the polis.

Quintilian also advances what has itself become a commonplace caution about the use of *topoi*: that an overreliance on topics can leave students of rhetoric "fettered by . . . rigid laws" and blind to the particularities of a given case (5.10.100-01). This is much the point Vico would later raise in his lectures on rhetoric (*Art of Rhetoric* §13) and that Northrop Frye would echo in *Anatomy of Criticism*: "[*T*]*opoi* or rhetorical commonplaces . . . are so dull when stated as propositions, and so rich and variegated when used as structural principles in literature" (103)—an insight that might be applied not only to literature, but imaginative discourse in general. The concern, as Quintilian first voiced it, appears to be twofold. First, Quintilian cautions against the commonplace so common it becomes a bald cliché: such commonplaces "will seem to have been tacked on to the

speech, not interwoven into its texture, either because it is out of keeping with the circumstances or like most of its kind is inappropriately employed not because it is wanted, but because it is ready for use" (2.4.30-31; see also Billig 229-30). For present purposes, it bears further emphasis that such clichés will come to lack the vibrancy of orientation. Second, Quintilian's concerns align with a Ciceronian skepticism toward logical formalism in topical reasoning. In the *Topica*, a later work ostensibly designed to recapitulate Aristotle's own *Topica* for Roman audiences, Cicero places greater emphasis on arguments from definition, cause and effect, and so forth, thus lending the treatise's topical system a "more 'dialectical' cast than the theory contained in *De inventione*" (Leff, "Topics" 30). Yet, Cicero's categorization of all such topics under the heading of rhetorical invention signals a project quite different from Aristotle's, an attempt to "unify" rhetoric and dialectic in a manner that privileges rhetorical concerns over the purely philosophical (Leff, "Topics" 31; Stump 22-23). In the context of Cicero's revision, Quintilian's concern about overreliance on topics indicates a need to keep the dialectical elements of rhetorical invention in check—to maintain sight on the particulars of a case and its rhetorical context.

Cicero and Quintilian offer no additional conceptual meta-theory in the vein of Aristotle's *Physics*, but it is worth nodding, in conclusion, to the theory of mnemonic *loci* discussed in the *Ad Herennium*. In Roman rhetorical mnemonics, the orator mentally constructs an elaborate series of images and settings designed to help navigate difficult orations from memory. This is a rather different art from that of topical invention, but the *Ad Herennium's* author does use the same word, *loci*, to name both rhetorical commonplaces and the imaginative "backgrounds" that aid mnemonic recall. The *Ad*

Herennium's commentary on memory, thus, proves useful in parsing the Romans'

connotations of the term *loci.* It reads, "The artificial memory incudes backgrounds [*loci*]

and images. By backgrounds I mean such scenes as are naturally or artificially set off on

a small scale, complete and conspicuous, so that we can grasp and embrace them easily

by the natural memory—for example, a house, an intercolumnar space, a recess, an arch,

or the like" (3.29). The "image," then, is to be the subject of the memory that rests within

a contextualizing locus much like script is arranged on a tablet or papyrus (3.30). Rhetors

should "equip ourselves with a large number of backgrounds," unobtrusive places that

suit the images they house without distracting from those images themselves (3.30, 3.32).

A number of similarities, thus, emerge between mnemonic and inventional *loci*: the

orator's need to develop rhetorical competence through a copia of *loci*; the need for *loci*

to suit subject matter; the need to balance an "amplifying" *locus* with its logical or

imagistic counterpart. But perhaps most valuable, as in Aristotle's *topoi*, is the idea that

the *locus orients* the orator and audience: the image of a man in a vacuum might mean

nothing, while the same man in a courtroom or church might summon for the orator the

necessary argument about his guilt, piety, or so forth. Obvious differences between

invention and memory aside, it is worth entertaining the thesis that commonplaces are

analogous to their mnemonic counterparts, that they orient audiences in the chaos of

cultural space. "The places of memory and invention," as Richard McKeon has argued,

are both "sources of invented novelty and of established fact by faculties of symbolic

imagination, factual memory, discursive reason, and intuitive understanding" (207).

Insofar as such "established fact" derives from social consensus and shared experience,

commonplaces help rhetors and audiences navigate their collective memory together. In

this sense, while commonplaces may be material, they are not *only* material, but also architectural, cultural, semiotic—materials arranged to let audiences know where they stand in a rhetorical world. In this sense, modern rhetorical theory benefits from close attention to the Roman theory of commonplaces, but that theory in turn benefits from the meta-theoretical idea of "place" that Aristotle originally provided.

Boethius to the Enlightenment

The history of rhetorical invention—and *topoi* along with it—is famously rocky between the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment. While Cicero's effective synthesis of rhetoric and dialectic would deeply influence Renaissance humanists (Leff, "Topics" 31; Conley, *Rhetoric* 111-14), the specifically rhetorical tradition of topical invention entered a decline beginning the early Middle Ages, a decline that can be traced roughly to the work Boethius (480-524), the neo-Platonist analytic philosopher and so-named "last of the Romans" (Stump 13). Boethius wrote two treatises on topics: *In Ciceronis Topica*, a lengthy, meandering commentary on Cicero's *Topica* and other works; and *De topicis differentiis*, a brief, curt formulation of the philosopher's own understanding of topical theory, and one that projected a strong influence on the thinking of the Middle Ages. The former is notable for a slight revision to the world of Ciceronian rhetoric. While Boethius generally reveres Cicero as a patriarch of Roman thought, he, wittingly or not, injects a heavy dose of philosophical formalism into Cicero's topical system. Where Cicero and Quintilian had stressed, to varying degrees, the primacy and particulars of the rhetorical situation itself, Boethius stresses philosophical forms and boundaries around what "counts" as argument: "Many things produce belief, but because they are not reasons,

they cannot be arguments. . . . For example, sight produces belief in things seen, but because sight is not a reason, it cannot be an argument" (*In Ciceronis Topica* 1.276-77). Boethius appears interested in limiting the scope of topics to dialectical deliberation; as he excises from topical invention many methods for reaffirming belief that already exists (1.277), he deprives the art of the epideictic, identity-building quality suggested by discussions of commonplaces in the *Ad Herennium* and *De inventione*. Where Cicero once advised "saying something common" as a way to amplify a speech and galvanize an audience, Boethius banishes this sense of "commonplace" from the proper domain of topical invention. Such exclusion has had a lasting effect, reifying the primary association of topics with dialectical formalism (see Bird) and ushering an entire tradition of specific topical tools—from Aristotle's *idia* to Roman commonplaces—into a quarantine zone.

What Cicero and the *Ad Herennium* refer to as a commonplace, Boethius derisively calls a "sophistic" topic, and claims "is not even rightly called an argument" (*De topicis differentiis* 1.1182A). This is because topics, according to the system Boethius develops in *De topicis differentiis*, come in exactly two forms, neither of which the commonplace fits: First, "maximal propositions . . . that . . . need no proof from without" are a variety of topic upon which syllogisms are constructed (1.1185B). Such propositions differ from commonplaces in their logical certainty. Whereas, as Billig stresses, Ciceronian commonplaces reflect the porousness and frequent contradiction of "common sense," Boethius lists as topics abstract propositions such as, "a thing was only capable of what its natural form allowed" (1.1190A). Second, such maximal propositions function under a set of *differentiae* similar to Aristotle's *koinoi topoi*: categories like from the parts, from definition, from similars, or in the case of the example above, from the

form (see *De topicis differentiis* 127-28). Boethius reinstates the supremacy of logic over rhetoric; as Leff shrewdly puts it, his project's "effect is less to synthesize Aristotle's dialectic with the Ciceronian system than it is to collapse the latter into the former" ("Topics" 38). In the fourth and final book of *De topicis differentiis*, Boethius accounts for rhetoric, suggesting that the primary difference between dialectic and rhetoric is that the former deals in "theses"—matters of universal truth—while the latter deals in "hypotheses, that is, questions hedged in by a multitude of circumstances" (4.1205C-D). Boethius maintains, though, that "[d]ialectical and rhetorical places are strictly analogous. . . . The conclusion is that rhetoric is a subset of dialectic, more limited in scope, in that its proper realm of operation is the particular, whereas dialectic deals in universals" (Moss 17). Rhetorical proofs are merely dialectical proofs tailored to a given circumstance. By expunging "sophistic" *topoi* of orientation from the mechanics of dialectic and rhetoric alike, Boethius also erases the richness of Aristotle's spatial metaphor and its influence on Cicero and Quintilian.

The dialectical formalism of Boethius was, however, not the only theory informing Early Medieval rhetoric. Inspired in large part by Boethius' precursor St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), who famously unified of scriptural argument with classical rhetoric in the final book of his *De doctrina christiana*, a new kind of rhetorical "place" began to emerge, often associated with use of scriptural excerpts as *topoi* in Christian rhetoric (what St. Thomas Aquinas would later term *loci theologici*), but extending to the wide-ranging use of commonplace-books between the Middle Ages and Renaissance (Moss 21). Attitudes toward rhetoric in the Early Middle Ages saw a tension between the dialectician Boethius and the largely Ciceronian Augustine, for whom

rhetoric's importance superseded dialectic, insofar as "only in rhetoric—the art of Christian eloquence—could the word of God be adequately treated" (Conley, *Rhetoric* 81). Cicero was, of course, not Christian, but a shared commitment to artful persuasion and the use of textual-cultural authority provided consubstantial ground between Cicero and early Christian rhetoricians. Cicero's *topos* of citing virtuous authority proved particularly appealing (*Topica* 20.78; Moss 21). Of course, this practice of rhetorically invoking authoritative quotations endures in modern rhetoric, be it religious—where, for instance, scriptural touchstones provide links between "timeless" Biblical authority and latter-day issues—or secular, where the words of quintessentially American figures from Jefferson to Lincoln to King to Reagan serve to ground diverse arguments in the "common sense" of American virtue and exceptionalism. Thanks largely to the legacy of Boethius, such quotations are rarely counted as *topoi*. The insights of Aristotle and Cicero, though, suggest it may be just and productive to regard them as such, insofar as authoritative quotes economically firm up notions of "common sense" and ideologically orient audiences.

Between the Middle Ages and Renaissance, such quotations were often compiled in commonplace-books—a subject I lack the space to treat thoroughly, but whose history Ann Moss recounts impeccably in *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought*. The spirit of commonplace-books also derived from the Stoic philosopher Seneca and the tradition of the *hupomnemata*, or "the formation of the self across . . . scattered *logoi*" (Foucault, "Writing" 238). Seneca, in particular, wrote that we should "follow . . . the example of bees," who fly from flower to flower extracting the necessary parts for the making of honey-comb (*Epistles* 2: 84). This metaphor, and the

related one of the Medieval *florilegia* or gathering-of-flowers, sum to an understanding or rhetorical self-development that echoes the Ciceronian and Isocratean concern for the knowledgeable, well-rounded orator. This orator, as Cicero says, combines a wealth of commonplaces—the "honey" or "flowers"—with the wisdom to assemble them into a beautiful whole (*Orator* 15.48, 70.234). The tradition of commonplace-books departs, though, from that of public civic oratory insofar as commonplace-books were often private compositions designed for quiet self-improvement or amusement by individuals with little ambition to appear as public rhetor (see Morson, *Words* 248-51). In this sense, they differ drastically from the pragmatically oriented handbooks of Roman rhetoric. The point to stress, however, for the historian concerned with *topos* and its synonyms, is that the tradition of commonplace-books has strengthened the idea of the commonplaces as authoritative or otherwise noteworthy fragments of discourse—thus fusing *ethos* and *logos* in a short space. This understanding of "commonplace" persisted, to varying degrees, as an undercurrent even as rhetorical invention fell into general disfavor.

The Boethian decline of rhetoric in the Middle Ages eventually gave way to a famous recovery of classical texts, chiefly Cicero's, during the Renaissance, when humanists returned to newly rediscovered works like *De inventione* with vigor (Conley, *Rhetoric* 111-14). Thus it is, for example, that Desiderius Erasmus' (1466-1536) *De copia*—though not a treatise on topics—evinces the Ciceronian spirit of rhetorical abundance. The lasting legacy of Renaissance philosophy, however—exemplified by figures like Peter Ramus (1515-72), Francis Bacon (1561-1626), and their Enlightenment successors Rene Descartes (1596-1650) and John Locke (1632-1704)—elevated dialectic and scientific empiricism at the expense of rhetorical epistemology (see Vancil). Ramus'

Arguments in Rhetoric Against Quintilian acerbically defames the classical rhetorical

tradition, beginning with Aristotle, for overstretching the epistemic reach of rhetoric.

Invention and arrangement, Ramus avers, belong properly to dialectic, while rhetoric

should comprise only the ornamental canons of delivery and style. He faults Aristotle,

too, for overcomplicating the question of invention:

> [Aristotle] entangled the arts of invention in as many ways as we have
>
> them now, despite the fact that only one general theory—separated into
>
> the ten topics of causes, results, subjects, adjuncts, opposites,
>
> comparisons, names, divisions, definitions, and witnesses—could be
>
> adapted to make clear most easily and plainly all questions, all parts of
>
> speech, and all finally all subjects. (111)

Implicit in Ramus' condensation of Aristotle's *Topica* down to ten words is a flat

dismissal of anything resembling the *idia* of the *Rhetoric* the commonplaces of the

Romans—along with the rich functions of cultural orientation either might imply—since

such culturally-discursively specific topics spill beyond the boundaries of dialectic. The

Ramist perspective held sway for centuries, codified notably in Antoine Arnauld and

Pierre Nicole's influential *Logic or the Art of Thinking* (1662)—better known as the *Port-*

Royal Logic—which dismisses rhetorical topics as needless on the grounds that "nature

alone furnishes us a general knowledge of reasoning that is sufficient for us to understand

what is said about it in the topics" (181). Implicit especially in Ramus and the *Port-Royal*

authors' arguments, but also in those of the Medieval logicians like Boethius, is an elitist

distaste for the vulgarity of popular culture and an aversion to the idea that rational men

need to verse themselves in the opinions and discourses of "common sense." Where

Aristotle grudgingly accepted the blurred boundaries between scientific and rhetorical knowledge, the Enlightenment erected a clear hierarchy that relegated topics to an abridged list of categories or banished them altogether. So it is that a comprehensive reclamation of the Ciceronian commonplaces feels edgy and the expansion of *topoi* to fully account for the Aristotelian metaphor of "place" can feel borderline heretical: anyone to make these theoretical moves still has to wade upstream against Boethian and Ramist currents.

Of the late Renaissance philosophers, only Bacon was somewhat generous to rhetoric, though he, too, wished to reposition invention beyond the rhetorician's purview. In an interesting reconfiguration of foes and allies, Bacon's *The Advancement of Learning* maligns dialectical induction "whereby the Principles of sciences may be pretended to be invented" as "vicious and incompetent" since it masquerades as true invention—scientific invention—without meeting the rigorous criteria of scientific empiricism (221). Rhetorical invention, meanwhile, "is not properly an invention: for to invent is to discover that we know not, and not to recover or resummons that which we already know"; yet rhetorical "Remembrance or Suggestion," as Bacon redubs invention, is to be a subservient ally of scientific inquiry (222-23). Thus, *topoi* for Bacon are those places "which may excite our mind to return and produce such knowledge as it hath formerly collected, and to the end we make use thereof" (224). Acknowledging that most of his contemporaries reject them as impractical and variable, Bacon then comes to a surprising defense of the special topics: "I do receive particular Topics, this is places or directions of invention and inquiry in every particular knowledge, as things of great use; being mixtures of Logic with the matter of sciences," they aid scientific inquiry insofar as

"every degree of proceeding in a science giveth a light to that which followeth" (224).

Bacon vindicates the special topics, but at a great cost to the integrity of rhetorical

invention: reduced to a mnemonic aid for true, scientific inquiry, the special topics

become a logically linear set of scientific premises that cumulatively inform all

subsequent knowledge. Though such "invention" little resembles the messy, culturally

rooted systems of Aristotle or Cicero, there may be some veracity to Bacon's thesis that

topics "help us . . . to produce what we know already" (224)—if one, that is, interprets

such a statement as upholding the primacy of epideixis rather than ceding rhetoric's

ground to science. This was surely not the most immediate, principally intended meaning

of Bacon's assertion, but he may have hit a salient point in spite of himself.

Vico and the Primacy of *Topoi*

Phrased another way, a generous reading of Bacon suggests that rhetorical topics

might function at the intersection of invention and memory—a thesis forwarded more

overtly by two subsequent and often overlooked rhetoricians, Giambattista Vico and

Joseph Priestley. Vico (1668-1744), a counter-Enlightenment philosopher and professor

of rhetoric in his home of Naples, had little influence on the study of rhetoric during his

lifetime, though recent rediscovery of his work has highlighted Vico's remarkably

prescient, almost postmodern thinking on rhetoric (see Verene; Marshall; Schaeffer,

Sensus Communis; Grassi; Goetsch). Reacting most immediately against the rational

empiricism of Descartes, Vico ambitiously sought to establish a "science" of human

understanding beginning with the phenomenology of culture, the shared experience of

"common sense" unknown to the natural sciences. Against the Ramist consignment of

rhetoric to ornament, Vico conceived rhetoric as "a science of narration" (Verene 165), a process that derives meaning from our perceived place in history. Vico, thus, revitalizes invention as a method of generating discourse from shared cultural memory; he emphasizes, among other things, the power of myth and rhetorical tropes in thought and language—including the four "master tropes" of metaphor, metonym, synecdoche, and irony that would later occupy the thought of Burke (*New Science* 2.404-11; Burke, *Grammar* 503-17). For Vico, rhetorical exchanges perpetuate the stores of what he calls "poetic wisdom," the intimate knowledge of the "history of ideas, the customs, the deeds of mankind" (*New Science* 368). The concept of "poetic wisdom," thus, supplies a sweeping countermeasure to the Cartesian location of "wisdom" within abstract rationality; by accounting for custom, belief, literature, and history, "poetic wisdom" is also rhetorical wisdom in the Isocratean and Ciceronian sense.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of *topoi* within Vico's conception of rhetoric. Vico's, as Ernesto Grassi has put it, is a "topical philosophy," since, for Vico, "topics is the faculty which renders minds ingenious" (15). Human ingenuity, in other words, derives not from the discipline of Enlightenment rationalism, but through intimate knowledge and experience of the key nodes of culture. Vico's contributions to topical theory entail (1) a modest defense of classical *topoi* against their Enlightenment detractors, (2) a pioneering look at the relation between *topoi*, memory, and metaphor, and (3) an innovative application of axioms as a sort of provocative special *topoi*. In *On the Study of Methods in Our Time*, Vico reprimands his contemporaries for disregarding the topics; this is "harmful," Vico argues, "since the invention of arguments is by nature prior to the judgment of their validity, so that, in teaching, . . . invention should be given

priority over philosophical criticism" (§3; 14). Topics are vital, says Vico, in finding the "middle term" (15)—that is, the culturally momentous middle premise supporting an enthymeme. Yet, as Donald Philip Verene argues, Vico is not simply upholding a sort of Boethian formalism here, but advocating that students acquaint themselves thoroughly with "common sense," which they can then apply to topical invention (169; Vico, *Study* 13). In his lectures on rhetoric, Vico echoes a point of Quintilian's, warning that "unless you enrich [*topoi*] with ample and varied learning, you will be like the one who indeed knows all the letters of the alphabet but, when he combines them in written words, they have no meaning" (*Art of Rhetoric* §13). He then supplies examples of specific arguments derived from Aristotle's *koinoi topoi*, illustrating for students how common sense might inform such argumentative forms, and vice versa (§14). "It is not my province to give precepts," Vico here quips, alluding again to the primacy of varied knowledge and experience: the *koinoi topoi* may be useful, but their heuristic value is secondary to the manifold stores of poetic wisdom that students of rhetoric must study.

Elsewhere, Vico posits bigger ideas about the nature and role of *topoi*. "Imagination," writes Vico in his labyrinthine, ambitious treatise on *The New Science*, "is nothing but the springing up again of reminiscences, and ingenuity or invention is nothing but the working over of what is remembered" (2.699). The "regulating art" for reminiscence and invention alike, he says, "is topics." To fully understand the idea of *topoi* Vico has in mind, it is also necessary to understand his notion of memory ("reminiscence"), which Verene summarizes as a union between conventional memory; imagination, or *fantasia*, derived from myth and cultural semiotics; and invention, "the power of the subject to move from one act of formation of sense to others" (97, 105). In

short, Vico makes explicit the implied connection between Roman *loci* of invention and mnemonics: he conceives *topoi* as "places" in the collective memory of history and myth that sum to our set of "common sense," and from which, among other things, arguments can be derived (see Williams and Enos). He stresses, further, that such *topoi*—for example, the names and images of Gods like Jove and Neptune (Verene 105)—are not only read or spoken, but *felt*. "The first founders of humanity applied themselves to a sensory topics," Vico hypothesizes, "by which they brought together those properties or qualities or relations of individuals and species which were, so to speak, concrete, and from these created their poetic genera" (2.495). Thus, much as Burke would later define man as the "symbol-using animal" (*Language* 3-24), Vico seems to suggest that we are topical animals—that from our experience, both visceral and discursive, we piece together significant bits and fragments into an ordering narrative of life, history, and purpose, and that all further invention must derive from this topical copia.

Given the primacy of *topoi* in Vico's theories of culture and rhetoric, it is fitting he would arrange the most famous section of *The New Science*—his list of 114 foundational axioms that appear early in Book 1—much as one would a set of *topoi*, à la Aristotle's *idia* or Cicero's commonplaces in *De inventione* (Marshall 195-206). These axioms address a breadth of subject matter, from historical fact ("The Phoenicians were the first navigators of the ancient world" [302]) to core ideas of Vico's philosophy ("Common sense is judgment without reflection, shared by an entire class, an entire people, an entire nation, or the entire human race" [142]) to recalcitrant political jabs ("It is a vulgar tradition that the first form of government in the world was monarchical" [255]). Many of Vico's axioms, as David L. Marshall deftly puts, are "not so much true

as provocative" (201). This is not to say that Vico disbelieved his own axioms, but, to the point, that "Vico's axioms interpellate the reader. They behoove the reader to respond. . . . [They] replicate for the reader . . . what Vico takes to have been the originary interpellative situation in which language was invented, when [early humans] sensed in the thunder and lightning a will intent on singling them out." In this sense, and as I discuss at length in chapter 4, Vico's *topoi* strongly anticipate Mikhail Bakhtin's discourse theory, which emphasizes speaker, addressee, and the responsive purpose of the "utterance" (Bakhtin, "Problem")—and thus the ability of the *topos* to suggest a complete horizon of conversation. Viccian invention, thus, is not just the discovery of persuasive materials, but the act of provoking and carrying on a formative cultural dialogue among addressors and addressees—and Viccian *topoi*, like the axioms, are the discrete resources one draws upon to spur such a dialogue.

The Belletrists and Priestley

Though Vico continues to inspire interest among modern students of rhetoric, the most influential eighteenth-century rhetoricians in their own time were the Scottish belletrists, most notably Hugh Blair (1718-1800) and George Campbell (1719-1796). Blair and Campbell were largely silent on the matter of *topoi*, chiefly because their configuration of rhetoric generally discounted invention in favor of style and taste—a rhetorical-literary tradition rather unlike that of Isocrates and Cicero in that it emphasized elite refinement over practical cultural literacy. In his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, Blair advises that "it is one thing to discover the reasons that are most proper to convince men, and another to manage these reasons with the most advantage. The latter is

all that rhetoric can pretend to do" (118). Blair dubs the topics "superfluous," a "trifling and childish" distraction from the rhetor's subject matter (118-19).

If the belletristic dismissal of topical invention dominated rhetorical pedagogy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there existed at least one significant voice to the contrary. As one grammarian wrote in 1801,

> Dr. Blair has not only omitted but discountenanced [the topics]; and such an opinion have I of the good sense of this writer, that I should much doubt of its utility, if the very reason of the thing, as well as the authority of the ancients and some of the most respectable among the moderns, did not sanction and recommend it. Dr. Priestley's reasons for the use of the topics appear to me unanswerable. (John Walker 306)

Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), a scientist, teacher, rhetorician, and dissident English cleric, was, as Crowley notes, the only prominent rhetorician of his era to advocate the topics (*Methodical* 10-11), though his writing did carry some influence for teachers like the one above. Though historians often wrongly lump him in with the belletrists, Priestley parted ways with Blair and Campbell on both politics, where Priestley was a reformer and belletrists conservatives, and rhetorical theory, where Priestley defended invention, though under a new heading (George 82). Inspired by the associationist psychology of David Hartley, Priestley conceived his *Lectures on Oratory and Criticism* as synthesis of rhetorical principles with "the doctrine of the association of ideas" (i). Therein, invention is rebranded as "recollection," as the faculty of "readily recollecting, and judiciously selecting, what is proper for [one's] purpose, out of the materials with which the mind was previously furnished. The dominant interpretation, here, is that, in the words of

Michael G. Moran, "Priestley . . . demoted invention from a process of discovery to a process of memory" (180), much, one might say, as Bacon subordinated rhetorical invention to that of science. Yet, as Vico amply demonstrates, discovery-versus-memory hardly holds a tenable binary, and a more generous reading of Priestley places his theory somewhere on a continuum between Bacon and Vico.

Priestley does insist that the orator know his subject matter thoroughly before composing a speech (3), but this claim is likely less a nod the primacy of empiricism than a restatement of the same concern voiced by Quintilian and Vico, that topical forms without knowledge devolve into empty husks. As a religious dissident who eventually fled to asylum in America, Priestley intended his claim as a moral one against ignorance and stereotyping (see Lawson). Priestley's commentary on *topoi* appears fairly conventional, though he does emphasize the association of abstract ideas—"wisdom" and "goodness," for example—as they function as the "middle terms" of enthymemes (7). He also provides examples of special topics concerning questions of person, time, place, motive, and so forth, all of which highlight commonplace associations audiences are likely to make: women are less prone to violent crime than men; young men are more violent than old; Spaniards are less prone to drinking than Germans; Italians are more jealous Frenchmen; and so on. These topics are not necessarily true, but the associations they reflect (Germans with drinking, youth with hot-temperedness, etc.) hold rhetorical sway, echoing the cultural emphases of many classical rhetoricians. Priestley's *topoi*, thus, are designed to summon from memory those associations most useful to a given case—that is, tap into currents of orientation—while the author's ethical meta-commentary cautions against exploiting associations that are damaging or false.

Topoi in Twentieth-Century Scholarship

While several scholars after Priestley—including John Quincy Adams during his tenure as a professor of rhetoric at Harvard—allotted space in their writing to the explanation and effect of *topoi*, Priestley represents the last significant innovation on topical invention before the twentieth century. One can organize twentieth-century approaches to *topoi* around three notable theorists: Stephen Toulmin, Chaïm Perelman, and Kenneth Burke.

Toulmin, a Cambridge-educated analytic philosopher, is well known by rhetoricians for *The Uses of Argument*, a 1958 treatise on logical epistemology. This book, by the author's admission, was never intended to inform rhetorical theory (vii-ix), but its coinage of "warrant" proved found fertile ground in rhetorical scholarship. By Toulmin's formula, an argument comprises three essential components: the claim, or conclusion; the datum, or information justifying the conclusion; and the warrant, the usually tacit premise that links datum and claim (89-93). In Toulmin's now-famous example, the argument "Harry was born in Bermuda, so Harry is a British subject" justifies the claim Harry's citizenship via the datum of his birthplace and the unstated warrant that "A man born in Bermuda will be a British subject" (92). Otto Bird, in a 1961 review, likened Toulmin's warrants to the topics of medieval logic, illustrated most fully by Boethius: "The resemblance is so close . . . that is appears we are witnessing something of a re-discovery of the Topics" (534). While Bird is correct that Toulmin's schema most resembles that of Boethius, Thomas Conley refigures Aristotle's *topoi*, common and special alike, into a Toulminian scheme whereby they become synonymous with warrants ("Logical Hylomorphism" 95-96). Ed Dyck's article "Topos and

Enthymeme," though it does not invoke Toulmin specifically, configures Aristotelian

topoi as "binary relations" within a formula that recalls Toulmin's analytic method.

Toulmin, thus, represents the most prominent name in a wave of latter-day criticism

informed by a philosophy that is essentially Boethian.

Perelman, a Polish philosopher of law, and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, a Belgian

academic, are responsible for *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (1958),

which stands as arguably the most ambitious and through twentieth-century work on

rhetoric. Its epistemology is heavily Aristotelian, and it has inspired a good deal of

scholarship on topical invention (e.g. Crosswhite; Olson; Warnick). The authors structure

The New Rhetoric's 300-page final section on "Techniques of Argumentation" as a latter-

day recapitulation of Aristotle's *koinoi topoi*, keeping many, such as arguments from the

parts and from division, and scrapping some, such as arguments from the opponent's

name, in favor of more useful modern classifications (see Warnick 120-28). On the term

topos (*locus*), itself, the authors recite the familiar spatial metaphors of Aristotle and

Cicero, concluding that "*loci* form an indispensable arsenal on which a person wishing to

persuade another will have to draw, whether he likes it or not" (84). The strength—and

profound achievement—of *The New Rhetoric* is to update Aristotle's general categories

of argument into a more relevant, detailed, and pragmatic system that accords with

twentieth-century civic discourse. The weakness of *The New Rhetoric*, if one chooses to

view it as such, is that it slights the Aristotelian *idia* and the Ciceronian commonplaces in

favor of broad categorical discussion yielded from a latter-day set of "common topics"

(Leff, "Commonplaces" 445-46). Thus, while *The New Rhetoric* represents a

monumental leap in the modern study of persuasion, it is not a terribly innovative text on

the concept of *topoi*. Its neo-Aristotelian scope, in other words, does not extend to the Aristotelian notion of *topoi* as nodes of orientation.

One book that might challenge *The New Rhetoric* as the most valuable study of rhetoric in the twentieth century is Burke's *A Rhetoric of Motives*, an expansive, dizzying synthesis of rhetoric, literature, and philosophy. As modern students of the discipline well know, Burke's *Rhetoric* introduces the primacy of "identification," the concept that a speaker, to persuade an audience, must first demonstrate a common, "consubstantial" ground. Burke's mentions of *topoi* are few and far between, but they are consistently provocative. Once he claims that "Aristotelian 'topics' . . . shift . . . easily and impeccably between ideas and images" (86). Elsewhere, he suggests that identification functions "first by inducing the auditor to participate in form, as a 'universal' locus of appeal, and next by trying to include a partisan statement within that same pale of assent" (59). Burke's *Rhetoric*, as he avows, takes primary inspiration from Aristotle and Marx (Burke, "Methodological"), but it makes sense that his project has been linked to both Cicero and Vico as well (Leff, "Burke's Ciceronianism"; Schaffer, "Burke and Vico"). Burke points to the intersection between identity, politics, and form, a space one might call the Burkean *topos*—a subject of inquiry that recalls Cicero's quest for copious rhetorical knowledge and Vico's link between imagination, memory, and invention. In short, though Burke comments sparingly on *topoi* directly, he conveys the spirit of the *topos* that might break loose from its usual set of moorings and drift freely in the plane of orientation—a term, once more, that I borrow from Burke himself.

Conclusion: Toward a Functional Understanding of *Topoi*

Given the vexed history of *topos* as a concept—its various meanings and connotations, its synonyms, its disappearances from and resurgences into the theoretical conversation around rhetoric—it makes sense why rhetoricians struggle with the question of what a *topos* is. I have no ambition to definitively settle that question, but I will advocate for a certain attitude toward *topoi* that I think most benefits rhetorical criticism, especially as it applies in the postmodern era of rapid circulation and plural, fragmented discourses (see McGee, "Text"). In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke stresses that rhetoric exists in the mess of the "Human Barnyard," that its "ideal culminations are more often beset by strife as the condition of their organized expression, or material embodiment" (24). The center cannot hold, Burke reminds us: "Ideal culminations" of consensus, stability, and stasis give way to discord and division—which exists as Burke's perpetual counterpart to identification. Rhetoric operates not from the ontology of stable, agreed-upon forms but from the "material embodiment" of strife itself. Because the nature of allegiances and disagreements remain always in flux, so too are the rhetorical materials for coping with them. Insofar as *topoi* are the "places" of such argument, it seems to fair to suggest that they are also places in motion.

Thus, rather than the ontological question of what they *are*—a question bound up to a high degree in assumptions of stability and stasis—I will advance a revised question, one aligned more squarely with the spirit of rhetoric itself: *what do topoi do?* I pursue this question, for now, by returning to the four points of tension I identify toward the beginning of this chapter, and I will address them in reference to the history of the concept I recount above. I will also address them in reverse order, beginning with the

question of synonyms, then rhetoric versus dialectic, and the two prevailing definitions of *topoi*. I will conclude with the most important matter, the metaphor of space.

The matter of synonyms largely concerns stylistic choice. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, for instance, opt for the Latin term *loci* rather than the Greek *topoi* even though, as I note above, their conception of the concept most broadly intersects with Aristotle's *koinoi topoi*. I do not believe this lexical choice itself hinders their project. Yet, there are connotations to the different synonyms that bear emphasis. Most important, following Crowley and Debra Hawhee, I think it wise to differentiate between *topoi* and commonplaces. Crowley and Hawhee use *commonplace* "to refer to statements that regularly circulate within members of a community" while applying *topics* to "procedure[s] that generate arguments" (89). While this is not the exact theoretical ground I wish to stake out, I second the general division. "Commonplace," because of its connotations in popular discourse (the clichéd, ubiquitous, or commonsensical), is well suited to describe the idea of "common topics" (as opposed to the Greek *koinoi topoi*) we inherit from the Romans. This concept of the commonplace, I believe, intersects broadly with that of the *topos*, but the two should not be regarded as entirely synonymous. I return to this point below.

Other synonyms offer other problems. Roberts's phrase "lines of argument," in his translation of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, expresses to some pragmatic effect the function of the *koinoi topoi*, but sheds the central metaphor of place and with it all implied relation to the *idia* and other sorts of *topoi*. Similarly, "topic" may be a proper cognate but, to my ear, demands a counterproductive association of *topoi* with headings, "topic" sentences, and abstract themes or "main ideas" (see D'Angelo, "Topic Sentence"). Besides that, as

Kennedy stresses, "one of the reasons for studying [Aristotle's] *Rhetoric* is to learn its traditional terminology, of which *topos* is an important instance" ("Reworking" 173). As my lengthy discussion of Aristotle above illustrates, there are metaphorical intricacies bound up in the term *topos* from which its English translations distract. So it is that, when referring to the "places" of argument in the classical sense, or in subsequent theories and commentaries that owe a debt to Aristotle, I will deliberately employ the term *topoi*, the term that best implies the metaphorical act of location in all its richness. I would encourage other rhetoricians to follow suit.

At stake in the tug-of-war between rhetoric and dialectic (or, for that matter, the same between rhetoric and philosophy, or science) is, among other things, the richness of the concept *topos* itself. Aristotle, as I explain above, aggregates specific rhetorical *topoi* (the *idia*) that fit into larger overlapping "regions" of function (the *koinoi topoi*). While the *koinoi topoi* intersect conceptually with their dialectical counterparts discussed in his *Topica*, Aristotle conceives of rhetoric as an art that *begins* with specific, "special" places and maxims, while dialectic begins with categories of debate. In Roman rhetorical handbooks, these specific rhetorical places become opposing sets of commonplaces outlining the contradictory nature of common sense. In Vico and Priestley, they become the interconnected nodes of cultural memory. The point to stress, once more, is that all these rhetorically focused theories stem from the primacy of the specific.

Where logicians like Boethius and Ramus have sought to demote rhetoric, they have often done so by consigning *topoi* to dialectical formalism—the *differentiae* and ostensibly universal "maximal propositions" of Boethius, or the ten topics of Ramus. This is not to say that dialectical *topoi* (or "topics"—as the term stripped of locational

connotation makes more sense in dialectic) are useless, but it is to say that their role ought to be decidedly secondary in rhetoric, whose need and means both, as Crowley, Burke, and others have argued, arise from specific events of disagreement within specific cultures (see Crowley, *Toward* 27). I am not, then, denying the existence, or even the utility, of dialectical topics, but I do contend that rhetoric requires its own conception of *topoi* that speaks from and to the particularities of rhetorical practice.

By a similar token, the two prevailing definitions of *topos*—the argumentative heuristic and the commonsensical assumption or "stock argument"—suggest two different traditions broadly corresponding to dialectic and rhetoric. Both, as Leff argues, "entail strengths and liabilities": the dialectical tradition of procedural *topoi* grants invention "greater internal coherence and integrity" but "slight[s] the special, material circumstances that surround issues of public debate," while the "material perspective places [*topoi*] in closer contact with actual situations" but offers little systematic coherence ("Topics" 42). Are the two traditions irreconcilable? I will argue not. It is possible to perceive *topoi* as both heuristically generative and culturally "material" and specific if one approaches them not as universal procedures or *differentiae*, nor stock arguments acquired by rote memorization, but nodes of discourse that allow rhetors to make connections, to link to other nodes in cultural-ideological space. As I argue above, it matters less what *topoi* are—what form they take—than *how* they allow rhetors to forge connections.

So it is that the topical metaphor of space becomes not just convenient, but epistemologically vital. This was true for Aristotle, as I argue above, and it ought to be true still. In the *Physics*, again, Aristotle conceives *topos* as the "envelope" of space just

surrounding an object's form and articulating its position in relation to a larger context—

not form itself but the "demarcating force" that mediates between form and context. I

also suggest above that Burke's concept of "orientation" aligns particularly well with that

of topical space. For Burke, orientation implies "the linkage of outstanding with

outstanding," the associative connection to ideas about "how things were, how they are,

and how they may be" (*Permanence* 14). To say that *topoi* orient audiences is similar to

Miller's insight, employing the linguistic concept of semantic space, that "[a] *topos* might

be thought of as . . . a point in semantic space that is particularly rich in connectivity to

other significant or highly connected points" ("Aristotelian" 141-42). There are a number

of useful ways to further articulate such an idea. Crowley and Cintron each independently

describe such linkage as "ideologic," a term denoting not strictly "logical" connections,

but those made among ideological premises and beliefs (Crowley, *Toward* 75; Cintron,

Angels' Town 131). From a slightly different angle, Roland Barthes describes the "sign"

as "the associative total or concept and image," enabling an understanding of *topoi* as

"signs" that express particular rhetorical potency (*Mythologies* 114). In any case, the

point to stress is that, as Miller contends, *topoi* are best conceived not as parts of

arguments or containers of meaning, but as nodes that link outward to other nodes of

meaning in ideological space ("Aristotelian" 136, 141). It matters less what form a *topos*

takes than how potently it links outward, thus making itself available for rhetorical use.

Hence, it behooves us to understand *topoi* not formally but functionally.

CHAPTER 2

ANATOMY OF A *TOPOS*: A TERMINOLOGICAL SYMPOSIUM

At the 2012 Democratic National Convention, Julian Castro, then Democratic mayor of San Antonio, delivered a rousing keynote address that I still remember as one of the clear highlights of the four-day event. In a doubtlessly calculated move, the young Latino statesman's speech brought to mind a certain *ethos* of American pluralism and multicultural hope witnessed eight years prior in another Democratic keynote address— that of a relatively unknown but oratorically electric senate candidate, Barack Obama. Much like Obama eight years prior, and again in 2008, Castro's speech sounded the feel-good tones of opportunity, education, and melting-pot democracy. One forceful thesis he advanced throughout was that the spirit of American exceptionalism (which he endorsed) requires a social apparatus allowing the underprivileged a chance to succeed—to become exceptional. As he put it:

> Now, in Texas, we believe in the *rugged individual*. Texas may be the one
>
> place where people actually still have *bootstraps*, and we expect folks to
>
> *pull themselves up by them*. But we also recognize there are some things
>
> we can't do alone. We have to come together and invest in opportunity
>
> today for prosperity tomorrow. (Emphasis added)

By the theory I'm advancing, both the phrases *rugged individual* and *bootstraps* (itself synecdoche for *pull yourself up by the bootstraps*, though Castro goes on to supply that

bit of the saying, too) qualify as *topoi* inasmuch as their connotative, ideological densities forge links outward, *orienting* audiences among a larger matrix of cultural values. Such links connect to commonplaces ("the individual is responsible only for himself," etc.), myths (the founding fathers' story; the Horatio Alger narrative), and other *topoi* about the spirit of America and the value of individual achievement (see Crowley, *Toward* 70-75, 97-100). Both could be broadly characterized as conservative *topoi* insofar as they generally fortify the political positions of the American political right, which values individual responsibility and rebukes government overreach on the fronts of taxation and social welfare. Even *Texas* adopts a metatopical timbre in such contexts. It is a socio-geographical place that, symbolically condensed, serves also as a rhetorical "place" exemplifying a set of ideals about the frontier myth, the American dream, the *rugged individuals* Castro references, and so on—not to mention the image of the cowboy boot, and all it culturally entails, implicit in Castro's description of Texas as the "one place where people still actually have bootstraps."

Each of these three *topoi*, in itself, supplies the rhetorical critic with a wealth of material. To manage my scope, I will take an abridged anatomy of the *bootstraps topos* only. First, *bootstraps* clearly represents a *trope* (or "figure of speech") as well as a *topos*: If one defines the term broadly, *bootstraps* qualifies as a metaphor, a use of one concept or image to express another—here, the abstract idea of individual achievement. Insofar as the ideology of individualism almost completely governs this particular trope, though, *bootstraps* might also be more properly regarded as metonym—the use of an adjunct image to express the more complete phenomenon of individualism, much as Wall Street is metonym for mega-conglomerate capitalism. Finally, *bootstraps* could also be

regarded as synecdoche, the part for the whole: one image of blue-collar garb standing in for the entire symbolic apparatus of hard work and honest labor—everything from jeans and hardhats to the steel mill or coalmine to the totality of capitalist industry. Finally, Castro's particular use of *bootstraps*, in its reversal of political allegiances, also exemplifies the trope of irony. By linking *bootstraps* to social opportunity, Castro invites audiences to ironically understand the trope's dominant associations with the political right, who, the enthymeme goes, won't even allow individuals the *chance* to hoist themselves up by the bootstraps. (To add a further layer of irony, pulling oneself up by the bootstraps is a physical impossibility, and the phrase was once used to suggest comparably incredible feats. It is a testament to American belief of individualism that such a *topos* has evolved to suit a more-or-less unironic reading.)

Bootstraps* is also a textual fragment, a replicable micro-genre that transtextually recurs. This is true of the word itself, the phrase or saying it stands in for, and the image of the hard-working individual it represents. The lattermost category represents a narrative or literary archetype, a stock role so common it is perceived as universal; here Castro, invoking his Texan *ethos*, suggests such a recognizable character, an embodiment of can-do American spirit. In Ciceronian topical terms *bootstraps* also links resolutely to a set of bedrock commonplaces—"America is the land of opportunity"; "the individual is responsible for himself"; "winners never quit"; and so forth—that circulate among the American ideology of individualism and provide nodes of rhetorical fortification and amplification. The saying "Pull yourself up by your bootstraps" itself doesn't quite fit the classical conception of "commonplace" in that it only implies, rather than explicitly voices, dominant "common sense." But it does share with Ciceronian commonplaces an

aphoristic quality: it is a sort of authorless quotation (subsets of which include aphorisms, dicta, adages, proverbs, slogans, and so forth) perceived to contain cultural wisdom and credibility. (The literal impossibility of pulling oneself up by the bootstraps translates more pressingly into a directive to individually overcome any and all obstacles. Few Americans likely consider the logistics of the physical act described.) The rhetorical oomph of *bootstraps*, moreover, depends largely on its connection to a series of other fragments, most importantly a series of transcendent *ideographs* and *god-terms* like "individuality," "freedom," and "opportunity" that set the conceptual, interpellative parameters of ideological thought. In other words, by regarding Castro's *bootstraps* as a socially performative *utterance*, one necessarily perceives the *topos* as an ideologeme, an intersection of formal composition and culturally, intertextually derived meaning.

Castro's particular use of the *bootstraps topos*, finally, also implies something rhetorical commentaries on topics and commonplaces rarely consider: the prospect of change. On one hand, of course, rhetoric deals centrally with change. Social conflicts, imperfections, and incongruities pose the very need for rhetoric, for an epistemological recourse for problems born of uncertainty and probability. But while rhetoric represents what we do with language to effect social change, rarely do we consider the reciprocal effects—those on rhetorical devices and methods themselves. By attempting to realign *bootstraps* with a new set of ideological coordinates, Castro not only forges a deliberative argument about social policy and individual opportunity, but he reveals the potential instability of what once appeared to be a cultural fixity. *Bootstraps* still chiefly suggests a set of conservative assumptions, but Castro's use of the term reveals that someday it might not—or, at least, that its associative meanings might become less clear-cut. By

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attending to questions of cultural change, the rhetorician might make use of the similarities between *topoi* and what cultural evolutionists call *memes*, or replicable units of cultural transmission, of which *bootstraps* is a good example.

The preceding three paragraphs enfold a litany of key terms. The fact that none of these terms are quite synonymous with *topos* validates, I think, the particular resuscitation of the classical term that I am advocating. But each italicized term above does share significant conceptual ground with *topos*. In the previous chapter, I attempted to recover a revitalized understanding on the historical *topos*, one rooted centrally in the Aristotelian notion of "place" as a mediating and orienting force that forges associative links in cultural space. The present chapter adapts this concept for modern rhetorical inquiry, stressing the *density of connotations* by which *topoi* can economically link outward to stores of knowledge interspersed through the ideological cosmos (Barthes, *S/Z* 13; Weaver 213). I name this chapter a terminological symposium because I believe the most fruitful theoretical inquiry into rhetorical *topoi* will emerge from its examination, and cross-examination, via the conceptual vocabulary of the available adjacent concepts. Following the structure above, by which I briefly parse Castro's use of *bootstraps*, I group these relevant concepts into three categories: those dealing with *tropes*, *fragmentation*, and cultural *evolution*. Each set of terms ferries discussion further from the traditional arenas of topical invention, and, I will argue, outward toward a fuller, more dynamic understanding of *topoi* as they function and evolve in social practice. My purpose, finally, is to develop a more robust and elastic toolbox for the practice of topical analysis, particularly as it pertains to evolution. Accordingly, some cursory remarks about my use of *evolution* are in order before I circle back to this term at the end of the chapter.

Evolution's Place in Rhetorical Theory

Of tropes, fragmentation, and evolution, the lattermost signifies the most novel and substantial contribution of this project—and also the aspect most likely to ruffle feathers. Because I examine *topoi* alongside tropes and fragmentation in the service, finally, of understanding the role of *topoi* in cultural evolution, I want to begin and end with this final concept. Here, I offer some thoughts on the conceptual affordances of evolution.

As I suggest in the introduction, it bears note that my selection of terms elicits a point of irony: *evolution's* status as a *topos* potentially hinders my attempt to use evolution to explain the place of *topoi* in rhetorical theory. That is to say, *evolution* is not simply a denotative concept but a term laden with diverse and powerful connotations, many of which humanists perceive as negative, or at least threatening. As I also note in the introduction, my wish is, through evolution, to name a process of incremental change accounting for variation, replication, and differential "fitness" among *topoi* (Dennett, *Darwin's* 343)—ideas that I believe apply fruitfully to the study of rhetoric. While scholars like Daniel Dennett (a philosopher) and Carolyn R. Miller (a rhetorician) have taken up the cross-disciplinary reach of evolution in terms I find useful and generally respectful to the humanities (see Dennett, *Darwin's*, *Freedom*, *Consciousness*; Miller, "Do Genres Evolve?"), *evolution* carries in tow the baggage of what Thomas M. Lessl has termed "evolutionism," or the transformation of evolution into a term of scientistic quasi-religiosity (xi-xii). This baggage merits consideration, and I return to the matter later in this chapter, prefacing my discussion of memetics and Darwinian perspectives on

language. Rather than taking a defensive posture, though, I find it most productive to here weigh the merits of evolution in relation to similar terms used to theorize language and rhetoric. Doing so allows us to observe where evolution intersects and parts ways with comparable terms, and therefore what it adds to a conversation on language, rhetoric, and society.

In introducing evolution, I want to stress the rhetorical formation (and reformation) of culture at both microscopic levels (those of individual *topoi*) and macroscopic levels (those of *topoi* and human actors interacting across time). Three notable terms that have allowed theorists to address similar matters are *construction*, *sedimentation*, and *networks*, which I will speak to in that order. Social constructivism—roughly, the idea that social relationships "build" the structures and mores of culture—has become so commonplace among humanities scholars that self-identification as a social constructivist sounds redundant. We can occupy this position, too, without reference to the text of its coinage, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's 1966 sociological treatise *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge*, though Berger and Luckmann's architectural metaphors of constructions and foundations remain woven into our discourse, echoing their Marxism forebears of bases and superstructures (see Berger and Luckmann 103-04, 224-25n56). When rhetoricians speak of *topoi* as "building blocks" (see, for example, Rice 32, 39, 49), we are "building on" this metaphor to one degree or another.

Any attempt here to trace social constructivism's influence in rhetorical theory in the space of a few paragraphs would be laughably abridged. My emphasis, though, is on the metaphor itself—the implicit notion that language and society lay groundwork and

erect edifices of language and practice in which human culture occurs. Addressing language in particular, scholars like Paul J. Hopper and Alistair Pennycook have advanced the similar metaphor of *sedimentation* (c.f. Husserl). Referring to the myth of permanence and stability in grammatical structures, Hopper argues that "[s]ystemicity . . . is an illusion produced by the partial settling or *sedimentation* of frequently used forms into temporary subsystems" (158; emphasis in original). Accordingly, "emergent regularities" of grammatical structure "are *aggregations*; they are the sediment of frequency" (161; emphasis in original). By Hopper's estimation, rules and conventions accrue by repetition, their "sediment" forming thick layers of historical linguistic practice that project the illusion of permanence. Sedimentation in language, as in geography, is foundational. It enables and delimits individual edifices of discourse.

This implied relationship of utility and constraint makes metaphors like construction and sedimentation remarkably useful in describing the dependence of linguistic practice on preexisting social circumstances. The adjective "preexisting" warrants emphasis, though, insofar as sedimentation indicates geological *history* and "construction" typically enters discussion through the passive, deterministic voice—as in, "Race and gender are socially constructed"—leaving the phantasmal hand social predetermination to do the constructing. My hope is that evolution, by contrast, brings us to the present tense and the mechanics of change—change, in particular, that occurs though the interactions of human agents (rhetors) and discursive agents (*topoi*) both. (Where rhetorical theory has equipped us well to name the capabilities of these human actors, I design this chapter to provide a parallel conceptual vocabulary of *topoi* and their capabilities.) Such networked interaction resembles the project of Bruno Latour and other

advocates of "actor-network theory" (ANT), which examines the rhizomatic structures of practice that human and nonhuman actants produce (see Latour 75; Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 3-25). Latour justifiably bemoans the transformation of "the social" into an ill-defined, omnipresent hand that uniformly pulls the strings behind all activity, from law to religion to science (8). Calling such an approach the "sociology of the social," Latour advocates instead for a "sociology of associations" built from the specific, associative links among human and nonhuman actants working in local settings (8-9).

It is fair to similarly call the model of evolution I advocate networked. Moreover, the ideological sign-systems through which *topoi* like *bootstraps* garner rhetorical energy may appear more traditionally "networked" than do Latourian networks. Where specific *topoi* represent discrete and durable interconnected nodes, the "network" of ANT "does not designate a thing out there that would have roughly the shape of interconnected points, much like a telephone, a freeway, or a sewage 'network'" (129). What Latour offers, finally, is a patient attempt to deal with the complex associative thickets of social practice on the microcosmic level. ANT is a practice of persevering description. My focus, by moderate contrast, is on semiotics and rhetorical economy, on a theory of how semiotic *topoi* evolve through their "fitness" to be circulated by human rhetors, and how that evolution spurs cultural evolution on larger scales. Though the interrelationships between humans and objects doubtlessly facilitate, and in some senses govern, the rhetorical relationships I focus on, humans and their symbolic practices remain an appropriate as a site of study for rhetoric, with its emphasis on language and audience.

Evolution is well-suited to a rhetorical perspective insofar as rhetoric and evolution both imply the persistence of change. If one compares metaphors borrowed

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from the sciences, it bears note that studying sedimentation provides a historical *record* of evolution, but that evolution itself also describes a continuing, active process. In the present case, sediment represents the durable discursive formations that evolution slowly transforms. My purpose, then, in discussing the variation, replication, and differential "fitness" of *topoi* is to describe the instability of rhetorical resources—an instability that the attentive rhetorician can witness on a yearly, monthly, and sometimes daily basis. Pennycook, I hasten to add, describes something similar through the phrase "fertile mimesis," or the subtle variance that occurs in replicating sedimented discourses (37). This term, in effect, invites sedimentation and evolution into a common conceptual sphere characterized by the tug-of-war between what Mikhail Bakhtin terms "centripetal" and "centrifugal" powers ("Discourse" 272); replication can both reify a discourses and propel its gradual revision.

In moderate distinction to the Latourian emphasis on materials and objects, finally, the networks of rhetorical evolution I have in mind emphasize the vibrancy of discourse, the economical density of certain *topoi* that, though such utility, come to replicate as what cultural evolutionists have called *memes*. This emphasis, I hasten to add, is not better than Latour's, but it does apply more immediately to the rhetorical matters of speakers, audiences, and the symbols they use. The rest of this chapter addresses the theoretical dimensions of one important class of symbol—the rhetorical *topos*.

Topos and Trope

If Greek etymology configures *topos* as a place, a locus by which one effiently orients herself among other places and ideas, *trope* derives etymologically from the

concept of "turn" or "direction" (Lanham, *Handlist* 154-55; White 2-3). If a *topos* represents a node in sematic space linked to other such nodes, tropes supply vectors of attention. Tropes propel associative movement among *topoi*, accelerating some links and stemming others. While *trope* often signifies, in contemporary usage, a mere cliché or motif, I think it valuable once again to retain the spatial implications of the term's classical roots. Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, for example, employs the Greek *tropos* to describe the common topic of "[turning] what has been said against oneself upon the one who said it" (2.23.7; 1398a). *Tropos*, here, describes not the content of an argument but the rerouting or deflection of rhetorical energy—the sort of directional movement White identifies as "the soul of discourse" (2). Something similar occurs in the use of tropes like metaphor, metonym, synecdoche, and irony. Metaphor, for instance, forges vectors of association between two or more (potentially disparate) concepts like *argument* and *war*, to use George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's most famous example (4-6). A metaphor like *argument is war*, by extension, forges tributary vectors among the associative ideological baggage of each term. So it is, for example, that the warrior's heroic refusal to submit or compromise might color our assumptions about argumentation to the point where political "compromise" becomes a term of cowardice and distain rather than laudatory humility, as it has been before.

Historical attempts to categorize figures and tropes have led to confusing, contradictory set of taxonomies. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, for example, divides figures into those of "diction" and those of "thought," suggesting an epistemological distinction between style and substance (Fahnestock 7-8). In the *Institutio Oratoria*, Quintilian attempts to "purify" the *Ad Herennium*'s taxonomy into a clearer system, but

winds up rigidifying formal boundaries among rhetorical figures and needlessly omitting

or misclassifying some varieties of figurative language (Fahnestock 8-11). As Jeanne

Fahnestock explains in *Rhetorical Figures in Science*, the recourse to such formalist

pigeonholing is to emphasize not "what the figures are [but] what it is they do

particularly well, what it is they express iconically" (23). Figures and tropes "epitomize"

lines of reasoning, Fahnestock continues: "An epitome, from the Greek verb meaning 'to

cut short or cut open,' is in one sense a summary, an abstract containing all the essential

part of a larger work or text, and, in a slightly different sense, it is a representative or

exemplary selection from and then substitution for something longer" (24). By this

productive understanding, tropes share with *topoi* a concern for economy, the ability to

quickly suggest or link to some larger form or pattern in a short space. If, as Fahnestock

claims, metaphor epitomizes "argument by analogy" (24), *topoi* supply the ready nodes

of ideological significance between which such analogical movement can proceed.

Tropes epitomize argumentative forms (motions) while *topoi* describe the available

linkages through sematic space.

Through the millennia, rhetoricians have logged a great many figures and

tropes—Sister Miriam Joseph, in *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language*, compiles

nearly 200—each of which, I think, critics could examine individually vis-à-vis topical

invention. In an effort to quickly sample the range of available motions among rhetorical

nodes, I limit myself here to those four that Burke terms the "master tropes" (*Grammar*

503-17) and to which Vico asserts all other tropes of "poetic logic" are "reducible" (*New

Science* 131). These are metaphor, metonym, synecdoche, and irony. Each represents a

certain sort of rhetorical motion among *topoi* and thus lends itself to certain varieties of argument.

Metaphor

Of all the tropes, metaphor is, in Vico's words, "the most luminous and therefore the most necessary and frequent" (129). This language of "illumination" also surfaces in Cicero's discussion of metaphors, which he suggests "are like those objects in the [illumination] of a stage or of a forum are called 'ornaments,' not because they are the only ornament, but because they stand out from the others" (*Orator* 39.134; Fahnestock 18-19, 28). Such is not to say that metaphor is just showy "embellishment," as H.M. Hubbell somewhat misleadingly translates the Latin *lumina*, but that it appears "bright from within, in effect bringing out or expressing its [own] inherent nature" (Fahnestock 28). On the other hand, as Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* famously contends, metaphors also systematically and often transparently structure thought (as in the *argument is war* metaphor noted above), sometimes by "highlighting" one aspect of a metaphorical concept while erasing or "hiding" the other (10-13). The distinction between "fresh" and "dead" metaphors familiar to students of poetry provides a complementary vocabulary on such differential "luminousness"; fresh metaphors (e.g. "America is an unsolvable jigsaw puzzle") draw self-conscious attention to themselves as tropes and to the analogical lines they forge, while dead ones (e.g. "Republicans have declared war on single mothers") read prosaically and allow their analogical vectors to pass below audience's overt attention. Even a metaphor like the "declaration of war" on single mothers, though, conveys the conceptual asymmetry Lakoff and Johnson speak of.

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Its sheds a certain angle of light on the relationship between single mothers and Republicans, but it evades the reconsideration of war as a concept. Rather, to repurpose a metaphor of Burke's, the dominant associations of "war" provide the *fulcrum*, the hinge or pivot point, needed to move an audience's perspective about Republicans and single mothers (Burke, *Rhetoric* 56).

Michael C. Leff's incisive essay on "Topical Invention and Metaphorical Interaction" puts it this way: Metaphor introduces "new meaning . . . from the selection and identification of elements belonging to complex subjects, and the resulting structure exhibits a stability of its own without overwhelming the independence of its constituent subjects" (219). Where topical argument, traditionally conceived, evokes a linear progression among premises, and metaphor relies on immediate "synchronic association," Leff argues that "[i]n practice, . . . the distinction is not so absolute, and both rhetorical forms exhibit broadly similar processes of tension and attunement within the matrix of their constituent elements" (229). The vocabulary Leff supplies nicely complements discussions of topical association. Where, for instance, I.A. Richards characterizes metaphor as the "double unit" composed by a "tenor" (the "underlying idea") and "vehicle" that would contain the tenor (96-97), Leff's "tension" and "attunement" stress the reciprocal tug between metaphorical parts and topical associations alike. Metaphor rightly becomes the linkage between topical nodes as well as the tributary linkages between their constituent nodes of connotation. One component of a metaphor cannot "contain" the other, but links to the other through the available means of ideological space. Wayne Booth, too, in his article on "Metaphor as Rhetoric," begins to suggest the topical qualities of metaphor though his stress on metaphorical

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concision (or economy), rhetorical propriety, the role of metaphor in establishing a

speaker's *ethos*: "every speaker who uses any figure of with the intent that it be

recognized *as* a figure . . . calls attention to himself in ways that the user of 'ordinary,

usual,' untwisted language does not" (57). In Burke's terms, metaphorical components

"possess *degrees of being* in proportion to the variety of perspectives from which they

can with justice be perceived" (*Grammar* 504), and such perspectives, Booth might add,

reflect back on the character or identity of the speaker. Metaphorical linkages, in other

words, serve not only to connect points of cultural belief or assumption (what Sharon

Crowley terms *ideologic*) but also to reinforce the identity of the speaker as part of a

broader process of topical orientation.

Metonym and Synecdoche

The scholarly mania for metaphor—what Fahnestock aptly characterizes as a self-

limiting fixation among rhetorical critics (4-6)—has both distracted from the importance

of other figures and tropes and produced a wealth of insight that can apply beyond

metaphor to tropes like metonym and synecdoche. (Nothing, for example, prevents

Booth's point about *ethos* from extending from metaphor to other tropes.) I pair metonym

and synecdoche not because they are synonymous but because their rhetorical logistics

are similar. I am not the first to say so. Burke characterizes metonymy, the substitution of

a more "corporeal or tangible" term for an abstraction, as an act of "reduction," while

synecdoche, the substitution of a part for the whole, is, he says, that of "representation"

(*Grammar* 506, 507). But he then disclaims any rigid distinction: "Now, note that

reduction is a *representation*" (507; emphasis Burke's)—to which I add that

representation is often a reduction. The economical use of *topoi* and tropes, in fact,

necessarily implies some form of reduction. Insofar as a metonym like "Wall Street"

funnels the diverse attributes of market capitalism and corporate America into a single

term (and socio-geographical image), its reductive qualities are self-apparent. The same

is true, for instance, of a synecdochical slogan like "change we can believe in" when used

to (reductively) "represent" the entire corpus of discourse and policy surrounding the

Obama candidacy and presidency. When I say that metonym and synecdoche "funnel"

abstract or complex wholes into a single term, I mean not that figurative terms comes to

"contain" the compact essence of its broader referent, but that these tropes condense

vectors of rhetorical energy from diverse points in semantic space into a single,

representative point. Where metaphors spur connection among two such nodes (or two

clusters of nodes), metonym and synecdoche draw the rhetorical energy from a cluster or

cloud of nodes into a single point, typically preserving the most dominant connotations of

the cluster at large. Metonym and synecdoche, in other words, can describe the act of

rhetorical condensation characteristic of *topoi* in general.

Consider an example I return to in Chapter 4: Mitt Romney's 2012 campaign

gaffe "binders full of women," a self-defeating phrase the candidate uttered during the

second of three debates with President Obama in October of the election year. As

synecdoche, this phrase has come to "represent" the text of the second debate as a whole;

it supplants, in public memory, any broader, laborious textual reconstruction of the

debate. It also represents the broader narrative of Romney's decline as a candidate, his

disastrous cession of ground following a surprising victory over an ill-prepared Obama in

the first debate. As metonym, Romney's "binders full of women" stand in neatly for the

apparatus of androcentric corporate America—an entity that, along with the Republican

Party itself (House candidate Todd Akin had recently made disastrous remarks about

"legitimate rape"), suffered mutually reinforced perceptions of misogyny. Romney's

"binders" displayed profound rhetorical gravity: into its "orbit," as Burke might have put

it, "binders" drew diverse rhetorical energy scattered about the textual and conceptual

climate of 2012 American politics (see Burke, *Rhetoric* 26). The textual (synecdochical)

and conceptual (metonymic) elements of "binders" both illustrate the topical and *kairotic*

uses of tropes. By repeating "binders full of women" circa October 2012, rhetors could

exploit the transitory moment when the phrase economically connoted a wealth of

assumptions about corporate America, gender relations, the GOP, and Romney's

candidacy. The larger theoretical point to stress is that, among *topoi*, metonyms and

synecdoches exploit terminological density, the symbolic reduction of what Burke calls

semantic "clusters" into single terms (*Attitudes* 232-34). This sort of compressive

rhetorical motion allows rhetors to economically suggest a wealth of cultural knowledge

in the space of a single *topos*. So it is that the "reductions" and "representations" of

metonym and synecdoche become a frequent necessity in rhetorical practice.

Irony

 In the *New Science*, Vico hypothesizes that "irony could not have begun until the

period of reflection, because it is fashioned of falsehood by dint of a reflection which

wears the mask of truth" (131). Burke, in a similar vein, views *irony* and *dialectic* as

consubstantial terms: "Irony arises when one tries, by the interaction of terms upon one

another, to produce a *development* which uses all the terms" (*Grammar* 503, 512;

emphasis Burke's). When compared to other tropes like metaphor, metonym, and synecdoche, irony brings the role of audience or interlocutor into sharpest relief. If metaphor could be cast as "dialectic" between two terms or concepts, irony requires dialectic among speaker and audience via a certain term or set of terms, necessarily emphasizing the active, inferential role of audience to "reflectively" perceive what Vico names the discrepancy between "falsehood" as disguised "truth." Less yielding to terms like *true* and *false*, Burke's characterization of irony has much in common with his own concept of "perspective by incongruity," which occurs when "a word belongs by custom to a certain category—and by rational planning you wrench it loose and metaphorically apply it to a different category" (*Attitudes* 308). One might add that irony can still take effect short of deliberate "rational planning," but it does require some cognizance of a terminological or conceptual incongruity. In irony as in planned incongruity, not everything fits in its customary place.

Consider Booth's exchange with Stanley Fish on irony in the 1983 pages of *Daedalus*. Responding to Booth's book *A Rhetoric of Irony*, Fish rejects his interlocutor's category of "stable ironies," or those affixed to a sturdy foundation of understanding shared by speaker and audience, on the grounds hermeneutic stability is itself an illusion unless one refigures instability as "an endless succession of interpretive certainties" (Booth, *Rhetoric of Irony* 3-8; Fish, "Short People" 191). Booth's reply may or may not settle the debate, but it does slyly perform the author's own thesis. Booth writes four sections. The first is an arrogant, opportunistic parody of academic standoffishness that deliberately misquotes Fish; sections two and three then form a conventional (unironic) riposte to Fish's arguments, one that refers back to Part 1 as an example of irony's

functions; and the humorous conclusion, Part 4, confesses, "Everything that I have said since Part II began has been an outrageously ironic spoof, parodying the kind of self-protective, fearful, traditionalist responses that Fish's brilliant and irrefutable work too often evokes" ("New Strategy" 213). Because Booth can safely assume his audience, the readership of *Daedalus*, to be a group of academics "in on" the terms of discussion, he can harness a form of stable irony to make his point that stable irony is a functional rhetorical category.

An ironic *topos* condenses this sort of relationship into a minute space. Once again "binders full of women" proves illustrative. Like many Internet-memes-cum-*topoi*, "binders" relied largely on humor, and its humor derived from an ironic relationship among text of the *topos* itself, its connotative subject matter, and the cultural knowledge of audiences. In *A Rhetoric of Irony*, Booth speaks of a kind of novelistic irony whereby "the author and the audience stand together watching the characters from above as they make their mistakes" (255). The sort of "comic anticipation" this relationship yields travels far beyond novels, though, to characterize the general sense of being "in on it" central to the processes of identification and division that Burke describes in *A Rhetoric of Motives*. The ironic *topos*, one might say, *deflects* rhetorical energy. To repeat "binders full of women" was to turn an author's own terms against him, to reaffirm an "us" who recognize the problems of misogyny and corporate dehumanization and who "stand together . . . above" Romney and the class he epitomizes. Irony, here, stems from, first, the recognition of what Romney *meant* to communicate with his unfortunate phrase and, second, the rerouting of that energy back against its speaker.

Topos and Fragment

If tropes describe the vectors of rhetorical association typical of topical invention,

the concept of the fragment describes the textual formation of *topoi*. This section,

accordingly, will discuss the processes by which *topoi* can become abstracted from larger

texts and the functional vocabulary by which critics can examine such topical fragments.

The motif of fragmentation recurs prominently in accounts of postmodernity. Against the

modernist nostalgia for "totalizing ensembles," for example, Fredric Jameson finds the

postmodern critic unable "to organize an analysis and an interpretation around any single

one of these fragments in flight. To select—even as an 'example'—a single [text], and to

discuss it in isolation, is fatally to regenerate the illusion of the masterpiece or the

canonical text and reify the experience of total flow from which it was momentarily

extracted" (*Postmodernism* 78). "The pure and random play of signifiers that we call

postmodernism," Jameson continues, "no longer produces monumental works of the

modernist type but ceaselessly reshuffles the fragments of preexisting texts, the building

blocks of older cultural and social production, in some new and heightened bricolage"

(96). Postmodernity, one narrative seems to go, textualizes culture and then obliterates

that text into infinite permutations of fragmentary "reshuffling." Put another way,

postmodern cosmology appears to comprise fragments all the way down.

If such a conception of culture and reality is correct (or even a half-truth),

classically wrought models of rhetorical theory face a challenge, and I'm certainly not the

first to say so. Here is Edwin Black in 1965, well before the heyday of postmodern

theory, speaking rather clearly to the theoretical discrepancies between classical and

modern rhetorical systems: "It is easy to develop a rhetorical system out of commonplace

topics if one lives in a walled city, many days' journey from the nearest settlement, with well-established and clearly understood traditions and a culture almost tribal in its cohesiveness, but these conditions hardly apply to the political refugee in West Germany or even the file clerk in Kansas City" (126-27). If Western culture is both variegated and fragmentary (and was so even before the overt rise of postmodernity), the commonplaces Black refers to will sum to no cultural totality, but only an aggregate of discursive splinters that, as Jameson says, signify nothing stable. But Jameson's encyclopedic project of charting the postmodern depths, from literature to architecture to film and beyond, differs somewhat from that of the rhetorical critic who must bring a specific situation's persuasive methods (however transitory) into focus. At the risk of "reifying" the "total flow" of postmodern discourse, the rhetorical critic still has little choice but to home in on details. On the other hand, rhetoric can share with postmodernism an emphasis on change. In Celeste Michelle Condit's words, "to study rhetoric is not to seek for a unifying principle" but to "seek for the important discursive units that recur in discussions of an era and to explore their interactions" (*Meanings* 253). Where Jameson sees a kaleidoscopic explosion of fragments, the rhetorician might see an intertext of fragmentary voices and devices that enable and delimit the range of persuasion. If I find Jameson's position occasionally overwrought, I still believe the two perspectives are largely compatible.

The definitive statement on rhetorical fragmentation remains Michael Calvin McGee's 1990 essay "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture." There, McGee entreats rhetoricians to "quit whining about the so-called 'post-modern condition' and to develop realistic strategies to deal with it as a fact of human life" (278).

Owing to the postmodern absence of cultural totalities like those composing the classical

nation-state, McGee insists on reconfiguring "text" as a "fragment" of its context—which

leaves smaller fragments, the sort that can become *topoi*, as fragments of fragments. With

such heterogeneous patterns in mind, I turn back to *topoi*. Considered topically, I believe

there are two sets of interrelated questions for rhetoricians to ask about discursive

fragments: those about their origins and evolution, and those about their rhetorical

function in specific situations. Below, I consider topical fragmentation alongside eight

related terms—*archetype*, *ideograph*, *god-term*, *icon*, *lexia*, *quotation*, and *ideologeme*—

with these sets of questions in mind, advancing finally toward an understanding of *topoi*

not only as agents of rhetorical economy, but also as agents in the evolution of rhetorical

culture itself.

Archetype

As McGee's taxonomy makes clear, there exist different degrees of discursive

fragmentation, and therefore different varieties (or "sizes," "magnitudes") of fragments.

My example above of "binders full of women," for example, is a contextually "small"

fragment given its specificity to a certain set of rhetorico-historical parameters, while my

introductory example of "bootstraps" finds broader, though less rhetorically pointed,

meaning in a much larger swath of American cultural history. Among the conceptually

"largest" of such fragments would be what the pioneering analytical psychologist C.G.

Jung termed archetypes. For Jung, these are "archaic or—I would say—primordial types,

that is, . . . universal images that have existed since the remotest times" (5). I am not

interested here in testing the veracity of Jung's insistence that a set of such universals

sum to a "collective unconscious" underscoring the cumulative psyche; rather, I am interested in how "archetype" presents itself as a narrative and symbolic category of discourse. In Northrop Frye's essays on literary archetypes, for example, the term is a step toward total mythopoeic coherence (*Anatomy* 131-242, *Fables* 7-20). For Frye, literary archetypes—which can take imagistic and generic form both—sum to the "grammatical rudiments of literary expression," a sort of essential symbolary derived from the inherited traditions of Ancient Greece and Rome, plus Judeo-Christianity (*Fables* 12, *Anatomy* 133). Similarly, with a specific nod back to Jung, Ernst Robert Curtius sees archetypes as markers of "psychological history" (82). Curtius also forges a direct link between archetypes and *topoi*, "poetic topoi" like the "ideal landscape" forming widely recognizable images capable of sustaining "a perpetual exchange" between poetry and rhetoric (82, 101, 105). Despite postmodern skepticism toward the idea of "primordial images" that function prior to culture, it does behoove rhetoricians to take seriously the looming categories of recurring narrative fragmentation—the mother figure, the trickster, the ocean, the cosmos—that tend to recur with intense suggestive power (see also Rushing and Frentz). To say that culture is evolving and unstable is not to insist that durable categories cannot exist.

It would be only a small stretch to suggest that Aristotle's *koinoi topoi* in the *Rhetoric* represent something like an archetypal taxonomy of argumentation, an attempt to exhaustively map out the available space of rhetorical invention. Where Aristotle's bounded "regions" of topical organization could conceivably help Athenian orators choose appropriate form and material for their circumstances, so too can archetypal images or characters help the novelist, poet, or filmmaker convey a certain attitude or

thesis through her selection of familiar "stock" material. Consider the archetype of the dutiful, self-effacing mother exemplified to varying degrees by Barbara Stanwyck's character from the film *Stella Dallas*, Shirley MacLaine's in *Terms of Endearment*, or even Sigourney Weaver's Ripley in *Aliens*. To refer to such a character through narrative example (as in a novel or film) or otherwise (say, through reference to one's own mother in a political speech) is to draw forth rhetorical energy from a broad archetypal region. Returning to the figurative terms I use above, a politician's mother might become synecdoche for the associations of motherhood in general, and also metonym for abstract expressions of "family values" and "proper" gender roles. Both tropes describe the funneling of rhetorical energy into a representative node, one that props itself on tacit commonplaces: "mothers should be caregivers," "mothers should give everything to help their children succeed," and so forth. Archetypes, thus, organize realms of topical energy and clusters of topical nodes. They are not the smallest or sharpest of fragments, but represent broad, durable categories by which audiences might understand other fragments they encounter.

Ideograph and God-Term

Discussions of "ideographs" and "god-terms"—the definitions of which I come to momentarily—certainly predate their assignments to those precise labels. In his much-anthologized 1946 essay "Politics and the English Language," George Orwell laments the proliferation of "meaningless words" in arenas like art criticism and politics. Among the "abused" terms in politics, Orwell says, are "*democracy*, *socialism*, *freedom*, *patriotic*, *realistic*, *justice*," each of which "[has] several different meanings which cannot be

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reconciled with one another" (152; emphasis Orwell's). The case of *democracy* is particular grim, he adds, since "[i]t is almost universally felt that when we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently the defenders of every regime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using the word if it were tied down to any one meaning" (152-53). Today, one can sympathize more than ever with Orwell's frustrations—Terry Eagleton, for example, enumerates a similar list of "anti-theoretical" post-9/11 terms designed to "shut down thought" (223)—though the problem may be the inverse of what Orwell describes. From a topical perspective, a word like *democracy* isn't so much "meaningless" as it is staggeringly, bountifully meaningful: diverse groups and diverse ideologies (quite likely including the "democratic" demagogues Orwell perceives as willfully disingenuous) all infer intense "meaning" from such a term, even if their varying conceptual systems will link "democracy" to different points of connotation (commonplaces, *topoi*, cultural assumptions, and so on).

"Democracy" is a tailor-made example of an *ideograph*, what McGee describes as "pregnant" term that, together with other such terms, amount to "the basic structural elements, the building blocks, of ideology" (7). Speaking to my modification of Orwell's point, McGee continues that divergent groups of Americans "are *united* by the ideographs that represent the political entity 'United States' and *separated* by a disagreement as to the practical meaning of such ideographs" (8). McGee's point about unity and division is, I think, worth buying wholesale. Nonetheless, I would revise his metaphors of ideological "construction." Ideographs like "religion," "freedom of speech," and "rule of law," to use some of McGee's examples (6-7), indeed function as *discursive* "building blocks"—as fortifying terms one can cement into an essayistic or oratorical

edifice—but in the broader, transtexual sphere of ideology I would insist, once more, on the metaphors of connectivity and orientation rather than those of monumental construction. Emphasis on connectivity recasts ideographs as a special class of *topoi*. Where *archetype* describes a topical category or region, *ideograph* describes a "special" topic, a mediating force between a specific discursive form (the word "freedom," "democracy," or "justice" itself) and the range of connectivity that form enables among other points in ideological space. Ideographs both unite and divide because their range of connectivity is unusually expansive. For example, liberals and conservatives will assent to a eulogistic "common ground" evoked by the term "freedom," a region comprising numerous commonplaces about the rights and privileges essential to American identity. Both groups, though, will claim "freedom" for their divergent beliefs about the role of government intervention, church and state, and so forth, leading to multiple, incongruous realms of topical association.

McGee attempts to distance his keyword from "more general conceptions of 'Ultimate' or 'God' terms" through the ideograph's "attention . . . to the social, rather than rational or ethical, functions of a particular vocabulary" (8). I am not sure the distinction is so tidy. *God-terms*, an expression popularized by both Burke and Richard Weaver, represent, in the latter's terms, the "highest" link in a chain of discourse, the "prime mover of human impulse" (211). Many of the god-terms Weaver lists— "progress," "freedom," "democracy" (212-13, 228-29)—are those McGee would classify as ideographs and Orwell would decry as "meaningless." Weaver's "progress," for instance, "seems to be an ultimate generator of force flowing down through many links of ancillary terms" (212), where Weaver's terms of "force" largely mirror my own of topical

connectivity. It is true that Weaver's final paragraphs of *The Ethics of Rhetoric* demand a "rational" reassessment of American society's god-terms (232), but such an ethical terminus does not negate the conceptual similarity his prior descriptions of god-terms have to ideographs. Burke, though he offers a great litany of conceivable "rhetorical names for God"—a sort of splintering of the divine to all available avenues of public and private life—returns to the example of the Romans, who "knew that you could get a god merely by taking an adjective and transforming it into an abstract noun" (*Rhetoric* 299-300, 301). So it is, Burke reminds us, that we see the cultural "deification" of abstractions like *freedom* and *patriotism*.

I am suggesting that, while McGee, Weaver, and Burke emphasize different rhetorical qualities, they are viewing the same essential concept from different angles. In all cases, the sense of connotative reach available to the ideograph/god-term is central in configuring its rhetorical potential. One can justly speak of the ideographic qualities of the god-term, which, once ascended to its hierarchical zenith of symbolic order, doubles as a nexus of ideological organizations and division. ("God" itself is both the original god-term and an ideograph; incongruities over the precise socially ordering, connotative reach of "God" have motivated both ideological discord and war.) Without literally equating religion with capitalism, nationalism, or other –isms, one can also point out the "divine" qualities of ideographs. What Burke calls "secular prayer," or the "*coaching of an attitude* by the use of mimetic and verbal language*," centrally involves the selection of appropriate terms, among which the ideographic are supremely important (*Attitudes* 322; emphasis Burke's); one, in other words, ritually orders her secular life by performing allegiance to certain terms, much as one of faith might strive to live in conversation with

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God. It is easy to order one's life around ideographs because of their connotative wealth and elasticity. Both ideographs and god-terms represent the most well-connected of topical nodes. They are, by necessity, both denotatively diffuse (to Orwell's consternation) and connotatively brimming. They are, unlike the transitory "binders full of women," durable and long-lasting, but often convey less rhetorical bite than a situationally derived *topos*-of-the-moment. Ephemeral *topoi*, though, function largely by suggestively tethering current events to the values and ideas evoked by ideographic and "divine" *topoi*.

Lexia and Quotation

The question of where *topoi* come from is answerable, at least in one sense, by Roland Barthes's term *lexia*s, or "units of reading" (*S/Z* 13). In *S/Z*, Barthes attempts an ambitious, draw-out study of Balzac's short story "Sarrasine," a work Barthes chops up into numbered chunks—*lexias*—designed to describe the phenomenology of reading. On his key term, Barthes elaborates:

> The lexia will include sometimes a few words, sometimes several
>
> sentences: it will be a matter of convenience; it will suffice that the lexia
>
> be the best possible space in which we can observe meanings; its
>
> dimension, empirically determined, estimated, will depend on the *density*
>
> *of connotations*, variable according to the moments of the text: all we
>
> require is that each lexia should have at most three or four meanings to be
>
> enumerated. (13-14; emphasis added)

It is difficult, here, to take Barthes quite literally (how does one "empirically" list four "meanings"?), but the *lexia* is invaluable as a pragmatic category of textual division. In particular, Barthes's criterion of connotative density translates well to considerations of *topoi*. It is, as I explain above, the connotative density of ideographic terms that establishes their role as recurring *topoi*. When Barthes suggests that some *lexias* can be as short as "a few words," ideographs come to mind, for it is easy when reading a word like "freedom" or "justice" to cognitively abstract the term from the text, and from the "voice" of the writer, as an expression of cultural authority rather than that of the individual writer. It is difficult to lay down an exact set of criteria which by other phrases or sentences might also become abstracted from the text and born into rhetorical discourse as *topoi*—except to say that a connotative serendipity must take place between the fragment and the reader's ideological climate. This was certainly the case with "binders full of women," whose metonymic relations to recent politics were too obvious to ignore. In other instances, stylistic flair combines with connotative density to produce a memorable fragment. This is the case, for example, with "good fences make good neighbors" (popularly attributed to Robert Frost), another fragment I take up in Chapter 4.

The concept of the "lexia" describes how a fragment can wrench free of its text and become recognizable as a quotation. Typically, quotations circulate with some authorial tag—that is, as belonging to an actual author or at least a collective authority. But, in the words of Gary Saul Morson, quotations functionally belong to a "second speaker," not the flesh-and-blood individual who may have once put words to paper or voice, but often hazy public memory of the speaker that accompanies the quote (*Words of*

Others 96-97). There exist different genres of quotations—in the Bakhtinian sense of the *speech genre*, a form selected for its communicative or rhetorical function—among which Morson, in *The Long and Short of It: From Aphorism to Novel*, deals with aphorisms, apothegms, dicta, witticisms, witlessisms, and maxims in detail, each according to its sense of rhetorical *purpose* (13-14). One might also include slogans, which, rather than expressing the authority of an individual, "draw from the collective and help establish a distinct, collective identity" while, unlike apothegms, resisting contemplative or critical questions (Kopelson 594). Quotations, whatever the genre, rarely display anything approaching ideographic density of connotations, but the fusion of verbal style with at least significant ideological connectivity remains a good recipe for topical fitness. In the arena of rhetorical practice, I am suggesting, quotations can emerge as *topoi* tethered to *ethē*: they carry a sense of character and credibility in their very form.

Ideologeme

In her essay "The Bounded Text," Julia Kristeva introduces the term *ideologeme*, her own neologism, as "the intersection of a given textual arrangement (a semiotic practice) with the utterances (sequences) that it either assimilates into its own space or to which it refers in the space of exterior texts (semiotic practices)" (36). In other words, the term *ideologeme* compresses textual form and situated purpose into a unitary concept. It is an "intertextual function read as 'materialized' at the different structural levels of each text, and which stretches along the entire length of its trajectory, giving its historical and social coordinates" (36). To say that *topoi* are ideologemes, then, is to point out the factors of cultural variance and temporal drift that, in hindsight, are conspicuously absent

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in Aristotle's discussion of the *topoi*. To figure in the problem of change, in fact, is to divest Aristotle's definite article, *the*, of any definite qualities. There is no "the *topoi*" but only certain, available *topoi* as they function in a specific, transitory situation. Postmodernity shatters the Athenian myth of stasis.

This, anyway, would be the proper postmodernist position. It is a position I generally accept, though I would point out that the enduring relevance of terms like *archetype* and *ideograph* bespeaks both the durability of certain rhetorical categories and the often slow, incremental processes of cultural change within which the reciprocal change of *topoi* occurs. The qualification accepts the letter of Jameson's conception of postmodernity as the "free play of signifiers" while, in a sense, belying the spirit of Jameson's thesis. If stability is an ontological myth, it remains a pragmatic category on some fronts insofar as discursive and cultural formations often change very slowly. By invoking Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the *utterance*, though, Kristeva nods toward this sense of gradual drift. Against the unbending formalism of Saussurean linguistics, Bakhtin posits the utterance as the "*real unit of speech communication*" (*Speech Genres* 67; emphasis Bakhtin's). Bakhtin explains that utterances—which are bounded not by periods and semicolons but by "*a change of speaking subjects*"—represent links in an ongoing chain of discourse; they respond to previous utterances and anticipate the responses of future utterances (71; emphasis Bakhtin's). It stands to reason that speech genres, the functional forms utterances take, will change over time as the chain of communication progresses through evolving ideological climates. To regard *topos* as ideologeme is to account for this progression, and to pose the question of incremental change. It is my position that *topoi* themselves evolve and, in doing so, contribute to the

larger evolution of rhetorical culture. This thesis will propel the final section on *topoi* and evolution below.

Topos **and Evolution**

Topoi evolve. Stated casually, such a proposition will probably turn few heads—no more than any of the preceding attempts in this chapter to revise the classical term for postmodern conditions. Morson, for instance, stresses that verbal genres, unlike biological species, "rarely, if ever, display a single line of descent" (*Long and Short* 12; see also Frye, *Fables* 11); but such an observation hardly annuls the thesis that genres "evolve," that they change slowly over time (see Miller, "Do Genres Evolve?"). When the verb *evolve* takes on distinctly Darwinian connotations, though, many humanists grow uneasy, and often for good reason. Leah Ceccarelli's *Shaping Science with Rhetoric*, for example, describes the "imperializing" metaphors of conquest that characterize E.O. Wilson's *Consilience*, a book ostensibly designed to unite scientific and humanistic inquiry under a single project, but that, to the nonscientist, feels a lot like epistemological colonization (Ceccarelli 128-53). Amid the corporatization of higher education, and the professionalized threats to the liberal curriculum, humanists have every right to be wary of scientistic hubris and disciplinary gerrymandering. I myself am a committed humanist and harbor such concerns in abundance.

It is one thing—a good thing—to study the rhetoric of science, critique the more harmful uses of scientific epistemology, and to defend the humanities against disciplinary encroachment. It is quite another, from one's perspective as a humanist scholar, to dismiss science qua science or to cynically degrade any theoretical insights originating

from the sciences. Both these positions can be seen in the career of John Angus

Campbell, a rhetorician I greatly admire. Campbell's scholarly career rests principally on

an excellent series of articles regarding Charles Darwin and the rhetorical context for his

Origin of Species. These articles cover Darwin's polemical style ("Polemical Mr.

Darwin"), the relationship between rhetorical and scientific invention ("Scientific

Discovery"), cultural contexts for the *Origin* ("Scientific Revolution," "Why Was

Darwin"), and Darwin's strategic enlistment of rhetorical allies ("Invisible Rhetorician"),

among other matters (see also Davies; Depew; White 130-34). "To claim that Darwin

was a rhetorician," Campbell stresses in one essay, "is not to dismiss his science, but to

draw attention to his accommodation of his message to the professional and lay audiences

whose support was necessary for its acceptance" ("Charles Darwin" 69). It is, then, with

some confusion that one might read contributions to Campbell and Stephen C. Meyer's

Darwinism, Design, and Public Education, a collection composed largely of rhetoricians

and other non-scientists attempting to discredit Darwinian evolution *as science*. If

Wilson's imperializing metaphors represent disciplinary hubris, so, too, do many of these

essays and their attempts to undermine scientific consensus in the name of "pluralism" or

"teaching the controversy." (What controversy, exactly—and where should one teach it?)

Campbell's work on Darwin the rhetorician need not translate to his positions in favor of

allowing intelligent design into the science curriculum. It is, in my view, unfortunate that

they have.

Also pertinent is Thomas M. Lessl's *Rhetorical Darwinism: Religion, Evolution,

and the Scientific Identity*, a book whose pun of a title represents both the subject matter

of "evolutionism"—or the "spiritualization of scientific knowledge" (xi), the progression

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of which Lessel traces between Francis Bacon's Enlightenment and the present—and the theory of slow, incremental changes in rhetorical formations, the process by which concepts like evolutionism "evolve." Like Campbell's work on Darwin, Lessl's book includes a fascinating and persuasive body of historical work. Lessl then projects his ideas forward into a latter-day polemic against science's place in public discourse, a position that, from my perspective, devolves into an uncomfortable bifurcation between religion and science, one bolstered in part by ungenerous readings of scientific advocates (see Wetherbee, "Descent"). In my review of *Rhetorical Darwinism*, though, I point out that one (likely inadvertent) effect of Lessl's method is to demonstratively suggest the viability of Darwinian models of cultural transmission in rhetorical criticism ("Descent" n6).

I advocate for such a model below, but I consider my own position on Darwinism and the humanities a moderate one. In the last two decades, "literary Darwinists" like Joseph Carroll have painted a dire portrait of the state of the humanities. For Carroll, writing in 2011, the vapid language games of poststructuralism threaten the integrity of humanities, and their hegemony can only exert a "degenerative pressure" by which critical theorists and literary critics (he says nothing of rhetoricians, but one assumes we are also culpable) come to occupy a reclusive epistemological corner of the academy overshadowed by the "ever growing prestige and power of the scientific understanding of human nature" (*Reading Human Nature* 75). Carroll hopes, instead, that "the pace and production in Darwinist publication will continue or increase; the institutional resistance of the postmodern establishment will crumble from within, almost silently, softly metamorphosing into dust, like the Soviet empire, as a result of intellectual dry rot" (85).

In *Darwinian Misadventures in the Humanities* (2009), by contrast, Eugene Goodheart characterizes the neo-Darwinian "scientism" of many evolutionary psychologists, sociobiologists, and literary Darwinists as "a failure to respect the boundaries that divide the natural sciences from the humanities" (10). After dealing with Darwinian affronts to literature, religion, and ethics, Goodheart concludes his book with a defense of "dualism," of the separate magisteria of the sciences and humanities (see also Gould, coiner of the momentous and controversial phrase "non-overlapping magisteria" in reference to science and religion). If the boundary between the two "should not be impermeable," it is telling that Goodheart's examples of productive cross-pollination are all of novels that benefit from characters who are scientists—not from theories or moralities that benefit from a dialectic with science (107).

I am moderately sympathetic to Goodheart's concerns and only minimally sympathetic to Carroll's. Yet, finally, I agree with Carroll that Darwin deserves, at least, a right to "join the party" (*Reading Human Nature* 77). Darwin remains, after all, among the most momentous thinkers of the last two centuries, and his theory of evolution by means of differential fitness offers immense explanatory power—not only in the biological sciences, where it now a unifying principle, but also in the arena of language. I agree with Richard Dawkins that "Darwinism is too big a theory to be confined to the narrow context of the gene" (*Selfish Gene* 191). Rhetoricians ought to at least consider what Darwin offers.

Darwinian Language and Rhetoric

As Campbell's work has illustrated, Darwin's driving metaphors and analogies—

"natural selection" itself the most famous one—bespeak both the role of rhetorical

invention in the development of Darwin's theories and the naturalist's interest in

communicating his ideas in a publically comprehensible form. I will suggest, further, that

Darwin suggests a productive analogy between nature and human culture. In the *Origin*,

for example, he writes

> Nothing is easier to than to admit in words the truth of the universal
>
> struggle for life, or more difficult—at least I have found it so—than
>
> constantly to bear this conclusion in mind. Yet unless it be thoroughly
>
> engrained in the mind, the whole *economy of nature*, with every fact on
>
> distribution, rarity, abundance, extinction, and variation, will be dimly
>
> seen or quite misunderstood. (ch. 3; 52; emphasis added)

Darwin is speaking, here, of the human conceptual system and its limitations. To

comprehend a new idea in anything but the "dimmest" of light, the mind needs points of

familiar reference. This is one reason why Darwin introduces the metaphor of

economy—complete with its constituent analogues of supply and demand, abundance

and scarcity—that usefully demonstrate the similar competition for resources in nature.

Reciprocally, though, Darwin's metaphor also suggests the role of rhetorical invention in

the origins of Darwinism itself. Metaphors like "economy" and, later, the "polity of

nature" express a deep-seated analogy between nature and society in Darwin's thinking

(ch. 4; 84), one that permits Darwinism an epistemological intersection with social

theories of language.

With this analogy in mind, one can turn to Darwin's explicit pronouncements on language, of which there are many in *The Descent of Man*. Darwin writes, "We find in distinct languages striking homologies due to community of descent, and analogies due to similar process of formation" (ch. 3; 445-46). "Languages, like organic beings," he continues, "can be classed in groups under groups; and they can be classed either naturally or according to descent, or artificially by other characters" (446). More specifically, individual words also compete with each other. In addition to matters of brevity and concision (or, perhaps, what Barthes would term "density of connotation") in determining the certain words' survival, "mere novelty and fashion may be added; for there is in the mind of man a strong love for slight changes in all things. The survival or preservation of certain favoured words in the struggle for existence is natural selection" (466). Again rises the tacit metaphor of economy. There exists only use for so many languages and so many words among so many people, so competition among words *is* natural selection insofar as natural selection *is* economy. My point is not that "mere" metaphor here fuels a series of spurious claims in Darwin's work, but that a common epistemological foundation between his thoughts on nature and culture allows Darwin to accurately and productively broach the matter of linguistic evolution. This maneuver does not guarantee Darwin authority on the subject of language, but it does suggest, in my view, that his thoughts on language should be taken seriously—as many recent scholars do.

If words evolve, *topoi* evolve. If *topoi* evolve, rhetoric evolves. I am, as far as I know, the first to pursue the subject of topical evolution, but others have discussed evolution and rhetoric more generally. In *Darwin Pharmacy: Sex, Plants, and the*

Evolution of the Noösphere, Richard M. Doyle suggests a co-evolutionary interrelation between human rhetorical performance and hallucinogenic plants. Here, Doyle's "evolution of rhetoric" corresponds to the available symbiosis between human rhetors and rhetoric-enhancing drugs (127-73). Taking a more conventional approach to matters of nature and culture, Alex C. Parrish's *Adaptive Rhetoric: Evolution, Culture, and the Art of Persuasion* is the most recent and thoroughgoing statement on prospect of rhetoric as a bioevolutionary act. Drawing on George Kennedy's work in *Comparative Rhetoric*, as well that of biologists like E.O. Wilson, Parrish diligently pursues the thesis that "persuasion is a special form of animal signaling" describable by natural and cultural forces both (23). I am largely receptive to Parrish's project and the interdisciplinary cooperation further inquiry of its ilk could ideally yield—though, in the meantime, I genuinely wonder which subjects rhetoricians ought to take up and which are best left to scientific fields like biocommunication. Happily, my own interests in Darwinism circumvent such a potential turf war. Diverging from Doyle and Parrish's projects, I will focus specifically on the Darwinian evolution of nonhuman, discursive units of communication.

Topos, Meme, and Evolution

In a particularly insightful passage from *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke takes up the example of Darwin's *Origin* in relation to the dramatistic terms of *agent* and *scene*. The "agent-scene" ratio, in Burke's terms, describes the spectrum of emphasis between overt environmental determinism and overt individualism. Darwin's species, for Burke, amounts to an "agent-minus": "[Species] might be classed under the term agent to the

extent that their behavior has to be accounted for, at least in part, by some purely internal

principle of motivation. . . . Yet such organisms reflect the same reduction of

circumference as we have previously observed with respect to scene" (155). In other

words, species, in and of themselves, do act as agents—they attempt to ensure their own

survival. They are also profoundly bound by the environmental scene, which is why the

most valiant actions of a polar bear marooned in the Sahara will still be for naught.

I believe the same "agent-minus" status applies to *memes*. The evolutionary

biologist and public intellectual Richard Dawkins famously coined *meme* in his book *The*

Selfish Gene. Dawkins imagines the meme as the cultural analogue to the biological gene:

"Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making

pots or building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping

from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool

by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called

imitation" (192). The "success" of a given meme, Dawkins tells us, boils down to three

criteria, the same he uses to assess genes: "longevity" (how long a meme persists in

human usage), "fecundity" (the purchase or appeal of a meme in context), and "copying-

fidelity" (how faithfully a meme replicates) (194). Dawkins would later clarify his

particularly scientific understanding of the meme: "A meme should be regarded as a unit

of information residing in a brain. . . . This is to distinguish it from its phenotypic effects,

which are its effects in the outside world" (*Extended* 109). But meme theory, or

memetics, has been taken up by commentators much more enthusiastic and prolific than

Dawkins himself, most notably Darwinian philosopher Daniel Dennett in *Consciousness*

Explained, Darwin's Dangerous Idea, and *Freedom Evolves*; psychologist Susan

Blackmore in *The Meme Machine*; Robert Aunger in *The Electric Meme*; and Kate Distin

in *The Selfish Meme*. Of further interest are contributions to the now-defunct *Journal of*

Memetics (1997-2005), as well as a host of other books, articles, and edited collections

related to the subject (Aunger, *Darwinizing*; Benzon; Gatherer, "Macromemetics," "Why

the 'Thought Contagion'"; Gillett; Kronfeldner; Johnson; c.f. Richerson and Boyd).

The meme is a controversial concept, incurring distain from both audiences in

science, for whom the term is not scientific enough, and in the humanities, for whom the

term represents a scientistic transgression into the arena of cultural studies (see Rose).

Interestingly, both Goodheart and Carroll speak ill of memes. For the traditional

humanist, they are products of an irrevocably scientific epistemology (*Darwinian* 3). For

the literary Darwinist, memes are an unfortunate metaphorical shorthand distracting from

the real forces of evolution (*Literary Darwinism* xii-xiii; Burman). Popular science guru

Steven Pinker, further, suggests that memes have more in common with "epidemiology

than . . . evolution" inasmuch as ideas resemble "contagious diseases that cause

epidemics, rather than advantageous genes that cause adaptations" (210). And on the

gene-meme analogue, evolutionary psychologist Alex Mesoudi criticizes the "particulate,

all-or-nothing transmission of discrete units" suggested by meme theory (41).

These criticisms are not to be taken lightly. It bears note, too, that some theories

of memes are wholly incompatible with humanistic inquiry. Aunger, for instance, takes

some of Dawkins's later comments on memes to an extreme, insisting that because

"[a]rtefacts and behaviors fail the replicator test," memes must *physically* exist in the

brain—and even "persist in a brain in a vat" (324). It is beyond me to refute or confirm

such a hypothesis—except to say that this version of the meme does not immediately

benefit rhetoricians.

A version of the meme that does benefit rhetoricians—particularly in its relevance

to topical invention—is that advanced by Dennett. In terms reminiscent of Barthes's

lexias, Dennett defines memes as "*distinct memorable units*"—"the smallest elements

that replicate themselves with reliability and fecundity" (*Darwin's* 344). The

transcendent argument of memeticists like Dennett and Blackmore is that culture evolves,

in a Darwinian sense, through the selection of memes. In any given set of cultural

parameters, there exists a population or "economy" of memes, to return to Darwin's

metaphor, individual "species" of which compete under the conditions of variation,

replication (heredity, in biological terms), and differential fitness (Dennett, *Darwin's*

343). A macroscopic perspective, then, can trace broad trends in cultural drift—for

instance, the gradual decline and cloistered eradication of some overtly racist memes like

blackface or the proliferation of memes related to movements like Occupy Wall Street.

From another perspective, what Dennett and Blackmore term the "meme's-eye view," the

critic can imagine the individual meme (say, a unit like "we are the 99%") using humans

and cultural apparatuses to *stay in existence* (Dennett, *Darwin's* 361-69; Blackmore 37-

52). Thus, one returns to Burke's category of the "agent-minus." Memes could easily be

regarded as an *agency*—that which human agents *use* to communicate or persuade—or,

when pooled into a "memeplex," or complex of coadaptive memes, sum to a sort of

discursive "scene" or context. But one can also perceive memes acting as agents, albeit

rather simple agents propelled by the single motivation to replicate and persist.

Above, I liken memes to species rather than genes. This is a deliberate choice, and one, I think, that benefits *meme* as a rhetorical keyword. Memes are particulate and discrete, and the movement of culture involves the flow of discrete textual fragments. But memetic transmission should not be understood, in Mesoudi's words, as "all-or-nothing." Individual memes can evolve, and the subject of *topoi*-as-memes helps illustrate how. The prospect of topical evolution introduces two forms of interrelated change: connotative and formal, the former of which is necessarily primary. In the United States, the connotative meanings of a term like "socialism"—still useful as a *topos*—have changed drastically over the last century; once a divisive term of considerable eulogistic following, it is now, essentially, what Weaver calls a "devil term" or "term of repulsion"—what *they* are and *we* aren't (222). The word "socialism" has stuck but the ideologeme "socialism" has changed enormously. This process of change amounts to evolution insofar as replication of the word "socialism" through the decades has exploited the means of a changing historical climate; the "fitness" of "socialism" the meme lies in its connotative flexibility. I would argue that *ideology* has been the missing term in many accounts of memetics, particularly those concerned with the psychology of individual brains. (This category would include Blackmore, with whom I otherwise find much to agree with.) The matter of ideological climate provides the Burkean scene for memetic agents. When, in other instances, the form of a meme changes (for instance, when the Christian ichthys sprouts legs to satirize intelligent design), the new form must evoke enough connotative density to make itself useful in human discourse.

My argument is this: Rhetors use *topoi* to argue and communicate; *topoi* use rhetors stay in existence. The *topoi* that emerge and survive are those whose connectivity

remains opportune. *Kairos* is the necessary lifeblood of the *topos*, but it is also the force that dries up and sweeps aside obviated *topoi*. There is also, I would argue, a sense in which rhetoricians can configure evolution as an alternate path of inquiry to that of history. Rhetorical history, in its dominant iterations, remains centrally a matter of human actors: Platos and Aristotles, Burkes and Perelmans, Lincolns and JFKs. Evolution provides an alternate model centered on the interactions of human agents, topical agents, and ideological parameters. Evolution also accounts for the aleatory dimensions of rhetorical culture—the unexpected and unforeseeable coinages and developments that unsettle the "sediment" of discourse and shape the trajectory of culture. Rhetorical criticism cannot predict events like "binders full of women," though a Darwinian attitude toward rhetoric folds such unforeseen events into a coherent vision of cultural change through the explanatory power of "fitness." The recent proliferation of Internet memes— or, in Limor Shifman's terms, "groups of content items" that circulate online, and among which riffs on "binders full of women" posed a potent example (39-42, 2-4)—only illustrates further the potency of memes-cum-*topoi* (see also see also Knobel and Lankshear; Lewis; Vie, "Cokelore," "In Defense"; Wetherbee, "Picking Up"). While some memeticists disparage the fast-and-loose terms by which Internet users describe memes (see Dennett, *Intuition Pumps* 274), I believe the web only makes apparent and pressing what more capable memeticists have been arguing for decades. The meme is an imperfect term, but, used well, it is one rhetoricians ignore to our own detriment.

Conclusion

The sort of topical criticism that might result from the terminological symposium I provide in the chapter should, I think, return to two central questions sets of questions. One would concern the work a certain *topos* accomplishes or might accomplish in a delimited set of rhetorical parameters—the famous "rhetorical situation" of Lloyd Bitzer's coinage. These questions necessarily isolate a manageable swath of cultural history for analysis, looking at the connectivity of a certain *topos*, or set of *topoi*, in that context, and examining the functional genres (archetypes, ideographs, lexias, and so forth) those *topoi* take. The second set of questions would involve the question of change. On this front, rhetoricians might examine the evolution of one of more *topoi* over historical time, paying attention to the dialectic between *topos* and ideological climate. While allowing for aleatory developments, rhetoricians might also speculate about future evolutions based on present-day uses of certain *topoi*—what possible avenues they enable or limit. These issues surface in the remaining chapters. In Chapter 3, while relying on illustrative *topoi* from debates about gay marriage and Occupy Wall St., I advance that thesis that rhetorical *epideixis* merits consideration as not only the rhetoric of "praise and blame," but also of cultural evolution. Chapter 4 then merges the topical theory I develop here with a Bakhtinian approach to the rhetorical appropriation of voice, analyzing how the voices of others circulate within individual *topoi*.

CHAPTER 3

EPIDEIXIS AND/AS CULTURAL EVOLUTION:

THE EXAMPLES OF "GAY MARRIAGE" AND "WE ARE THE 99%"

In February of 2004, a contentious election year that unfolded before an

increasingly grim and unpopular war in Iraq, the incumbent president George W. Bush

proposed legislation to add a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage at the

federal level. Speaking to the press in the Roosevelt Room of the White House, the

president spun a familiar narrative: the virtuous defenders of tradition needed to stand up

against a small minority of cantankerous upstarts. He spoke: "In recent months . . . some

activist judges and local officials have made an aggressive attempt to redefine marriage. .

. . And unless action is taken, we can expect more arbitrary court decisions, more

litigation, and defiance of the law by local officials, all of which adds to uncertainty."

Soon after, he added, "Marriage cannot be severed from its cultural, religious, and natural

roots without weakening the good influence of society." The terms of Bush's brief speech

appeared carefully chosen—culture, religion, nature, and certainty aligned against

aggression, revisionism, and arbitrariness—and the argument made waves. As those

following American politics in 2004 likely remember, the hot-button phrase "gay

marriage" surged into the national lexicon that February, bringing in tow precisely the set

of connotations Bush seemed to intend. Most Americans took the term to be an

oxymoronic coupling squarely opposed to the ideographic borders of tradition, morality,

and family values. Bush revitalized the language of 1996's Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). Marriage—itself a sort of god-term—was under attack and suddenly required defending against this profane, interloping adjective.

A lot—in terms of rhetoric and public policy both—has happened since then, and recent results are not what Bush would have hoped. The federal amendment was never ratified, national support for gay marriage has swelled from approximately 38 percent in 2004 to 59 percent in 2014, elements of DOMA have been ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, and same-sex couples can now obtain marriage licenses in the majority of American states (see Capeheart). On the rhetorical level, the nation has seen a shifting of terms and connotations surrounding "gay marriage." Democratic candidates who once sheepishly acknowledged that *of course* they believe "marriage is between one man and one woman" now lend avid support to the rights of same-sex couples. Republicans who once stood behind the bulwark of "traditional marriage" find their defenses crumbling. Despite the effects it had in diverting attention away from the floundering Iraq War and into the Republicans' bread-and-butter realm of "moral values," Bush's proposed legislation also, as journalist Jonathan Capeheart puts it, "sparked public debate about marriage equality that ignited a historic backlash." As Capeheart contends, the LGBTQ community has the Bush administration Justice Antonin Scalia to "thank"—in an odd sense—for accelerating the ideological drift on the matter of same-sex rights.

Capeheart is right: hindsight suggests that gay rights would not have advanced by such leaps and bounds had Bush not highlighted "gay marriage" as an issue in the first place. But I think the standard terms for rhetorically analyzing this kind of the situation require revision. Typically, we describe such process of rhetorical transformation through

the humanistic, rationalist metaphors of "sparking a debate" or "beginning a conversation." The "debate" metaphor is surely useful, though it offers the simplistic image of two orators offering two positions. This is not how civic discourse, writ large, progresses. The "conversation" metaphor, especially as it follows from Burke's image of the interminable discussion in the parlor (*Philosophy* 110-11), is much better, but even the Burkean parlor implies the perpetuation of discourse chiefly by *human actors* in a bracketed space, with little to say, at least explicitly, of the discursive resources that surround and constitute these speakers. Put another way, "debate" and "conversation" metaphors tend to imply an unalloyed vision of civic discourse by way of what Aristotle terms deliberative rhetoric—political rhetoric that deals in the future of the polis and draws from in the practical knowledge of matters like war and peace, economy, and security (*Rhetoric* 1.3-8.1358a-66a). My impression is that deliberation aptly describes the rules of speculation, but not the gradual processes of cultural change itself. For this— for an evolutionary understanding of the kind of rhetorical change that arose around the *topos* of gay marriage and its adjunct terms—we should turn to the category of *epideixis*.

Like *topos*, I contend that *epideixis*—which Aristotle somewhat misleadingly limits to the ceremonial rhetoric of "praise and blame" (*Rhetoric* 1.3.1358b)—connects usefully to evolutionary principles. If the concept of evolution were incompatible with our inherited lexicon of rhetorical criticism, then any evolutionary study of *topoi*, or rhetoric more generally, would of course prove counterproductive. But where I introduce the concepts of *meme* and *topos* to theorize evolution at the micro level, this chapter will explore the function of rhetorical *epideixis* in cultural evolution on a broader scale. My argument, in brief, is that epideictic rhetoric both sustains the parameters of ideological

life—as many recent rhetoricians have likewise claimed—and macroscopically accounts

for the same sense of incremental cultural drift that rhetoricians can microscopically trace

in the individual *topos*. A return to *epideixis*, thus, can help us study the shifting

parameters around a *topos* like "gay marriage" or—as I discuss in more detail below—

the sense in which a term like Occupy Wall Street's "we are the 99%" interlinks with

broader political rhetorics. In this chapter, I first offer a historical and theoretical sketch

of the concept of *epideixis* before then theorizing the sense in which *epideixis* coexists (or

alloys) with political rhetoric and contributes to the evolution of ideology and individual

topoi. I make reference throughout to the example of the "gay marriage" *topos*, before

then turning to that of Occupy's "we are the 99%." Finally, I note the problems an

evolutionary perspective raises in the common trend of "deliberative determinism," or the

assessment of rhetorical practice solely on its immediate, practical effects.

"The Rhetoric of Belief and Desire"

George A. Kennedy wrote in 1963 that epideictic rhetoric "is a form of literature

which has relatively few admirers today" (*Art of Persuasion* 153), a pronouncement that

Michael F. Carter, in 1991, labeled "an understatement" (209). Unease toward epideixis,

which we can trace back to Aristotle's and especially Plato's own wariness of emotive

public performance, stems from a perceived opposition between the frivolity and bombast

of the ceremonial orator, on one hand, and the hard-headed purposefulness of statesmen

and litigators—practitioners of deliberative and judicial (forensic) rhetoric—on the other.

It is true enough, as Kennedy claims in his commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, that

epideictic rhetoric "remain[s] a problem for rhetorical theory, since it becomes the

category for all forms of discourse that are not specifically deliberative or judicial" (47), but Carter joins with a set of twentieth-century and postmillennial rhetoricians— including Burke, Perelman, and Olbrechts-Tyteca, plus Lawrence W. Rosenfeld, Bernard K. Duffy, Celeste Michelle Condit, Jeffrey Walker, Dale L. Sullivan, Gerard Hauser, and others—who have both rehabilitated the stature of *epideixis* and teased out its specific functions.

Readers of the *Rhetoric* will gather that Aristotle thought *epideixis* a less important matter than deliberative and judicial rhetorics, the other two entries in his tripartite taxonomy of oratorical genre. This is likely due in part to Aristotle's antipathy toward the sophists, who, as general outsiders banned from the podia of deliberation and forensics, favored *epideixis* as their rhetorical genre of choice (Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*, for example). But Aristotle does provide a useful point of departure. After introducing all three genres, he allots only a single chapter to the *idia* of *epideixis* (1.9.1366a-68a), but its contents do merit attention. There, Aristotle enumerates the set of virtues worth praising—"justice, manly courage, self-control, magnificence," and others (1366a)—and delves into the proper techniques of "amplification" by which rhetors elicit the best connotations in the words of praise (1366b-68a). (One sees here the precursor to what Burke, following Jeremy Bentham, would call "eulogistic" and "dyslogistic terms [*Rhetoric* 92-93].) Here, one begins to sense the kinship between rhetorical *epideixis* and Aristotelian poetics. It is telling that Aristotle turns to the poet Sappho to illustrate the blameworthiness of shame in his chapter on epideictic *idia* because, in the *Poetics*, Aristotle reciprocally refers back to rhetoric as the authoritative study of what is "pitiable, terrible, important, or probable" (*Rhetoric* 1367a; *Poetics* 19.1456a). It would appear that

Aristotle, at this juncture in the *Poetics*, has chiefly in mind his *Rhetoric*'s chapter on *epideixis* because the virtues and vices discussed there correspond most directly to the thematic subject matter of drama.

The connection between *epideixis* and poetics is noteworthy because many critics have emphasized the kinship between classical *epideixis* and what we now term literature. In the words of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, "the epideictic genre of oratory seemed to have more in connection with literature than with argumentation" (48). A sort of "show-piece" or "work of artistic virtuosity," the epideictic speech, these authors claim, remains nonetheless essential for gaining "adherence" to certain virtues and "establish[ing] a sense of communion" that, in turn, enables certain action-driven arguments (or deliberations) in the future (48, 50, 51). *Epideixis* lays groundwork. By Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's understanding, then, George W. Bush might make a series of ceremonial pronouncements affirming the good of Christian faith and traditional families in late 2003 and early 2004 that are designed to lay the ideological foundation for his proposed amendment banning gay marriage in February 2004. The former set of speeches would be epideictic while the latter would be chiefly deliberative. The former set might also occasionally mimic more "literary" discourse in order to "amplify" the virtues necessary to later bolster action defending "traditional marriage." (Bush was famous for his foot-in-mouth, perhaps *anti*-literary, blunders, but one might argue that his folksy everyman delivery constituted one version of "literary" amplification, and helped construct an *ethos* well equipped to demonstrate consubstantiality with much of the American public [see Sullivan, "Ethos"].)

Perelman and Olbrects-Tyteca formulate a momentous addition and revision to Aristotle's useful but somewhat dismissive discussion of *epideixis*. Even this reformulation, though, is significantly "incomplete," as Condit notes, because "[n]ot all speakers of epideictic are established community leaders with long-term argumentative goals for their speaking" ("Functions" 286). Where Perelman and Olbrects-Tyteca characterize *epideixis* in terms of oratorical intent alone, Condit offers a series of pairings designed to account for the motives and effect of epideictic rhetoric. These are "definition/understanding, display/entertainment, and shaping/sharing," one or a combination of which will characterize virtually all epideictic speeches, and all of which connect rhetorical practice to "[t]he creation of poetically compelling public dramas" (288). These themes of self-definition, exhibitionism, quasi-literary entertainment, and community recur. Other rhetoricians have posited similar, basically complementary, criteria for *epideixis*: Carter deploys research from religious studies to look at the "ritual functions" of *epideixis*; Sullivan positions *epideixis* among the "orthodoxies" of education, legitimation, demonstration, celebration, and criticism ("Epideictic Rhetoric," "Epideictic Character"), while stressing the role of an audience "caught up in a celebration of their vision of reality" ("Ethos" 128); and, more recently, E. Johanna Hartelius and Jennifer Asenas stress Judith Butler's notion of "citationality" in the circulation of epideictic discourse.

The recent critical rehabilitation of *epideixis* is clearly a collective effort, but my own use of the term below entails a particular debt to Jeffrey Walker. In *Rhetoric and Poetics in Antiquity*, Walker's effort to demonstrate the mutually constitutive roles of rhetoric and poetics in classical societies begins with a realignment of Aristotle's three

oratorical genres. For Walker, deliberation and forensics belong fundamentally to the category of "pragmatic" rhetoric, while *epideixis* constitutes a second independent category. Advocating for an "expanded, basically sophistic" understanding of *epideixis*, Walker forwards a sense of the concept that includes "everything that modernity has tended to describe as 'literature,' and more" (7). Where pragmatic discourses require an expedient purpose and "and audience of . . . 'judges' or 'deciders'" (magistrates, rulers, or electorates), *epideixis* addresses a broader populous and "shapes and cultivates the basic codes of value and belief by which a society or culture lives" (8, 9). *Epideixis*, finally, is "the rhetoric of belief and desire," that which "mnemonically sustains the culturally authoritative codes of value and the paradigms of eloquence from which . . . pragmatic discourse . . . derives its 'precedents,' its language' and its power" (10). In this sense, *epideixis* is "primary" while pragmatic rhetorics constitute a "'secondary' projection" of epideictically sustained practices and ideological principles into specific fora. Walker's configuration, here, has much in common with Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's. Again, *epideixis* provides a necessary groundwork for pragmatic rhetorics, through the act of cultural sustenance is no longer the sole job of the orator who plans to speak deliberatively in the future. That orator (the George W. Bush from my example above) may still partake in *epideixis*—indeed, it is hard to imagine how he could avoid it—but *epideixis* now becomes, additionally, the domain of poets, dramatists, songwriters, and other writers, speakers, and performers who bridge rhetoric and poetics or have a hand, as Sharon Crowley contends, in firming up cultural commonplaces (*Toward* 73-74). Burke notes that "human interest" journalism represents a clear twentieth-century instance of epideictic rhetoric (*Rhetoric* 70). Fleshing out the modern

context, I would add that, media film, television, photography, Internet videos and memes, and even video games contribute significantly to the epideictic sustenance of cultural values and iconography. The *topoi* that circulate within these diverse texts and contexts can and often do, as Walker suggests, present themselves for speakers in "pragmatic" occasions. But the same circulation of *topoi*, I will argue, also necessarily entails the sustenance and remaking—the evolution—of cultural ideologies themselves.

Epideictic-Deliberative Alloying

I am interested, as a rhetorician, in both the essentially functional, productive and "pragmatic" uses of persuasion (what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tytetca conceive as "argumentation" proper) and the processes through which rhetoric—whether by incident, intention, or both—continually draws and redraws the available storehouses of persuasive material. The latter, again, represents Walker's "primary" function of *epideixis* and the former the "secondary," pragmatic extensions thereof. I believe that both these functions, though, often occur more-or-less simultaneously in the same situation or text.

Let us return to the example of Bush's speech that introduces his proposition for a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. Here is one excerpt, with sentences numbered for and key terms italicized for reference:

> [1] Marriage cannot be severed from its *cultural*, *religious* and *natural* roots without weakening the *good influence of society*. [2] Government, by recognizing and *protecting marriage*, serves the interests of all. [3] Today I call upon the Congress to promptly pass, and to send to the states for ratification, an amendment to our Constitution defining and

protecting marriage as a union of man and woman as husband and wife.

[4] The amendment should fully *protect marriage*, while leaving the state

legislatures free to make their own choices in defining legal arrangements

other than marriage.

The deliberative crux of the oration comes, of course, in sentence 3, which articulates its

exact purpose, and extends into sentence 4, which names some implications of the new

policy. These two sentences, true to deliberative convention, deal expressly with political

policy and the future of the nation: their denotative, explicit meaning is clear. But

sentences 1 and 2 are much hazier. In a sense, the first sentences fill out the paragraph as

a complete microcosmic expression of Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca's formula: the first

sentences lay an epideictic groundwork for the deliberative recommendations of the

second two. This is an interesting analytic thesis, but still, I think, too tidy. Rather, it

seems, elements of *epideixis* and deliberation alloy together in the composite text on a

more fluid basis.

I believe that the following formula holds: while primary, epideictic rhetoric need

not integrate deliberative or forensic motives, secondary, pragmatic rhetoric necessarily

weaves epideictic elements into its own discursive fiber. This is another sense in which

epideixis proves primary. In Bush's sentence 1, the ideographic terms of "culture,"

"religion," and "nature" gather around a core conception of social "good." As ideographs,

these terms are all denotatively diffuse but "pregnant" with highly emotive, connotative

meaning (McGee, "Ideograph" 7). By clustering these terms together, Bush nudges

audiences into a hermeneutic space whereby each term might be connotatively

understood in relation to the other: *culture*, in a eulogistic sense, represents

commonsensical inherited tradition derived largely from *religious* (presumably Christian)

belief and ritual, which in turn derives from *natural* (i.e. God-given) law; social "good,"

apparently, derives from a harmonious adherence to all three. This is an approximation,

but the critic can do little more than approximate when interpreting such terms. It is

difficult, likely impossible, to pin down the exact definitions of *culture*, *religion*, and

nature Bush has in mind because the rhetorical potency of such terms is essentially

connotative. But Barthes reminds us of the powerful "density of connotations" one sees

in these terms (*S/Z* 13-14). In Maurice Charland's parlance, these terms are

"constitutive": their "ideological 'trick' . . . is [to] present that which is most rhetorical,

the existence of a [people], or of a subject, as extrarhetorical" (137). Synthesizing

Burkean identification with Althsserian interpellation, Charland posits constitutive

rhetoric as "the textual nature of social being," the means through which individuals are

"hailed" as subjects (137-38; Althusser 118). As "a form of epideictic discourse

concerned with the problem of community identity" (Jasinski 213), constitutive rhetorics

must enlist terms that signal an *a priori* identity. The key terms of Bush's speech, in this

instance, hail Americans as subjects of tradition, faith, and natural law, and provides

faintly didactic clues as to what such terms might mean, and by extension how audiences

might conceive themselves.

    A political statesman cannot, in other words, call a press conference and

deliberatively propose that America adopt a certain purposeful definition of *culture*, or

religion, or *nature*. But a deliberative oration in favor of banning gay marriage may

depend directly on these terms—and on a specific *reading* of these terms that constitutes

the right audience. These terms, to be clear, qualify as rhetorical *topoi* in the sense I have

advocated, as semantic nodes whose connotative compactness economically orients audiences to broader spheres of understanding; they prove useful because they offer networks of associative linkages into the short space of a single word each. An alloyed epideictic-deliberative speech like Bush's, then, provides two functions. Its deliberative, denotative function is to pressure congress into writing a federal ban on gay marriage into law. Its epideictic, connotative function is to revise and fortify a certain vision of American-ness and public morality (see Hauser), the indispensable units of which are these *topoi*. Conservatives are now losing the gay marriage war (more on that below), but they won the first battle by fortifying certain topical nodes in the short term. Bush and others reintroduced *topoi* like "protecting marriage" (effusively so—see sentences 2, 3, *and* 4 above!) and "defense of marriage," as well as more abstract but momentous terms like "moral values," consistently and coherently enough to realign the rhetorical landscape in their favor—at least for the course of 2004. Metaphors like "protection" and "defense," as I suggest in Chapter 2, here provided bilateral vectors of associative movement between the *topoi* of family and tradition ("marriage" providing another happy, eulogistic term that Americans abstractly value) on one hand, and paternalism, patriotism, and principled conflict on the other. In 2004, one could trace the connotative evolution of a *topos* like "moral values" as it gained coherence in relation to these other nodes and became a tacit expression of religious commitment and opposition to certain gay rights. The ability of *topoi* like "protecting marriage" and "moral values" to curtail gay rights without *explicitly* maligning the LGBTQ community accounted, in large part, for the appeal and fitness of these terms.

Evolution, *Epideixis*, and the Geometry of Rhetoric

What Bush and his political allies failed to anticipate, of course, were the long-term, largely aleatory effects of propelling a *topos* like "gay marriage" into the public sphere. Figure 2, rendered from Google Trends' records of popular search terms since 2004, is illustrative of "gay marriage's" rhetorical life as a *topos* since then.
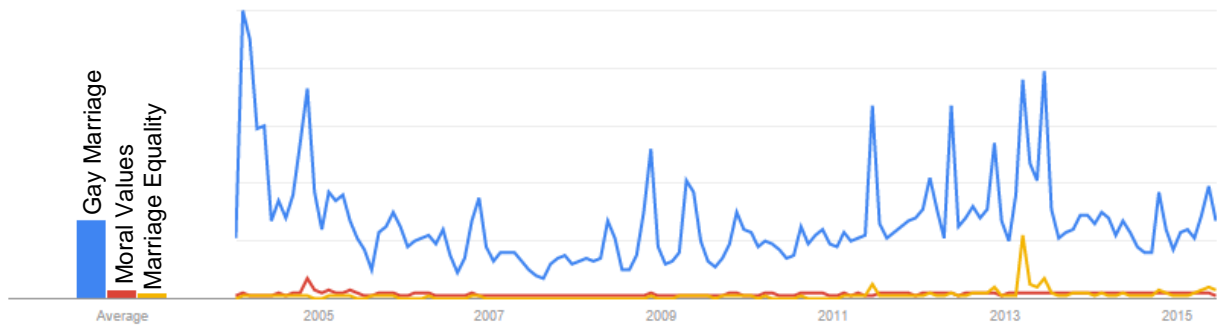
Figure 2: A Google Trends rendering of the search terms "gay marriage," "moral values," and "marriage equality" between 2004 and 2015.

As the graph indicates, early 2004 saw a dramatic spike in the public's interest in "gay marriage" following Bush's press conference and subsequent efforts to federally prohibit same-sex marriage. Though dipping and spiking through national discourse on a steady basis since then, gay marriage has remained a consistently important issue to the public, and that term—more than "marriage equality," "same-sex marriage," or any other—has remained our chosen appellation for the issue. While the graph of "gay marriage" towers over those of "moral value" and "marriage equality," the modest spikes of interest in these adjunct terms hint at the historical apparatus of connotation surrounding "gay marriage." The Right's "moral values" peaks in late 2004, coincident with the Bush-Kerry election and numerous state-level proposals to constitutionally ban gay marriage. In connection to adjacent *topoi* like "moral values," "gay marriage" at this point in

American history takes on a dyslogistic caste. The evolution of "gay marriage" since amounts basically to a slow transformation from a dyslogistic to contested to increasingly eulogistic term. ("Gay marriage" is eulogistic in liberal social circles, anyway, in a sense that it was not in 2004, even if many social conservatives still perceive the term as dyslogistic.) The Left's most frankly eulogistic revision of the term, "marriage equality," has failed to overtake "gay marriage" as the default appellation, but one notices an increased interest in "marriage equality" in late 2012 and early 2013, a period that follows Obama's public endorsement of equal marriage in May 2012 and coincides, in 2013, with both legal challenges to DOMA and new marriage equality laws in states like Rhode Island, Delaware, and Minnesota. "Marriage equality," at the very least, has become a significant node in the connotative backdrop by which Americans assess "gay marriage."

The common characterizations of *epideixis* as rhetoric designed to "[strengthen] adherence to what is already accepted" rather than "chang[e] beliefs" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 54) are certainly productive, though they cannot account for the role of *epideixis* in the sort of ideological drift I describe here. Heterogeneous postmodern societies, by definition, circumscribe a plurality of orthodoxies, such that few epideictic speeches can uncontroversially reaffirm American belief the way that an Athenian orator could comprehensively account for his nation-state's *doxa* (McGee, "Text"). By necessity, then, our *epideixis* is selective. Every instance of epideictic rhetoric deploys some *topoi* and ignores others. And those it does deploy it often does so in a selective way, prodding the *topos*' connotative evolution in one direction or another. Without discounting the material effects of history, I contend that ideological change results

largely from the macrocosmic sum of such choices, the mutually enabling interaction between human agents (rhetors) and discursive agents (*topoi*, memes). Rhetoricians, moreover, are well-equipped to study this dimension of ideological change.

I will pick up this thread of my argument again below. First, though, I want to raise the question of how rhetorical theory tends to picture the rhetorical situation—the act of mapping that R. Allen Harris has called "the geometry of rhetoric." Visual schemas, most famously the "rhetorical triangle," prove useful and comforting, tidying the turbulence of rhetorical praxis into an orderly diagram. Simplifications like this one are productive and necessary insofar as they abstract trends and tendencies out of otherwise indecipherable disorder. The greatest problem with the rhetorical triangle, though, is that it is less a triangle than a triad of free-floating nodes (see fig. 3a). The "triangle" usefully prescribes a harmonious relationship among speaker (*ethos*), subject (*logos*), and audience (*pathos*), but says little of the connective fiber linking these nodes. In a broad sense, to be sure, we understand rhetoric itself to supply such fiber, but theories of topical invention can and should explain the connections among speaker, audience, and subject in more concrete terms that the typical rhetorical triangle provides.
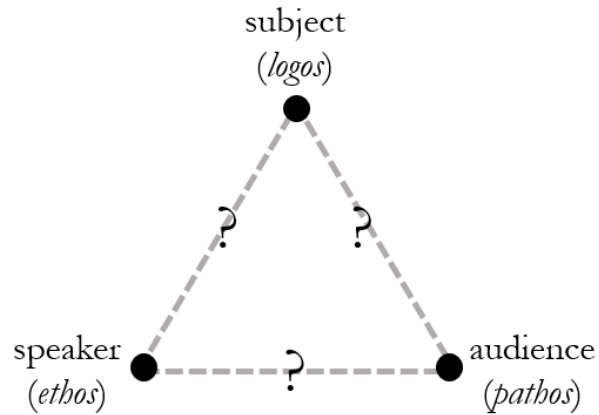
Figure 3a: The traditional rhetorical triangle offers little sense of what connects speaker, subject, and audience.

Topoi, conceived as connective "places," can be justly regarded as attempts to make sense of this connective fiber, as tools of not only *invention*, but *navigation*. Let me offer three possible models of such topical navigation based on three different understandings of *topoi*. First, W. Rhys Roberts's translation of Aristotle's *koinoi topoi* to "lines of argument" implies a more-or-less deterministic set of pathways (fig. 3b). Here, presumably, the rhetor would select one or more "lines" that accord with his audience and subject matter, and the heed the prescriptive directions of those "lines." This model is basically mechanistic and accounts neither for the resources of ideology nor the fuller

Aristotelian metaphor of "place." It is useful only for illustrating the conceptual

shortcomings of the "line of argument" metaphor.
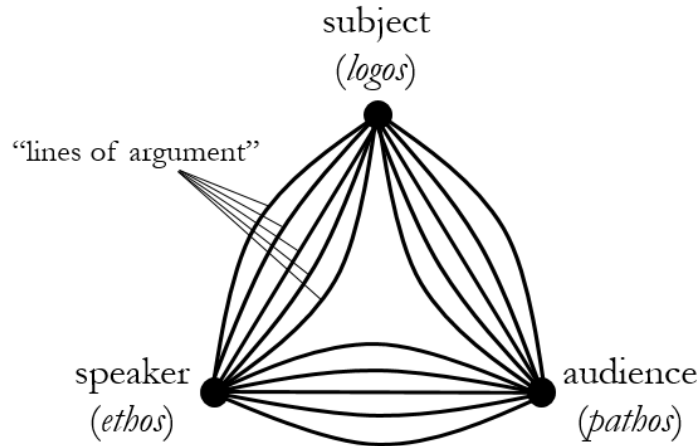
Figure 3b: The phrase "lines of argument" implies deterministic pathways among the three nodes.

As I note in Chapter 1, Aristotle allots the *idia* drastically more attention than he

does the *koinoi topoi*, suggesting that the dutiful rhetor should familiarize himself with a

great survey of cultural, philosophical, and technical knowledge instrumental to

successful rhetorical practice. The "common" domains of topics, which Quintilian later

termed "regions" or "haunts" (5.10-20-22), appear to be, for Aristotle, a matter of second

resort—places to "go looking" for if one's memory of appropriate *idia* does not

immediately suffice. It follows that a second, more sophisticated (and sophistic), model

of the rhetorical triangle would conceive the *idia* as stepping stones en route from corner

to corner, and *koinoi topoi* as significant "regions" in which rhetors could seek out

suitable footholds (see fig. 3c). This model is less deterministic than what "lines of

argument" yield, but still, I think, too literal-minded.
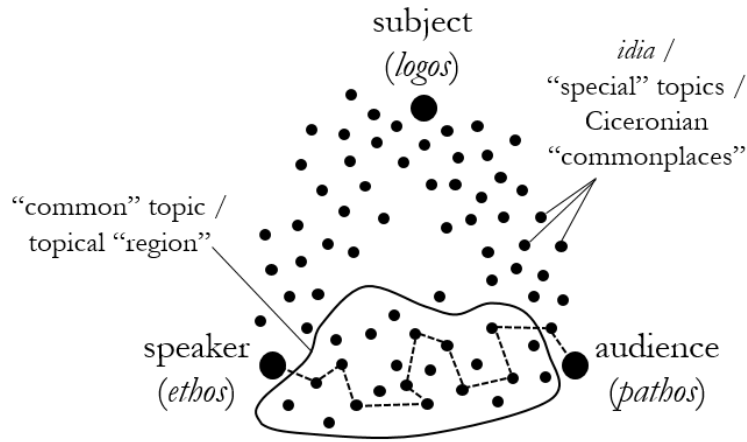
Figure 3c: "Special" topoi *provide nodes that link speaker, subject, and audience.*

The third model (fig. 3d), which I will cautiously advocate, dispenses with linearity in favor of nodal associations. There exists no one "path" between speaker, subject, and audience, but there does exist a complex network of topical nodes the rhetor may invoke in order to forge connective links among others. This is the model that best illustrates Miller's thesis that "[a] *topos* might be thought of as . . . a point in semantic space that particularly rich in connectivity to other significant or highly connected points" ("Aristotelian" 141-42). It is also the model that best accounts for the Aristotelian conception of "place" as mediator between form and cultural context—the conception of "place," as I argue in Chapter 1, that economically *orients* audiences to broader matrices of significance.
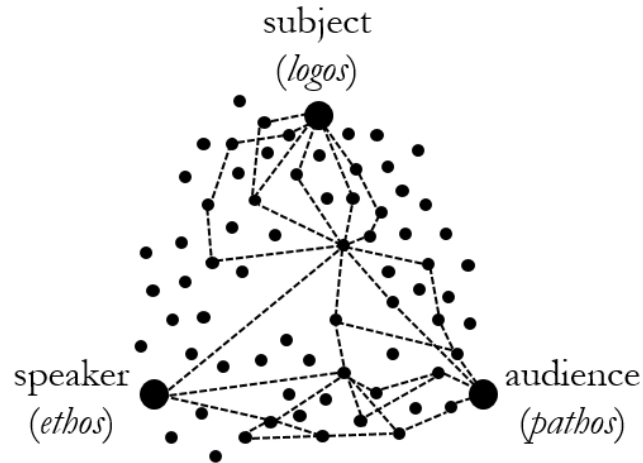
Figure 3d: Particularly "fit" topoi *link economically to other significant rhetorical nodes.*

So it is, for example, that to utter "moral values" in a 2004 political speech was to tacitly excite a network of related *topoi*—"gay marriage," "defense of marriage," "family values," "tradition," "faith"—as well as the commonplace propositions such *topoi* connote: "marriage is between a man and a woman"; "homosexuality is immoral"; "faith is the basis of morality"; and so on. Generally, speaking the "fittest" *topoi* are those providing the most economical utility. "Moral values" emerged as particularly useful to Republicans in 2004 because the term connotatively implied a set of commonplaces that were easier not to explicitly speak. As Susan Blackmore remarks in her chapter on the "meme's eye view," "incessant thoughts" and other particulate bits of discourse are examples of memes that exploit "opportunities for replication" (39, 37). What rhetoricians ought to add is that memes are sustained socially as well as cognitively: it is not enough for the meme "moral values" to be "catchy"; the phrase also must be socially, discursively useful, and the matter of its utility is a matter of rhetorical affordance. Its memetic fecundity and topical utility are nearly synonymous.

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But memetics introduces the dimension of time, and thus shakes up the static

revision of the rhetorical triangle I describe above. As I argue elsewhere, memetics

"should compel us to challenge the traditional fixity of *topoi*" and to challenge "the

traditional urge to conceptualize *topos*, text, and context in a secure, static matrix"

(Wetherbee, "Picking Up"). It becomes clear, by my own terms, that what I diagram

above (fig. 2d) is not a comprehensive model but a useful snapshot or a moving

formation. Its *topoi*, artificially frozen for the convenience of graphic representation,

constitute what I have elsewhere termed "the moving parts of the rhetorical situation"

(Wetherbee, "Picking Up"). If deliberation is the rhetoric of immediate utility (rhetor A

invokes *topos* B for purpose C), then *epideixis* is the rhetoric of topical cartography.

Language theorists like Vico and Bakhtin, who emphasize the *topos* and the utterance as

catalysts and anticipators of further discourse, remind us that one rhetorical situation

begets the next; and *epideixis* constitutes the reassertion and revision of terms which the

next rhetorical situation unfolds. In 2004, the Bush Administration successfully exploited

and reified a set of available *topoi* concerning faith and tradition in order to meet many

deliberative goals (reelection, the passage of many state-level gay marriage bans). They

also, in the short term, met the epideictic goal of sustaining a certain discursive culture of

religious traditionalism. What Bush could not foresee were the long-term effects of

loosing the "gay marriage" *topos* into the political sphere. Among other things, the

positive connotations of "moral values" declined and the term's memetic value waned;

the terms by which one could quietly demonize same-sex marriage lost stature. Where

Stanley Fish, in the 1990s, observed the right "hijacking the magic words" of the left, the

left turned the tables in the "gay marriage" debate ("How the Right"). Fueled by many

factors—most notably, I'm sure, the increasing visibility of gay friends and colleagues in straight Americans' day-to-day lives—"gay marriage" evolved, as did the constellation of significant terms and other *topoi* surrounding it. I do not intend to record an incremental history of that evolution here, but what does bear emphasis are the aleatory dimensions of topical interaction. It would have been difficult in 2004 to predict that, eleven years later, "gay marriage" would remain a viable *topos*, but for reasons mostly opposite to those the Bush Administration percieved.

Occupy Wall Street and "We Are the 99%"

I choose, here, to single out Occupy Wall Street and their slogan of "we are the 99%" because the Occupy Movement existed largely in a strange limbo between epideictic and deliberative motives. As few likely remember, the movement began with a small flame. Responding to a call from the anti-consumerist Canadian media outlet Adbusters, demonstrators congregated in Zuccotti Park of Manhattan's financial district on September 17, 2011. The ensuing protest targeted the politics of economic disparity metonymically symbolized by their chosen location. And if New York was the first match, the kindling of income inequality soon proved to mantle the globe. By October, the Occupy Movement was a worldwide phenomenon, extending to six continents and positively lighting up the United States and Europe with hundreds of protests. How far and wide did Occupy finally reach? A map compiled by the Occupy Directory specifies over 1500 separate "Occupy" events in 82 nations.

As early as mid-October of that year, former New York governor and Occupy-supporter Elliot Spitzer declared victory. "Occupy Wall Street has already won," he

wrote. "It has already altered our political debate, changed the agenda, shifted the discussion in the newspapers, on cable TV, and even around the water cooler." Spitzer continued, "Suddenly, the issues of equality, fairness, justice, income distribution, and accountability for the economic cataclysm—issues all but ignored for a generation—are front and center." This was a reasonable position to take amid the spate of Occupy protests around the world and their common spirit of righteous unrest. Finally, it seemed, citizens around the globe were recognizing the problem and voicing their grievance. Their collective presence was hard to ignore.

But how clear was Occupy's message? Not very, argued the author and political hobbyist Aaron Sorkin. In a September 2012 *New York Times* editorial, the *West Wing* and *Newsroom* screenwriter observed that Occupy had "fizzled" under its own obtuseness. By Sorkin's estimation, Occupy failed across the board: it never disintegrated the banks that were "too big to fail"; it levied no new restrictions against Wall Street nor prosecuted any of the plutocrats responsible for the financial crisis of 2008; it failed to "change the debate over executive compensation or education reform." Ultimately, for Sorkin, the sense of angst Occupy did successfully voice was inevitable with or without the movement—a movement that, unlike the political right's grassroots corollary in the Tea Party, offered too muddled a message to make a real difference. Sorkin offered an anecdote to sum up Occupy's shortcomings: "I remember "watching one protester with a sign that read 'Google = Jewish Billionaires.' Another protester ran over and ripped up the poster. The messages had become decidedly too mixed."

It has now been four years since Occupy began. The heat of collective protest has abated and so has the sense of disappointment that those protests yielded fewer concrete

results than many had hoped. It is finally an opportune time to look back and reflect. Hindsight shows us that Spitzer may have declared victory a bit prematurely—at least on matters of political policy—but it suggests also that Sorkin's cynicism may have been overstated. Whatever Occupy failed to accomplish in terms of policy, the movement is not shaping up to be the historical footnote Sorkin presaged. Why so? In abstract terms, it has proven difficult to *forget* Occupy, to emotionally distance oneself from the images and rallying cries of a global populace and its cumulative indignation, however disarrayed the movement's thesis. Occupy's apologists often claim, and rightly so, that the movement "changed the discourse" or "altered the conversation." Sorkin himself admits that "[t]he chant, 'We are the 99 percent,' has become part of the lexicon."

The topics of this chapter are largely synonymous with questions of how one "changes the discourse," "alters the conversation," or "enters the lexicon," and what such things mean rhetorically. Let me first suggest that Occupy's primary victory has been an epideictic one. The movement, in other words, has contributed to discourse more than policy, though it has helped to reshuffle the terms by which we understand economic policy. Whatever the inconsistences or failings of Occupy's "message," their slogan "we are the 99%" has etched itself into public memory. As the website *Know Your Meme* documents, Occupy's catchphrase spread virally across venues from *Mother Jones* to *Buzzfeed* to *Forbes* shortly following its appearance on a protester's poster in September 2011 ("We Are"). Hindsight suggests that "we are the 99%" has emerged as what Burke might term the "essence" of Occupy (*Attitudes* 252-54). Lacking the economy of public memory to store away the complex, often muddled details of Occupy's genesis and progression, we collectively select an economical nugget, an essence, and "99%" presents

itself. Failing a coherent thesis or successful set of pragmatic demands, Occupy is

fortunate to have spawned a eulogistic synecdoche for the movement as a whole.

Derivatives of the *topos* "We are the 99%" have proven memetically fit and rhetorically

useful even while its movement of origin has repeatedly spluttered in the deliberative

sphere.

"We are the 99%" emerged as a viable *topos* in 2011, one that organized the

anxieties over national, and global, income inequality into an unusually memorable,

emotive rallying cry. Even if one grants Sorkin's criticisms of the movement, it is

difficult to deny both the constitutive and connotative powers of the slogan. "We are the

99%," by shifting the epideictic terms associated with wealth, has made it more difficult

to eulogize the archetypes of benevolent wealth—the Horatio Alger myth, the "rugged

individual," the "pro-business" politician—in the service of, for instance, lowering tax

rates for the topmost brackets. Thanks in larger part to Occupy, there now exists a vibrant

set of counter-*topoi* opposed to right-wing standbys like "class warfare."

To understand how the epideictic incursions of "we are the 99%" have influenced

deliberative occasions, one can examine the 2012 presidential race. While the complete

phrase "we are the 99%" has significantly dwindled from public memory, Occupy did

succeed in turning the word "percent" itself against Wall Street and the Republican Party,

to the point where any reference to population in terms of percentages risked evoking the

set of connotations surrounding Occupy's "99%" *topos*. And when a surreptitiously

filmed video leaked in September 2012, GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney

unwittingly wrote himself into Occupy's narrative. "There are 47 percent of the people

who will vote for the president no matter what," he told supporters at a fundraiser. "All

right, there are 47 percent who are with him, who are dependent upon government, who believe that they are victims . . ." (qtd. in Corn). As Charles M. Blow later wrote in a *New York Times* editorial, "With that, any caviar-and-toast-points dreams [Romney] may have had of flitting away the days in the White House were toast." Romney's wealth and his wavering reputation as an out-of-touch plutocrat intersected with the Occupy narrative the moment he spoke the word "percent." It is not surprising that a private remark to supporters would read, publically, as politically ungraceful, but Romney's dismissive words about a large "percent" of the population, as Hartelius and Asenas might put it, inadvertently appeared to "cite" Occupy's terms, and thereby invite associative connections to the *topoi* of income equality surrounding "we are the 99%." By categorically maligning 47 percent of the population as delusional self-perceiving "victims," Romney both trivialized the plight of low- and middle-class wager-earners in America and lent a public, human face to the archetype of callous businessman ostensibly responsible for America's income disparity. The *topos* of the "47%" came to metonymically represent the less desirable points of Romney's *ethos*, a public construction that gained a certain coherence in connection to the "99%" *topos*. The epideictic impact of this term reverberated through a number of "pragmatic" contexts, including the deliberative juggernaut of the 2012 election.

Against Deliberative Determinism

As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca note, *epideixis* is the rhetorical genre "most in danger of turning into declamation, of becoming rhetoric in the usual and pejorative sense of the word" (51). It is true enough that the many disparaged facets of "rhetoric"—

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bandwagon appeals, manipulation, fearmongering, verbosity, intellectual "emptiness,"

disregard for "the facts," and so forth—are more characteristic of *epideixis* than of

deliberation or forensics, and it is true that such qualities often merit criticism. But to

dismiss *epideixis* categorically is something like cursing water itself for the rainstorm

overhead when one is also sailing on an ocean and enjoying a Perrier. As the work of

Walker, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, Condit, and others demonstrates *epideixis* is

necessarily constitutive of human cultures. Hauser adds, moreover, that *epideixis* fulfills a

frankly noble and virtuous purpose: "[T]he didactic function of epideictic suggests that as

a public sphere ceases to celebrate public morality and, instead, substitutes a scientistic or

a bureaucratic model of public relations for political relations, the public that inhabits this

sphere is denied the very instruction on which its survival as a politically relevant body

depends" (19). This is not to say, I would add, that epideictic didacticism cannot inspire

oppressive, exclusive, and frankly harmful visions of public morality, but it is to say that

the revision of such morality occurs not though rejecting *epideixis* wholesale (as if one

could), but a counter-*epideixis* offering new terms, recasting old ones, and nudging

evolutionary drift in certain directions.

Many media personalities, critics, and common citizens, disparage rhetoric as

oppressive, manipulative, and vapid. Rhetorical failure, or the failure of rhetoric itself, is

often cited when a movement like Occupy can't quite articulate a discrete thesis—or,

more generally, when any set of appeals fails to translate over the short term into a

corresponding change in policy or behavior. I am calling such assessments of rhetorical

failure *deliberative determinism*, and I believe they often result from an impoverished

comprehension of rhetoric as a complete process. For example, the old canard that "you

can't really change someone's mind, so why try?" implies a field of discrete, isolated discursive moments that succeed or fail in precisely those binary terms. (They typically fail, says the pessimist.) Such immediate terms of success and failure might rightly inform the assessment of deliberative rhetoric in isolation, but they provide a poor metric for assessing epideictic effects—and, by extension, a radically limited understanding of rhetoric and cultural change. My thesis has been that, to understand such change more productively, we should account for the symbiotic relationships among discursive *topoi* and human rhetors, as well as the field of cultural drift that results, in no small part, from their interactions. This set of emphases, again, need not pass over deliberative rhetoric and its conflicts, but it should account for the processes by which deliberative rhetorics stem from epideictic storehouses of rhetorical knowledge and textually alloy themselves to epideictic rhetorics.

In his essay "The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy," John Dewey contends that Darwin's principles of incremental change by natural selection entails a "new logic [that] outlaw, flanks, dismisses—what you will—one type of problems and substitutes for it another type. Philosophy forswears inquiry after absolute origins and absolute finalities in order to explore specific values and the specific conditions that generate them" (13). So too with rhetoric. Though, I believe, terms like *topos* and *epideixis* durably hold, rhetorical criticism must consistently recalibrate to account for the ideological evolution of its units of study. Rhetorical formations and individual *topoi* all carry what Henri Bergson terms the "vital impetus": their evolution is not teleological but self-perpetuating in the pursuit of further vitality (97-108). And because vitality both derives from existing contexts and shapes new ones, as the examples of "gay marriage" and "we are 99%" each

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illustrate, the "effects" of rhetoric cannot finally be measured by deliberative success and failure alone. This does not mean, of course, that we cannot bracket certain situations and certain swaths of rhetorical history for the sake of analytic convenience. But rhetorical criticism will benefit from fixing one eye on the possibilities and uncertainties of evolutionary drift. The classical notion of *epideixis* adapts fruitfully to describe this drift, among which individual *topoi* are often powerful catalysts.

CHAPTER 4

THE TERMINISTIC SCREAM:

INTERNALLY PERSUASIVE DISCOURSE AND TOPICAL ASSOCIATION

Kenneth Burke once professed that, rather than the pseudoscientific "parliamentary" methods of polling and submitting questionnaires, "[t]he future is really disclosed *by finding out what people can sing about*" (*Attitudes* 335; emphasis in original). At least for the moment, I will take literally Burke's provocative synecdoche, his use of song to stand for the whole productive capacity of human discourse. So I begin with a song.

In his 2010 pop-country hit "Voices," singer Chris Young's refrain puns on the psychiatric cliché of "hearing voices." The result is an equally clichéd, but catchy, set of truisms about family and tradition:

> I hear voices like my dad sayin', "Work that job but don't work your life
>
> away." And mama tellin' me to drop some cash in the offerin' plate on
>
> Sunday.
>
> And granddad sayin', "You can have a few but don't ever cross that line."
>
> Yeah, I hear voices all the time.

These are, quite certainly, the sorts of things people can sing about, and rarely the sorts things on which Gallup polls the electorate. But aside from an epideictic affirmation of hard work, family, faith, and good fun—values typically implied in the country-singer

ethos—"Voices" displays little that is rhetorically exceptional. It is, in other words, a perfectly tame, generic pop-country single designed in the tradition of rheto-poetical epideixis, what Jeffrey Walker terms "the rhetoric of belief and desire" (10). The song serves no pragmatic, deliberative call to action, but lauds and perpetuates a set of shopworn virtues. As Sharon Crowley would say, it "firms up" a set of cultural commonplaces familiar to audiences of country music, or, in Burke's parlance, stakes out a "consubstantial" ideological ground where singer and audience can meet (*Toward* 73; Burke, *Rhetoric* 20-23).

Something similar is true of virtually all pop music—so why bring up Burke's dictum alongside this unremarkable ditty? I do so because Young's lyrics manifest with uncanny lucidity the Soviet linguist, philosopher, and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of *internally persuasive discourse*—the sense in which individuals internalize and negotiate the truncated words of others as an act of "ideological becoming" ("Discourse" 341). Bakhtin's theory, which I take up below in greater detail, helps articulate the process by which individuals come to discrete fragments of rhetorical material, or rhetorical *topoi*, not exactly as "building blocks" of discourse (see Jeff Rice 32; Bloomquist 135) but as nodes rich in connectivity manifested largely by their infusion with the voices of others. Bakhtin's term returns us to Burke's initial provocation: *internally persuasive discourse* gets at both "what people can sing about" and the available tones through which we can hear such song. As Young goes on, his narrator hears more voices. He recounts his dad's advice that he'll be "a quitter for the rest of [his] life" if he leaves the football team; his mom reminds him to pray every night; his grandma cautions that "if you find the one, you better treat her right." Such words, as

Bakhtin tells it, are "fundamentally and organically infused with the image of a speaking person" ("Discourse" 347): Young's narrator, we gather, has assimilated the virtues of "working hard" and "sticking it out" into his own internal discourses, but he articulates those virtues to himself through the image and vocal intonation of his father. Young's listeners, then, hear these virtues repeated through the meta-filter of the singer's own voice—a low country drawl characteristic of the genre. In the individual consciousness, such internalized words of others sum less to an ideological edifice than a series of nodes that help individuals navigate the plurality of voices composing social heteroglossia. From within, we "hear voices" that tell us how to interpret those voices we encounter without.

A second example—this one concerned not with what we can sing about, properly, but what cries we can rally around. In the 1976 Sidney Lumet film *Dog Day Afternoon*, a pair of would-be robbers, Sonny and Sal, attempt to heist a large sum of cash from a Brooklyn bank—enough, Sonny hopes, to pay for his partner's sex-change operation—only to find that most of the bank's money has already been picked up and removed. The movie morphs from crime thriller to social drama when a media frenzy erupts around the botched heist. In the most celebrated scene, Sonny (played by a young Al Pacino) rallies the growing crowd by appealing to their antipathy for the police. "*Attica! Attica!*" he yells repeatedly, marching to and fro while the masses behind the police line respond in a crescendo of cheers. Sonny refers here to the controversial, bloody, and racially charged Attica prison riot of 1971, which ended when New York state troopers and corrections officers retook the facility by force, killing ten hostages and twenty-nine inmates in the process, and wounding many others (*Attica* 373-74). The

confrontation, which was widely regarded to indicate the poor leadership and draconian tactics of the New York police force and governor's office, has been called "[w]ith the exception of the Indian massacres . . . the bloodiest one-day encounter between Americans since the Civil War" (xi).

While *Dog Day Afternoon*'s "*Attica!*" references a charged moment in American history, the scene also *creates* a moment in itself. The one-word excerpt is widely regarded as one of the great lines in the history of American film, even landing on the American Film Institute's list of the all-time best 100 quotes in American cinema ("AFI's"). For rhetoricians, two things are worth noting about this particular fragment of exclamatory discourse. First, it exerts a sort of connotative imperialism whereby, after seeing the film, one likely perceives "Attica" to mean something beyond a particular corrections facility in upstate New York or a particular historical incident from 1971. As Bakhtin puts it, "Words that acquire special weight under particular conditions of sociopolitical life become expressive exclamatory utterances: 'Peace!' 'Freedom!' and so forth" (*Speech Genres* 85). *Dog Day Afternoon* recasts "*Attica!*" as such a repeatable utterance. The exclamation, by necessity, becomes something of an abstraction—powerfully emotive and connotatively dense, but denotatively diffuse—still capable of forging associative links to the historical event, yes, but also of linking outward to a more general set of tensions between the authorities and the public as dramatized in the film. Second, if you'll pardon the pun, Pacino's emphatic delivery of the line becomes a *terministic scream*. Like Burke's "terministic screens," Pacino's voice supplies a filter of "selection" and "deflection" such that the unadorned word "Attica" and the expletive "*Attica!*" function as altogether different utterances (Burke, *Language* 45). The first,

Burke might say, at least allows a more dispassionate, definitional, "scientistic," reading, while the second eschews "objective" tonalities in favor of those more frankly "suasive" and symbolically active (45-46). For those who have seen *Dog Day Afternoon*, the utterance "*Attica!*"—garbed in italics and an exclamation mark—will likely enter the consciousness through the authoritative timbre of Pacino's voice. It becomes, we might say, a fragment tethered to an *ethos*.

The same is certainly true of the homespun clichés composing Young's refrains in "Voices." The examples from "Voices" and that from *Dog Day Afternoon* all represent Bakhtin's notion of internally persuasive discourse insofar as all are memorable, repeatable fragments—discursive memes—internally spoken by others' memorable voices, and thus pre-packaged with ethical appeal. In "Voices," for example, a fatherly *ethos* colors the sentiment "don't be a quitter" and a sage, grandmotherly *ethos* sustains the virtue of compassion toward one's family. As I stress below, all these examples, too, can function as rhetorical *topoi*—as "places" from which rhetors can begin and sustain acts of rhetorical invention. But the differences between these examples also bear note. Young's examples are decidedly more elastic and long-lasting than "*Attica!*": they represent long-held, enduring assumptions that undergird common perceptions of "traditional" American life. "*Attica!*" is not necessarily less powerful than Young's more commonplace sentiments of "have faith," "work hard," "treat your loved ones right," and so forth, but it is more specific and more intimately tied to a socio-historical moment of rhetorical ignition. (Hence my ability to paraphrase Young's virtues, but not "*Attica!*") I develop these important similarities and differences further below, first by recounting Bakhtin's theory of internally persuasive discourse in more detail, then by synthesizing

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Bakhtin's theory with classical rhetoricians' conceptions of *topoi* and commonplaces to forward the explicitly rhetorical function of inner speech. I then shift focus to examine two more examples of internally persuasive fragments abstracted from their original contexts: the poet Robert Frost's "good fences make good neighbors" and GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney's 2012 campaign gaffe "binders full of women." Together, these two very different examples help illustrate the theoretical breadth of internally persuasive discourse as a concept pertinent to rhetorical invention. Finally, I close by considering the effects of my theoretical offerings on rhetorical praxis, highlighting the interplay between rhetorical agents and internally persuasive "voices" in the public sphere.

Internally Persuasive Discourse

In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin posits that "the ideological becoming of a human being . . . is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others" (341). As an extension of Bakhtin's blanket theory of dialogism, which sees all communication as chains of linked "utterances" that respond to prior discourses and anticipate further response, this sense of "ideological becoming" rejects images of the autonomous, romantic individual, favoring instead that of the individual born into language. The self, Bakhtin tells us, is invented from the available means of discourse. Together with V.N. Vološinov and P.N. Medvedev (the other key members of his intellectual circle), Bakhtin forwards the psychological primacy of language as a key tenet of dialogism. In Vološinov's words, language supplies "the semiotic material of the psyche," such that individuals constitute their own identities through a sort of "inner speech" that manifests

on the border between the internal self and the external, social world (29, 26). In

Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics and "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin also champions

the novel as a genre unique for its ability to dramatize and circumscribe the many

competing and intersecting discourses that compose social life—a genre, as Kay Halasek

notes, that resists the authoritarian monologism of the Stalinist rhetoric that weighed on

Soviet intellectuals in Bakhtin's time ("Starting" 4). In theorizing the novel, Bakhtin

poses by extension what Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson call "the novelistic self,"

an individual consciousness whose identity takes form only "as a conversation, often a

struggle, of discrepant voices with each other, voices (and words) speaking from different

positions and invested with different degrees and kinds of *authority*" (216, 218; emphasis

in original).

Bakhtin identifies *internally persuasive discourse*, which he defines as those

words of others that individuals "assimilate" and "tightly interw[eave] with 'one's own

word,'" as a primary component of the novelistic self ("Discourse" 345). While less

famous than some of Bakhtin's other key concepts (e.g. heteroglossia, chronotope, the

carnivalesque), internally persuasive discourse is one that many of Bakhtin's major

commentators have stressed as crucial to the theorist's thought (Emerson; Booth,

"Freedom"; Morson and Emerson 218-23; Morson), while rhetoricians have probed the

concept's particular uses in rhetorical pedagogy and hermeneutics (Trimbur; Bialostosky,

"Liberal Education"; Farmer; Halasek, *Pedagogy* 116-44; Zappen 40-45, 141-61;

Haskins and Zappen). Below, I stress the role of internally persuasive discourse in

rhetorical invention, but first it is necessary to further tease out Bakhtin's sense of the

term in the dialogic formation of individual identities. Bakhtin contrasts internally

persuasive discourse with what he calls *authoritative discourse*, likening the latter to

recitation from rote memory and the former to "retelling in one's own words"

("Discourse" 341). As Bakhtin explains, the authoritative word—which stems from

sources like "religious dogma," "scientific truth," and "fashionable" texts—"enters our

verbal consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass; one must either totally affirm it

or totally reject it" (343). Thus, while Bakhtin presents them much as a dichotomy,

authoritative and internally persuasive discourses would appear to exist on a sort of

continuum: "calcified" words like those from Biblical scripture often enter consciousness

as purely authoritative, but their hard edges can erode over time, allowing assimilation

into the individual's own language (344-46). This assimilation, again, often maintains the

image and voice of the speaking other, but the "novelistic self's" maturation and

"evolution" involve making peace with words that our "half-ours, half-someone else's"

("Discourse" 345; Morson and Emerson 221).

In other words, the folkishly affecting quotes from Young's "Voices" qualify as

more internally persuasive than "authoritative" because the song's narrator is able to

integrate them more-or-less organically into his own speech, rather than approaching

them as "dead quotation[s]" or things "that [fall] out of the artistic context" (Bakhtin,

"Discourse" 344). In Burke's terms, fatherly adages like "Don't be a quitter" still

constitute "symbols of authority" because they can "command" the individual into certain

modes of thought, but they also represent only part of a larger matrix of competing words

and voices—one authority among many (Burke, *Attitudes* 332). In *Dog Day Afternoon*,

Pacino's character effectively synthesizes the communally dissenting voices of others

into a rallying cry ("*Attica!*" is not his word alone) but does so with such strong effect

that he leaves his own voice imprinted on the word. Thus, Pacino's injection of pathos can persuasively enter another's individual consciousness with the word "Attica" itself. The process of assimilating such memes, as several scholars have noted, shares much with Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky's understanding of the linguistic development of children's consciousness (see Emerson; Trimbur; Farmer). Vygotsky's thesis that "meaningful speech" constitutes "a union of word and thought" has a very Bakhtinian ring, and likely speaks to the intellectual climate the two thinkers shared (Vygotsky 212; Emerson). But the key difference between Vygotsky and Bakhtin's projects, as Morson and Emerson note, is Vygotsky's emphasis on the "earliest stages of language acquisition" versus Bakhtin's on the complex maturing consciousness (218). Bakhtin, thus, highlights the perpetual evolution of "ideological becoming" even into old age, but perhaps most potently in late adolescence and early adulthood when the internal clash of competing voices is especially strong. Trimbur offers one potent example from that stage in life: a Christian college student finds herself in dialogic tension between the internally persuasive voices of her English teacher (Trimbur himself), her family, and her Bible (218). One can imagine, perhaps, adages like "think critically" from the teacher's voice internally wrestling with the mother's "be respectful" and the Gospel of Matthew's "judge not lest ye be judged." Such an internal struggle could yield any number of outcomes, including the rejection of the teacher's authority or the toppling of scriptural quotation from a pedestal of "authoritative" discourse onto the field the "internally persuasive." These individual, vocally imbued fragments can in themselves exert a powerful rhetorical force—one, I'll argue, best understood by synthesizing topical theory with the Bakhtinian ideas discussed above.

Inner Word and Topical Invention

In order to forge a connection between Bakhtinian inner voice and rhetorical *topoi*, an initial word is in order about Bakhtin's famously vexed relationship with rhetoric in general. As Ekaterina V. Haskins and James P. Zappen aptly put it, Bakhtin's "seemingly ambivalent, even contradictory, attitude toward rhetoric helps to explain the equally varied and even contradictory responses of contemporary scholars and critics" (329). Bakhtin frequently maligns rhetoric in the same terms by which he describes "authoritative" discourse, as language designed to achieve immediate victory by silencing potential respondents. At best, Bakhtin has argued, rhetoric serves as a "distanced echo" of true cultural dialogue, one "narrowed down to an individual polemic," while at worst it insists on "the unconditionally innocent and the unconditionally guilty [where] there is complete victory and destruction of the opponent" ("Discourse" 325; *Speech Genres* 150). By its association with monologism, Bakhtin appears to indict rhetoric for objectifying the consciousness of opponents and interlocutors, of remaining "deaf to the other's response" and masquerading as "the *ultimate word*" (*Problems* 292-93; emphasis in original). Responding to such opposition between "monologic" rhetoric and "dialogic" poetics, Don H. Bialostosky has posited "dialogics" as an alternative mode of inquiry to rhetoric and dialectic ("Dialogics") and John M. Murphy has cautioned rhetoricians to take seriously the monologic and manipulative facets of their field's central concept. Yet, as Halasek notes, Bakhtin's celebration of the novel entails an exuberant discussion of the numerous "rhetorical genres" that sum to its heteroglossic composite: "The novel," Bakhtin writes, "and artistic prose in general, has the closest genetic, family relationship

to rhetorical forms" (Halasek, "Starting" 2; Bakhtin, "Discourse" 269; see also *Problems* 106-22). Elsewhere, Bakhtin repeats the definitional truism that "all rhetorical genres . . . are oriented toward their listener and his answer"; thus, while "monologic in their compositional structure," rhetorical utterances can apparently invite dialogic exchange by initiating a chain of discourse ("Discourse" 280).

Here, I second Haskins and Zappen's synoptic assessment of Bakhtin and rhetoric: "This seeming ambivalence toward rhetoric is actually an ability to see rhetoric both ways—as both monologic and potentially dialogic—both unresponsive to the point of seeking the complete destruction of the other and receptive to the other by virtue of rhetoric's basic orientation toward the audience" (330). In his periodic commentary on rhetoric, Bakhtin's Janus-faced attitude seems to account for both the muzzling authoritarianism of Stalinist rhetoric and the classical paradigm of ethical, civically productive rhetoric as espoused by figures like Aristotle and Quintilian. Of especial note in making the latter connection is a later article of Bialostosky's, "Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and Bakhtin's Discourse Theory," that synthesizes the two theories. Bialostosky's thesis is the Bakhtinian theory of utterances (concrete speech-acts demarcated by a change in speaking subjects) and speech genres (the functional "shapes" utterances take)— articulated most fully in his essay "The Problem of Speech Genres"—amounts to a deliberate revision of Aristotle's rhetorical theory (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 60). Bakhtin seems to adopt a classically rhetorical posture in his prescription that "[b]oth the composition and, particularly, the style of the utterance depend on those to whom the utterance is addressed, how the speaker (or writer) imagines his addressees, and the force of their effect on the utterance on the utterance" (*Speech Genres* 95). Yet, Bialostosky

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argues, Bakhtin rehabilitates the frankly "performative" facets of rhetorical practice—

broadly classified under the canons of delivery, arrangement, and style—at the expense

of invention, the canon Aristotle privileges (394). In other words, the description of

rhetorical communication in terms of utterance and genre necessarily foregrounds the

stylistic subtleties that yield different interpretations from and effects on audiences and

interlocutors—again, the difference between "Attica" and "*Attica!*" While Cicero and

other Roman rhetoricians stress the "amplifying" effects of inventive devices like

commonplaces much as they do stylistic figures of amplification (Cicero, *De inventione*

2.49; *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.25), Aristotle's rhetorical taxonomy, at least cursorily,

implies rigid separation of invention, to which he allots Books 1 and 2 or the *Rhetoric*,

from arrangement, delivery, and style, each of which he discusses more fleetingly in

Book 3. This is the split Bialostosky recognizes when he argues that Aristotle's and

Bakhtin's "two rhetorics are complimentary, but . . . Bakhtin's rhetoric is functionally

prior to Aristotle's and ultimately governs it. There can be persuasion without argument,

grounded in shared evaluation expressed through intonation, and the selection and

disposition of arguments in rhetorical utterances must be ruled by their provocations and

their anticipations of response, not by their availability alone" (406). Bialostosky's

pronouncement sounds much like Burke's now-canonical dictum that rhetor must learn to

"talk the language" of her audience for persuasion to become possible (*Rhetoric* 55). It is

a difficult point to disagree with.

I do agree with Bialostosky's assessment here, but would slightly reframe his

terms of analysis by pointing out a potential intersection among the rhetorical canons. In

particular, I identify a certain reciprocity between invention and style. If, as Bialostosky

argues, a Bakhtinian stylistic awareness of suitable speech genres necessarily precedes any formally inventive attempt to draw forth the "available means of persuasion," I would contend that a more elastic sense of invention already enters into the notion of genre and style Bakhtin and Bialostosky have in mind. Specifically, what Bialostosky terms "provocations and their anticipations of response" corresponds roughly to the rhetor's need to select connotatively appropriate material in the process of invention. In Chapter 1, I reread Aristotle's commentary on *topoi* in the *Physics* to suggest that the key conceptual idea behind Aristotelian *topoi* is not the need for twenty-eight quasi-dialectical "common" heuristics, nor the distinction between "common" and "special," but the *topos* as agent of "orientation," a device by which the rhetor can economically forge associative links to stores of knowledge and belief shared by his audience. In practice, such topical deployment often involves the fusion of invention and style. A catchy appellation like George W. Bush's "axis of evil," for instance, can undertake a powerful topical process of association. As Crowley's explains, the word "evil' can "excite a network of emotions habitually associated with the devil," thus potentially evoking a web of tacit but penetrating web of associations among Christian audiences (59). Likewise, "axis" can summon World War 2 imagery of the jackbooted Gestapo or kamikaze bombers. The power of "axis of evil" is not denotative but connotative. To use the term is not to explicitly equate North Korea, Iraq, and Iran to a satanic revision of Hitler's Germany or Imperial Japan, but the term's speaker may profit from such associations. Such is economical power of *topoi* in general.

Bush's voice claims "axis of evil," though, much as Pacino's claims "*Attica!*" If one speaks to an audience familiar with Bush and his use of the phrase, is difficult to

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speak "axis of evil" without evoking invisible shudder quotes. That is: we tend to *hear* Bush speaking "axis of evil" phrase even when another body speaks the phrase; as Bakhtin would say, we encounter the phrase attached to the image of person who, in our public memory, originally spoke it. And this phenomenon has discernable rhetorical effects. Insofar as Bush's *ethos* suggests untrustworthiness and even buffoonery among many political circles—even right-leaning ones—"axis of evil" now struggles to gain an effective, unironic reading among many audiences. The phrase's failure to evolve beyond the condition of Bush's implied voice, so to speak, has encumbered its rhetorical fitness. This is not to say "axis of evil" functions no longer as internally persuasive discourse, but that the inner voice associated with the phrase can undercut its original, unironic set of associations. Bush's detractors will infer a voice that, much like Wayne Booth's "unreliable narrator," persuades to the contrary of the intended "message" (*Rhetoric of Fiction* 158-59).

The example of "axis of evil" illustrates a larger trend regarding commonplaces and inner voices. In *Arguing and Thinking*, the social psychologist Michael Billig notes the rhetorical nature of thought itself: "As the mind oscillates between alternatives, it successively champions the case for one decision or another, changing its set of justifications and criticisms. The considerations, calculations and reasons, which are entertained privately, would therefore resemble those which might be heard in public debate" (144). Billig draws from the Roman tradition of commonplaces developed in Cicero's *De inventione* and the anonymously written *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, each of which list sets of contrary arguments applicable to the prosecuting and defending attorneys' cases in judicial rhetoric. The *Ad Herennium*, for instance, recommends that

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prosecutors defend information derived from torture with the claim that "men are compelled by violent pain to tell all they know," while the defense attorney might counter that "one person is less exhausted by pain, or more resourceful in fabrication" (2.7.10). As Billig explains, such oppositional sets of "common sense" suggest that a given audience's (or individual's) corpus of common sense "is not unitary, but is composed of contradictory aspects" (234). What Bakhtin adds to the equation are the inner vocalizations of such commonplaces: the "oscillations" Billig identifies occur not only between different propositions and beliefs, but the internally persuasive voices that imbue such commonplaces. Internal opposition between, say, "winners don't quit," on one hand, and "it's only a game" on the other is also opposition between a stern fatherly voice (one associated broadly with personable responsibility and achievement) and a more frankly feminized voice (one associated with compassion and caregiving). The conflict is also between the two *ethē* those tones imply. The high-schooler who identifies most readily with "traditional" masculinity is more likely to take the former voice seriously and therefore less likely to quit the football team. On this process of identification, Bakhtin identifies "intimate styles" as those generic constructions ideally allowing "speaker and addressee to merge completely" (97). It is ironic but, I think, accurate that many young men "hear themselves" in self-flagellating tones of quasi-militaristic authority ("never surrender;" "be a solder;" "be all that you can be") and thus perceive such voices most "intimately."

These are, again, commonplace statements. "Commonplace," by Crowley's definition, refers to statements and phrases achieving "wide dispersal among members of a community" (70). The commonplaces of Roman rhetoricians, thus, were not regarded

as inherently *true* as they were *familiar* and *useful*. For commonplaces to function as true *topoi*, according to the definition I have been advocating, they must not only be common but also connectively potent. Analyzing commonplaces through Bakhtin's concept of internally persuasive discourse, I believe, yields the conclusion that commonplaces often function topically not only by linking to cultural knowledge and other commonplaces (the process Crowley dubs *ideologic*), but by linking, too, to sources of ethical appeal and authority through their inner vocality. So it is, without much reservation, that one might appropriate and tweak Bruno Latour's thesis that objects can possess agency. For Latour, it is reasonable to conceive of objects—material *things*—as agents insofar as "*any thing that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor*": hammers enable woodworking, kettles enable the boiling of water, and so forth (71). This is not to say, Latour stresses, that objects consciously "act" or "do things 'instead' of human actors," but rather that social science must account for the "non-human" elements integral to social action as well as the human (72). The extension to rhetorical theory and *topoi* is logical: *topoi* "act" insofar as they enable arguments with built-in appeal to ideological consensus and authority: In a chiasmic relationship, human rhetors use *topoi* to make arguments and *topoi* use human rhetors to proliferate. And while *topoi* do not think or feel, they do *speak*. The internally persuasive voices through which groups appropriate *topoi* augment their utility in rhetorical discourse.

"Good Fences Make Good Neighbors"

       The remainder of this chapter focuses on two particularly compelling instances of vocally imbued *topoi*. The first was born of literature and lives in politics: In 1995,

Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia wrote, "Separation of powers, a distinctively American political doctrine, profits from the advice authored by a distinctively American poet: Good fences make good neighbors" (qtd. in "Justice Scalia's" A22). The reference is one many scholars of literature will recognize from Robert Frost's 1914 poem "Mending Wall"—and many such scholars will share the *New York Times* editorial board's chagrin as they reprimand Scalia for his misreading: "The poet Robert Frost gave no such advice, though Justice Scalia is not the first to say he did. [Frost's] poem, 'Mending Wall,' makes the case against walls" ("Justice Scalia's" A22). The *Times* is correct, of course—they are, at least, if one subscribes to anything but a willfully idiosyncratic reading of Frost's original poem. In "Mending Wall," Frost's narrator and his neighbor together repair a rock wall between their properties while the narrator coyly points out the futility of the endeavor:

> We wear our fingers rough handling them.
>
> Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
>
> One on a side: It comes to little more:
>
> There where it is we do not need a wall:
>
> He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
>
> My apple trees will never get across
>
> And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
>
> He only says, "Good fences make good neighbours." (35)

The famous quotation becomes a strange artifact in the context of the poem. As Bakhtin notes, a simple sentence like "What joy!" can achieve quite different ends as an utterance, either sincere or bitingly sarcastic, based on its context in a larger, composite utterance

(*Speech Genres* 85). Something similar is true here. In Bakhtin's terms, the poem satirically dialogizes the would-be monologic (authoritative) assertion that "good fences make good neighbors." Where "good fences" would read, at least superficially, as a "dead quotation" and an instance of "calcified" authoritative discourse ("Discourse" 344), Frost reinscribes the dictum into a dialogic exchange that undermines its authority. We can reasonably deduce that the poem, as a whole, rebukes "good fences" since Frost erects its hierarchy of voices to favor the narrator's as more thoughtful and complex, while the "good neighbors" dictum seems to indicate, more than anything else, the neighbor's doltish incapacity to hear dissent.

But we do not always come to "good fences" as readers of poetry or dutiful parsers of heteroglossic strata. Scalia certainly didn't; nor is he the only public rhetor to quote, or misquote, Frost in this fashion. "Good fences make good neighbors" has become an adage that circulates widely in argumentative and political rhetoric, addressing topics from domestic immigration policy to conflict in the Middle East to Scalia's take on separation of powers in American government to local affairs. A *ProQuest Newsstand* search of English-language newspaper, for instance, yields close to 3000 instances of the phrase and its derivations in prominent papers between 1979 and 2014. I include a few characteristic examples from recent publications: In Fort Wayne's *Journal Gazette*, Frank Gray states, "Robert Frost wrote that good fences make good neighbors, and so far it appears that some fences along Westbrook Drive will continue to keep residents and the city on good terms" (C1). Advocating for regional partitioning of Iraq, Red Jahncke writes in the *Providence Journal*, "All of this would follow the wisdom of America's foremost foreign-policy expert and Mideast specialist, Robert

Frost, who reasoned, 'Good fences make good neighbors'" (1), a sentiment echoed by the *Washington Post*'s editorial board, who invoke the same quote and attribution to make the same argument: "We should heed the words of poet Robert Frost: 'Good fences make good neighbors'" ("Settling" A20). The Los Angeles *Daily News* editorializes that "[Farmers and ranchers] aren't the kinds of folks inclined as a rule toward regulation for regulation's sake. But they are the kinds who understand completely that good fences make good neighbors" ("For California's Sake"). And in a letter to the *Hartford Courant*, reader Judy Singer offers a local analogy to fences recently erected in Israel: "[I]f the people of Massachusetts were blowing themselves up in Connecticut restaurants, Gov. M. Jodi Rell and our legislators would be debating a fence right along with the three-strikes legislation. Of course, that would be less shocking here than in Montana. New Englanders know that good fences make good neighbors" (A10).

I could go on, but these examples suffice to illustrate a few trends. Gray, Jahncke, and the *Washington Post* editorial board—along with Justice Scalia and many others—directly and unironically attribute "good fences" to Frost. I hope, however, my argument makes clear by this point that the issue is not one of simple "misreading" or of philistine pundits who flunked American lit. On the contrary, many of them *do* know their Frost—or appear familiar enough with his reputation to recognize, as Scalia puts it, the "distinctively American" poetic *ethos* he potentially brings to an argument. There is, Bakhtin would remind us, no single, unitary "Robert Frost" all readers are guaranteed to infer, but his associations with quintessential "Americanness," blue-color labor, unpretentious intellectual refinement, and the Atlantic Northeast are all widely assumed. We infer, in other words, a sort of "essence" of Frost, a construct similar to what Booth

famously coined as the "implied author," the literary re-creation of the flesh-and-blood

man, and a term Seymour Chatman has revised to account for the complete authorial

presence "as reconstructed by the reader from the narrative" (Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*

74-75; Chatman 148). But in this case, of course, it is not exactly textual reconstruction

that allows political commentators to claim "good fences" as Frost's sentiment. Instead,

what enters play is a hazier sense of Frost the inferred "person" and public figure. As

Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tytecta explain, "the concept of 'person'

introduces an element of stability": "In argumentation, the person, considered as the

support of a series of qualities, the author of a series of acts and judgments, and the object

of a series of appraisals, is a durable being, around whom is grouped a whole series of

phenomena to which he gives cohesion and significance" (294, 295). In the popular,

public imagination, then, it would appear Frost's "stability" and "durability" of character

cohere around the abstractions I name above and not necessarily around complex

pronouncements from his poems. The *Daily News'* editorial board is able to imply Frost's

authorship of "good fences" without mentioning him by name through a thematic link to

agricultural labor, a common subject of the poet's work. Singer, the *Hartford Courant*

reader, does something similar through an appeal to regional identity—"New Englanders

know that good fences make good neighbors"—which works because Frost's residence,

from boyhood to death, in New England is common enough knowledge, especially to

Singer's Connecticut audience. The problem of "misreading" Frost arises, then, because

the connotations of the "good fences" *topos*—for instance, the American virtues of land

ownership, self-reliance, and respect for property—cohere all too well with the vague

sense of "Robert Frost" that exists in the public imaginary.

"Good fences" also benefits as a meme from this coherence: the ethical appeal prepackaged into the phrase, that of the great "quintessentially American" poet, bolsters the "fitness" of "good fences" as a replicable rhetorical device. This association, of course, wasn't always the in place, and one can trace the evolutionary-rhetorical history of the term in an abstract sense. As folklorist Wolfgang Meider notes, a number of similar maxims from around the world precede "good fences." These include, "'There must be a *fence* between good neighbors' (Norwegian), 'Between neighbors' gardens a *fence* is good' (German), 'Build a *fence* even between intimate friends' (Japanese)," among others (70; emphasis in original). In American letters, Mieder notes a number of dicta that loosely connect fences and neighborliness—for example, an 1804 farmer's almanac that advises, "Look to your fences; and if your neighbor neglects to repair and keep in order his half, do it yourself; you will get your pay"—before *Blum's Farmer's and Planter's Almanac*, out of North Carolina, finally prescribed that "good fences make good neighbors" in those precise words (70, 71). But, as Mieder explains further, Frost's 1914 appropriation of the phrase in "Mending Wall" supplies the "ultimate significance" of the term since. This claim is more or less empirically verifiable: Figure 4, produced from Google's Ngram Viewer, illustrates the frequency of "good fences make good neighbo(u)rs" in titles from the Google Books database between 1830 and 2000, graphed in proportion to the total number of books available from each year. One notices an isolated bump in frequency around 1850, which coincides with the *Blum's* almanac Mieder identifies as coining the phrase in print. But the phrase's frequency begins to increase rapidly only after "Mending Wall's" publication in 1914, and has only escalated since. From a rhetorical stance, we might say Frost's *ethos* ignited the phrase's vitality.

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It is worth noting, though, that the success of "good fences" is likely in part a matter of style—or, more specifically, of what Richard Lanham has recently termed "stylistic filtration" (19). By Lanham's argument, the sheer glut of information available to the public sphere demands devices of selection. Rhetoric's role in persuasion, according to Lanham, doubles as the "economics of attention," the ability to present information such that it "sticks" in public consciousness, thus circulating widely and efficiently (21). "Good fences make good neighbors," in other words, has likely beat out other iterations of the same sentiment thanks to its catchy, anaphoristic deployment of the adjective "good": it economically and memorably packages a set of attitudes about citizenship and property. This quality, no doubt, is what enabled readers to initially abstract "good fences" from its satirical position in the poem and resurrect it as an unironic dictum. As Bakhtin explains, "When the individual sentence is analyzed separately from its context, it is interpreted to the point of becoming a whole utterance" (*Speech Genres* 82).
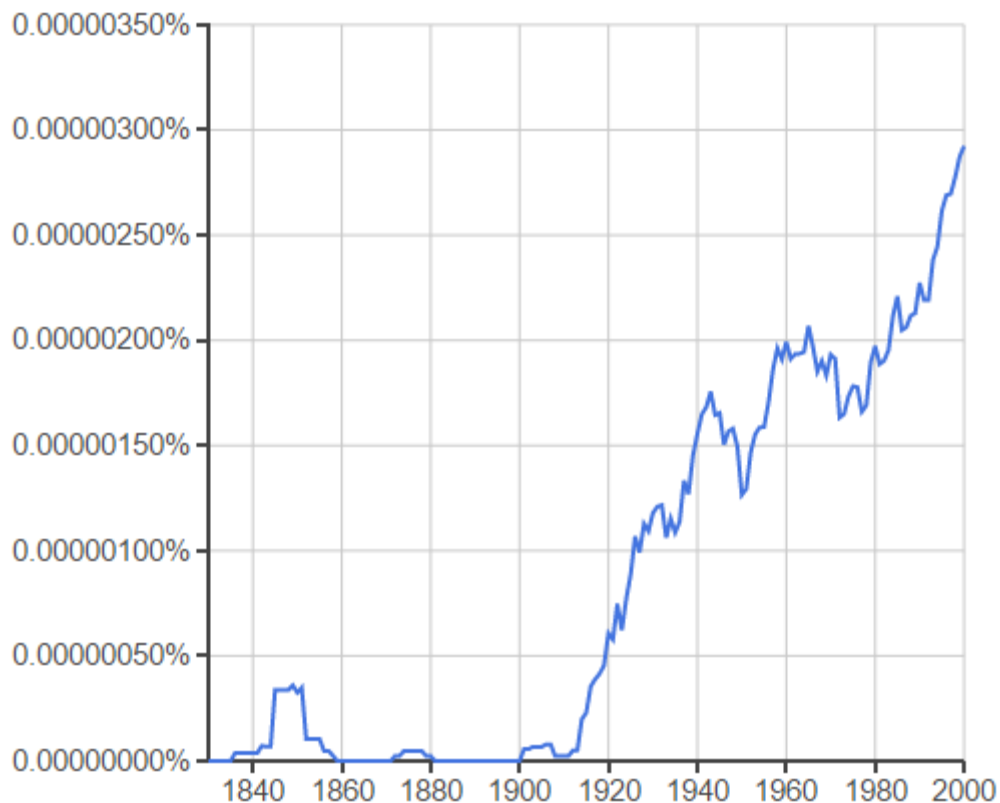
Figure 4: A Google Ngrams graph indicating the frequency of "good fences make good neighbor(u)rs between 1830 and 2000, graphed in relation to the total number of books available from each year.

Note, though, that Bakhtin does not label such abstraction from the whole an act of *mis*interpretation. Such a negative evaluation would be hard to mete out insofar as the circulation of fragments informs the rhetorical praxis of quotidian life; people lack the discursive economy to track down the context of each fragment that surfaces in the media or in everyday speech. Yet, "good fences" still carries a shade of its context insofar it suggests Frost's name and character. (And in this sense, it matters little that the phrase "isn't really his"—that it was coined before his birth in an almanac from North Carolina—because the social force of public memory ascribes it to Frost.) As Google Ngrams tells us, Frost's association with the term would appear to matter more than any stylistic quality itself because "Mending Wall" is what set the phrase circulating. To

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return to Bakhtin's terms, it appears to matter most that we encounter "good fences make good neighbors" through the internally persuasive voice of the quintessential American poet. "Good fences" comes to inhabit quotation marks, either implied or explicit, that refer back to Frost and bank on his credibility as a tool for economizing attention. This is not to say we hear Frost's "voice" in "good fences" as immediately or literally as we might hear Bush's in "axis of evil" or Pacino's in "*Attica!*" but it is to say that the phrase potentially evokes the image of the speaking poet in tones of poetic authority. One need not hear Frost literally speak to *imagine* such tones. Indeed, the vast nebulousness and malleability of Frost's *ethos*—what Burke has called the transformative "*resources* of ambiguity"—proves an asset (*Grammar* xix; emphasis in original). Much like, for example, the founding fathers, Martin Luther King, Jr., or Shakespeare, Frost lends an utterly uncontroversial, eulogistic voice to the arena of American politics: liberals and conservatives alike can claim him, as can urban sophisticates and rural blue-collars, men and women. There appears scant rhetorical risk in beginning a sentence, "As Robert Frost once said …" And unless one writes for an audience of literary scholars, this formula appears true even if the author is about to misrepresent the content of Frost's poem. The content of "Mending Wall" is less the point than the connotative totality of Frost's internally persuasive voice. By extension, the inventive capacity of the phrase as a *topos* derives not only from its face-value content nor its replicable catchiness, but also the hazy sense of authority connoted by Frost's voice. One might even argue that Frost's "good fences" represents a secular, latter-day corollary to the scriptural *topoi* advocated by St. Augustine or Hippo in the early Middle Ages—those that couple Christian authority, vocalized as authoritative or internally persuasive discourse through the figure

of the sage clergyman, Christ, or God Himself, with the cultural *logos* of Biblical

narrative. Frost's poetry is mostly secular, but his place in the American literary canon

allows his voice to both stand in as a sort of synecdoche for American values and to

enable arguments that benefit from appeals to such.

"Binders Full of Women"

      Internally persuasive voices, though, are often more discrete and immediate than

Frost's. Such is the case in my second example. Anyone who paid attention to the 2012

presidential campaign between President Barack Obama and Republican challenger Mitt

Romney will likely remember my second example of a vocally imbued *topos*, "binders

full of women." After a surprisingly weak performance from Obama in the first of three

televised debates between the candidates, Romney entered the second on October 16, just

three weeks before Election Day, enjoying a small surge in the polls. That surge

dissipated, though, following a disastrous performance—one triggered, in no small part,

by Romney's unwitting coinage of the meme "binders full of women" (see Neuman;

Parker). During the debate, Romney fielded a listener's question about pay equity for

women. He spoke to his own experience as governor of Massachusetts. The exact quote

was: "And—and so we—we took a concerted effort to go out and find women who had

backgrounds that could be qualified to become members of our cabinet. I went to a

number of women's groups and said, can you help us find folks? And I brought us whole

binders full of—of women" ("Transcript").

      These final words hit a cultural nerve, fragmented loose, and ricocheted across

news and social media outlets at a breakneck pace. Like "good fences make good

neighbors," Mitt Romney's gaffe thus represents a discursive fragment detached from its original context and recast as a separate utterance. As I argued in Chapter 2, fragments like "good fences" and "binders" function as what Roland Barthes terms *lexias*, "units of reading" one can demarcate according to their "connotative density" (*S/Z* 13). The Internet, to be sure, has a great deal to do with how "binders" was abstracted from the second debate, and I discuss elsewhere how Romney's flub—along with his odd commentary on Sesame Street's Big Bird clandestine crack about the "47 percent" of the population whose votes the GOP need not pursue (see also "2012")—also deserves rhetorical attention for its modal affordances as an "Internet meme" subject to appropriation and remix in various online spaces (Shifman; Wetherbee, "Picking Up"). Here, though, I will limit my discussion to the vocal infusion of "binders" and its rhetorical effects. One can begin to articulate these effects by contrast to Frost's "good fences." The principal difference between the two *topoi* is one of immediacy: much like "*Attica!*"—only, perhaps, more so—"binders" stems from and necessarily refers back to a particular historical-cultural event. As Romney uttered the phrase, it quickly forged a set of connotative links to timely cultural knowledge of Republican misogyny and corporate soullessness exemplified, for instance, by Todd Akin's then-recent comments on "legitimate rape" and the capitalistic greed underlying the Wall Street bailouts. Burke explains the importance of timeliness in one particularly insightful passage:

> [I]f the Aristotelian concern with topics were adapted to the conditions of
> modern   journalism, we should perhaps need to catalogue a kind of
> *timely topic*, such as that of the satirical cartoon, which exploits
> commonplaces of a transitory nature. The transitoriness is due not to the

fact that the expressions are wholly alien to people living under other
conditions, but to the fact that they are *more persuasive* to people living
under one particular set of circumstances. (*Rhetoric* 62)

In other words, a specific event like a presidential election requires the rhetorical mobilization of transitory knowledge: Republican problems with the female electorate and corporate greed both qualify as perennial concerns, but both issues were particularly charged in 2012. "Binders full of women," thus, entered rhetorical praxis as transitory *topos* pejoratively linking one public figure's voice and *ethos* to a set of timely issues.

Bakhtin would stress, too, that Romney's voice—the distinctly aural connotations of "binders"—instrumentally ensured such associations. This is another sense in which "binders" was more immediate than "good fences," for Romney's literal voice, in 2012, circulated ubiquitously in the media in a way Frost's likely never did. This fact of Romney's candidacy meant that the voice infused in "binders" became largely self-referential. While one could deploy "good fences" in the context of the 2012 election, for instance, to critique Obama on immigration policy, the effect of Frost's internally persuasive voice would be predominantly supplemental. It could fortify an argument in its tacit appeal to the quintessentially American wisdom the poet, but the argument would remain, most centrally about Obama (or Romney), not Frost. To deploy "binders full of women" in late 2012, by contrast, was generally to select Romney as the subject of one's argument. An October 2012 editorial from the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, for example, quips, "Mitt Romney does not have a binder full of women. He has a binder full of women's issues he intends to ignore, scorn, or obfuscate" ("Women in Binders" A16). Meanwhile, another editorial from that month, this one from the aggregate news site

AllAfrica.com, censures the Nobel committee for awarding the 2012 Peace Prize to the European Union despite the "neo-colonial" burden the EU places on many African countries while historically neglecting the achievements of Africans, women, and African women especially: "It seems the committee's binders full of women are collecting dust next to their binders full of Africans" ("EU Awarded"). These editorials take exigence—in Lloyd Bitzer's famous sense of the term, as an "imperfection marked by urgency" (6)—from different developments on different continents. Because a presidential election epitomizes such a state of urgent imperfection, the former's stakes for the American electorate are clear. It effectively endorses Obama. As Bitzer explains, exigence comprises "a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations" that dictate the parameters of a rhetorical situation; Romney's importance as a presidential candidate saturated American rhetoric to the point where one could scarcely bring him up without making a positive or negative argument about his candidacy. The more interesting point, though, is that the second editorial effectively drags the American election into an argument about a different topic. *AllAfrica.com* uses the American election to supply the terms of critique against the Nobel committee's decision. By riffing on "binders," the author, in a sense, ventriloquizes Romney's voice into the corpus of the Nobel committee. The message is: You should be better than this; you (literally) sound like Mitt Romney. A tacit, enthymematic "middle premise" about Romney's fitness for command underlies this argument. The argument is made possible only by a transitory shared understanding of the internally persuasive discourse bound up in "binders"—by the evocation of Romney's voice.

Such critique-through-ventriloquism requires a different sort of internally persuasive discourse than that attached to "good fences." As the "axis of evil" example above illustrates, Bakhtin's terms seem malleable enough to conceive something like *ironically* persuasive internal discourse attached the image of an untrustworthy speaking person. Some basic criteria still apply: the inner voice in question and the character it implies still must harmonize and cohere with the connotative total of the message it speaks. Americans tend to perceive in Frost's *ethos* a set of assumptions consonant with those of the dictum that "good fences make good neighbors." By speaking "binders full of women," Romney stepped into a connotative trap largely of his own design. He gave economically potent voice to a set of ideas easy to link to the archetype of the white, rich, out-of-touch, misogynistic businessman. This is not even to say that Romney, the flesh-and-blood man, *is* or *was* all of those things, but it is to say that "binders" helped vocalize a social perception to that end. As Burke might say, the metonymic and synecdochical functions of "binders" necessarily "reduce" Romney, his identity, and his discourse to an economical nugget (*Grammar* 506): Romney's "binder" becomes metonym for the entire scene of androcentric corporate bureaucracy; the phrase itself becomes synecdoche for the second debate and Romney's narrative of loss; and Romney internally persuasive voice, as intoned in the phrase "binders full of women," comes of stand for the whole of his character. In Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca's terms, Romney the rhetorical "person" comes to cohere around "binders" and its negative associations. Such (for Romney) unfortunately "coherent" associations were, again, not *created* by the "binders" *topos*, but the phrase's inception did mark an exceedingly convenient point of invention: it became easy to indict Romney for sexism and classism through a quick act of suggestive

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ventriloquism. The circulation of Romney's voice contributed heavily to his undoing as a presidential candidate.

Rhetorical Agency and the Fragmentation of Voice

Chris Young's refrain that he "hears voices all the time" is seconded by Bakhtin, who writes, "I hear *voices* in everything and dialogic relations among them" (qtd. in Morson and Emerson 98). Whether these voices Bakhtin references belong to specific and current public figures and celebrities, more mythic figures from cultural memory, or individuals from one's own intimate experience, they are all at once pervasive and fragmentary. We generally come to folkish truisms like those from Young's song though archetypical but nonetheless potent voices—the father, mother, teacher, clergyman, and so forth. "Good fences make good neighbors" provides more specificity through its association with a certain literary authority, but "Frost" himself—or the socially reassembled essence of the man—is also a vague, archetypal construct. Pacino's "*Attica!,*" Bush's "axis of evil," and Romney's "binders full of women" are more precise and internally persuasive within certain socio-historical parameters. All, though, are rhetorical *topoi* vitalized by vocal connotation.

Despite Michael Calvin McGee's famous call for rhetoricians to attend to the postmodern fragmentation of rhetorical discourse ("Text"), the splintering of voice itself into topical nuggets marked by internally persuasive discourse has received scant attention. This phenomenon as I have illustrated it, has numerous implications for rhetorical theory and practice. I have been exploring those more theoretical implications throughout this chapter, but one point worth stressing further is that different *topoi* can

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have very different shelf-lives, and that the longevity of a certain *topos* often centrally depends on its vocal plasticity. If one were to graph "binders full of women" as I do "good fences" above, the result would yield only one frenzied spear of commotion above October and November 2012 before quickly dwindling away to almost nothing. "Binders," in other words, was unable to adapt past the circumstances of the election; it was unable to unshackle itself from the voice of Romney, a figure whose perceived social importance plummeted once he conceded the election to Obama. *Topoi* like binders tend to burn brightly during their periods of relevance—for a moment, the importance of "binders" soared high above the steady, plodding circulation of "good fences"—but then changing circumstances extinguish them. A *topos* like "good fences" owes its longevity to the productive ambiguity of Frost's voice: he speaks to us authoritatively, but in broad terms.

But what of individual rhetors acting in real-life circumstances? Do my theoretical claims bear on their praxis? I believe they do, and I will offer a few concluding thoughts as to why and how. It may come as a surprise, to start, that I do not believe my theoretical offerings entirely negate the traditionally romantic notions of "finding one's voice." Indeed, "finding" may be the apt verb because, as rhetoricians like Thomas M. Lessl have long held, "voice" is not created from scratch but chosen more-or-less categorically based on the rhetorical effects of different vocabularies, timbers, tones, and so forth (see Lessl, "Priestley Voice"; Rhodes). "Finding" a voice is a matter of study and selection. Moreover, one may "claim" a voice insofar as that voice comes to organically resonate with the individual's own *ethos*. But here is where matters get thorny. The first point to stress is that while the individual rhetor may "claim" a voice (or

a voice may claim her), the individual does not necessarily control, much less "own," her voice once it enters the social sphere. When one individual's fragmented voice enters the consciousness of others as internally persuasive discourse, it becomes dialogized into a new contextual matrix, and the voice's "owner"—for lack of a better word—loses control of the ensuing relations. The stakes, of course, are higher for individuals in the public eye than they are for private citizens, but the process is similar. Disagreements or incongruities between individuals, as Bakhtin explains, represent the "surface upheavals of the untamed elements of social heteroglossia," the tangible manifestation of deep ideological disparities implicit in the many voices that compose any complex, heterogeneous society ("Discourse" 326). But such "surface upheavals" between public figures echo though the deeper currents of heteroglossia, helping to shape the ideological terrain as they reverberate. Romney's utterance of "binders full of women" *stuck* in the currents of social heteroglossia, working its way into the discourse of others and dragging the voice of its author along.

Public rhetors, in other words, must contend with the fragmentation and circulation of their own voices. Romney could scarcely control the public appropriation of his own once he spoke "binders full of women," but he might have performed any number of individual agentive acts to prevent such a rhetorical misstep. A slight revision of wording—"binders full of women's resumes," for example, or simply "lists of qualified women"—would have supplied no meme-worthy phrase fit to pejoratively usurp the candidate's voice. (And conversely, in 2008, Obama worked assiduously and successfully to associate his own voice with memes like "yes we can" and "change we can believe in"; such associations can be forged intentionally.) It is obviously harder to

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fault Frost for failing to foresee the circulative potential of "good fences make good neighbors." With some detriment to the poetic tenor of his composition, he might have replaced "good fences" with a more prosaic substitute ("Shut up and help me fix the wall!") if he wished the narrator's critique of needless borders to more plainly trump the neighbor's advocacy for them. But, regardless, the "life" of "good fences" falls largely into the realm of the aleatory: rhetors and writers can rarely prognosticate with any precision how their own words and voices will fragment and circulate in the economy of discourse. Often, the best rhetors can do is speculate—apply some calculation to the tenors of their voices, the connotative density of their phrasing, and the ideological parameters within which their words might echo. The public rhetor is an agent, but her agency depends in part on anticipating the acts of other agents.

But enough on the role of high-profile agents—the Mitt Romneys, Robert Frosts, Al Pacinos, and Chris Youngs whose voices circulate broadly in social heteroglossia. Since I can hardly counsel nonhuman agents (*topoi* themselves), I direct this chapter's concluding remarks to the many human agents whose cumulative action gradually and quietly shapes the landscape of public discourse. As Celeste Michelle Condit has argued, the parameter of public rhetoric exist in slow, subtly changing flux: "The noun *rhetorical formation* should always be understood as carrying the connotations of the verb *form*" (255). In the polity of rhetoric, as in that of nature, change occurs gradually and incrementally. I will add, too, that the gradual rhetorical change Condit perceives is both fluid and particulate. There exist discernible *topoi*—"good fences," "binders," "axis of evil," and so on—that retain formal stability as long those forms profitably enable arguments. This relative stability makes *topoi* convenient sites of analysis and praxis

both, but individual rhetors should understand that the selection and repetition of *topoi* is in no way a neutral act. Because *topoi* replicate from text to text, the selection of a given *topos* doubles as an invitation to one's audiences and interlocutors to repeat that *topos* in further discourse. As Lanham reminds us, there exists room in the economy of discourse for only so many specific, particulate *topoi* to proliferate. To echo "binders full of women" during the 2012 election cycle, therefore, was also to tacitly impede the invention and circulation of arguments about other elements of the election and Romney's candidacy. Democrats can still give thanks that "binders" galvanized their cause and drew legitimate attention to Romney's shortcomings, but all rhetors should shoulder the ethical implications of the *topoi* they choose to repeat.

The same goes for the more fluid internally persuasive voices that append themselves to individual *topoi*. As Bakhtin's translator and key commentator Michael Holquist stresses, "Heteroglossia is not just a swirling mass of contending languages; each language is the profile of an ideology, the site of a world view" (44). So it is that the structure of voices composing one's society is also a structure of ideology. The quotidian praxis of public discourse, as Bakhtin puts it, represents a steady conflict between "centripetal" and "centrifugal" forces. The former set of forces attempts to reign in heteroglossia toward a compact, localized center of discursive power; it organizes heteroglossia in a strict hierarchy. The latter seeks the democratic, utopian proliferation of diverse voices. In this chapter, I did not deliberately set out to present the white, male perspective on internally persuasive discourse and topical association, but it is no coincidence that most of the examples convenient to illustrating my argument rely on the voices of white men. Even if these white, male voices can be satirically dialogized, as

Romney's was, they provide the "default" tones of our internally persuasive discourses. Political exigencies, especially those as momentous as presidential elections, certainly require that rhetors often echo the voices of power. But we should keep in mind questions about the big picture and the slow drift of rhetorical praxis. As we choose means of persuasion, are we enabling minority voices—those of women, racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ communities—to have a place in the future of civic discourse, or are we only reifying the upper tiers of cultural heteroglossia? While rhetors may unapologetically borrow authoritative voices from the ranks of the politically ascendant and the annals of cultural mythology, we all ought to keep in mind the long terms stakes of our topical selections—who speaks, and who *can* speak, through our chosen *topoi*?

CONCLUSION

THE FUTURE OF THE "TIMELY TOPICS"

It is a testament to the encyclopedic scope of Kenneth Burke's intellectual project

that, for all the critical and theoretical commentary on his work, many of his more minor

ideas and coinages have travelled under rhetorical theory's collective radar. One such

coinage, which I discuss in preceding Chapter 4, is the "timely topics." Here, from the

Rhetoric of Motives, is Burke's primary statement on that term:

> Thus, if the Aristotelian concern with topics were adapted to the
>
> conditions of modern journalism, we should need to catalogue a kind of
>
> *timely topic*, such as that of the satirical cartoon, which exploits
>
> commonplaces of a transitory nature. The transitoriness is due not to the
>
> fact that the expressions are wholly alien to people living under other
>
> conditions, but to the fact that they are *more persuasive* with people living
>
> under one particular set of circumstances. (62)

The core ideas expressed here relate rather clearly to the scope of this project. One might

describe the genre of the satirical cartoon, for instance, as a didactic pastiche of timely

memes: political caricatures, symbols of American mythology (Uncle Sam, Lady Liberty,

partisan donkeys and elephants, and so on), and narrative tropes unsubltly labeled by the

news of the day. (Mitt Romney's binder might wear the bolded tag "Corporate America"

in a 2012 cartoon.) It is difficult, indeed, to imagine a political cartoon all of whose

component images and captions lack topical vibrancy. The short space of such cartoons

requires economic selection, usually in the form of a tropological links among established

topoi in the form of people, phrases, and symbols.

Burke suggests that "a statement about the 'timely topics' would seem to be, not

an extension of the rhetorical motive into fields not traditionally considered part of it, but

merely . . . the application of classical theory to a special cultural condition set by the

modern press" (63). Shortly thereafter, Burke expounds further on these new avenues of

the "rhetorical motive": "The extreme heterogeneity of modern life, however, combined

with the nature of modern postal agencies, brings up another kind of possibility: the

systematic attempt to *carve out* an audience, as the commercial rhetorician looks not

merely for persuasive devices in general, but for the topics that will appeal to the

particular 'income group' most likely to be interested in his product, or able to buy it"

(64). It is true, certainly, that Burke's America of 1950 was "radically heterogeneous"

compared to the culture of the Aristotelian polis, and it is true, further, that the

postmillennial Information Age has pushed such heterogeneity much further. Burke's

satirical cartoons and postal systems still exist, but so too do Internet memes, Twitter

hashtags, viral videos, and the ceaseless desperation of a 24-hour news cycle. (If he were

rewriting the *Rhetoric* for the new millennium, Burke himself might have noted the

Romney-related Amazon binder review I refer to in the Introduction.) In a sense, this

latter-day proliferation of media entails more detail, more nuance, more substance; rather

than two or three perspectives on a given event, courtesy of two or three major news

outlets, we have dozens, or hundreds, including first-hand accounts from citizen-

journalists armed with smartphones. This is a good thing in more ways than one. The

live-Tweeting of the Arab Spring uprisings, for instance, was a fascinating and complex media event. What Burke calls the "*carving out*" of audiences is less of a rhetorical gymnastic than it once was because of the greater diversity of discrete coexisting cultures, subcultures, discourse communities, and media outlets. The public rhetor, today, often "knows her audience" in intimate terms that Edward R. Murrow or Walter Cronkite could only guess at.

As this project has described, however, the present-day profusion of media production also requires more intense competition for attention of audiences, and therefore more intense competition among rhetorical *topoi* whose ongoing survival depends on their use and replication by human rhetors. Such topical struggle entails complications. Think, for example, of the two roughly coincident events of Islamist violence that occurred in early January of 2015. Between January 3 and 7, the West African jihadist group Boko Haram stormed the Nigerian town of Baga, killing somewhere between several hundred and several thousand Nigerians, and displacing more. On January 7, two Al-Qaeda-affiliated gunmen breached the headquarters of the satirical French periodical *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris, killing eleven and wounding eleven more in retaliation against allegedly blasphemous depictions of the prophet Mohammed. While both events were horrific, any metric ought to confirm that the sheer experience of needless human suffering resulting from the Boko Haram attack outweighs that from the *Charlie Hebdo* incident: more people were killed, wounded, and displaced in Baga than Paris. And yet, the latter received far, far more media attention in the West. Writing for *Time*, Charlotte Alter argued that Americans' empathetic "disconnect" played into the hands of the African jihadists: "When terrorists kill villagers in non-Western countries, it

feels like one of many bad things that happen to people in far-away places. When terrorists attack Western cities Americans might live in, hotels Americans might stay in, or nightclubs Americans might dance in, it feels like a bad thing that could happen to you."

This is a problem of rhetorical identification, but also of topical evocation. Following the *Charlie Hebdo* attack, the meme "Je suis Charlie" ("I am Charlie") and its hashtag variant #JeSuisCharlie lit up social media and the Western news cycle. As Alter notes, some Twitter-users circulated a parallel hashtag, #IamBaga, to raise awareness about the massacre in Nigeria, but their efforts garnered comparably scant attention. In January 2015, *Charlie Hebdo* became a rather exclusive synecdoche for the West's collective ire against militant Islam; accordingly, "Je suis Charlie," that simmering node of topical vitality, pulled a vast breadth of "timely" rhetorical energy into its orbit. "Je suis Charlie," in three words, rallied the commonplaces of free speech, anti-extremism, and international (Western) solidarity—and perhaps those of Islamophobic mistrust as well, though the spectacle of the moment made it difficult for dissenters to challenge the *topos* itself. In short, the phrase made itself readily available to rhetors concerned with issues of Islamism and free speech. If, say, a French, British, or Dutch parliamentarian, in early 2015, were to have advanced legislation curbing religious exceptions to free speech laws, the phrase "Je suis Charlie" would have suited her deliberative ends. To repeat "Je suis Charlie" in such a case is not, exactly, to state one's apathy toward the plight of Nigerians, but it is to apply further pressure on the topical diversity of the epideictic sphere; when the means of persuasion so comprehensive localizes in a single *topos*, attention necessarily diverts from other *topoi* (such as #IamBaga) and their associated

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issues. In this sense, one can appropriately question the ethics of circulating a single *topos* like "Je suis Charlie" without expressly condemning the motivations or deliberative ends of the rhetors responsible for its replication. We need, in other words, a measured analysis of both the deliberative effects of specific *topoi* and, simultaneously, the epideictic effects of those same *topoi* on the textual composition of culture itself.

As I have suggested repeatedly, fragments of discourse now travel more quickly and broadly than they ever have before—though they also face a more diverse and competitive environment. Because of this, individual *topoi* and rhetorical culture writ large now coevolve together at a brisker, more volatile pace. We rhetoricians should attune ourselves to the textual and contextual factors that will constitute the future of the timely topics. We should take notice of how *topoi* evolve, how they enable inventive connections, and how they organize our attention. As critics and rhetors, we must learn to responsibly and critically interact with the *topoi* that surround us. We need to learn from examples like "binders full of women" and "Je suis Charlie"—and we also need to critically analyze comparable *topoi* that arise in the future, and speculate carefully about the consequences of their use.

Such critical thought is difficult. I stress, in multiple instances, the aleatory dimensions of cultural evolution and rhetorical utility. No one (besides the shooters themselves) exactly saw the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings coming, and no one exactly planned "Je suis Charlie" as a measured, collective response. These things *just happened*—or, more precisely, they reflect the unpredictable violence of ideological and political incongruity, as well as the frantic, cumulative grasping for discursive resources that succeeds such violence and inadvertently supersedes other rhetorical struggles. We

cannot predict history. By extension, we cannot know which *topoi* will surge in vitality next month or next year; nor can we know with certainty the lives such *topoi* will lead in public discourse.

My closing argument, though, is that none of this absolves us from ethical and critical responsibility—especially those of us who study and practice rhetoric. How do we cope? Here, I identify three distinct but mutually reinforcing avenues of criticism that rhetoricians might pursue into the matters of *topoi* and cultural evolution. I will call them historical, current, and speculative criticism.

Historical criticism of *topoi* will attempt to better understand and learn from the rhetoric of the past. Such inquiry will establish the individual *topos* as a site of historical, transtextual analysis. Fredric Jameson once brought the dictum "Always historicize!" to bear on textual analysis (*Political* 9). For the rhetorical historian interested in *topoi* and their evolution, historicizing becomes an act of recreating the action of the past, or picking through the past's textual sediment to understand how discourse, culture, and history interacted. Such historical inquiry should broaden our comprehension of what is rhetorically possible—of what specific *topoi* can do and what rhetors can do with them. It should also tell us how *topoi* and cultural circumstances evolve together through the repetition of rhetorical acts. Such criticism will highlight the documented relationship between *topoi* and cultural change.

Current criticism of *topoi* will cast an explanatory lens on the interaction among *topoi*, rhetors, and texts in the present and recent past. Such criticism will stay abreast of discursive trends in political rhetoric and broaden our sense of what it means to be rhetorical critics and agents in the new millennium. While taking notes from historical

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criticism, current criticism should remain attentive to the functions of recent *topoi* and the rhetorical climates they work within and help create. This category, I believe, applies to most of the specific examples I cover in the present project.

Speculative criticism will turn the insights of historical and current criticism toward the future. The future perpetually eludes us, of course, but rhetoricians can and ought to speculate about how certain varieties of *topoi* might function following certain significant events—say, the next momentous Supreme Court ruling, terrorist attack, or political stunt in the name of religious freedom. It is, indeed, no trivial question to ask how civic rhetors should discursively respond to such events in a manner that is both deliberatively effective *and* nudges the epideictic drift of cultural evolution in the best direction. This balance should remain our concern as we think about future interactions between human and discursive agents.

The route to such a balance, I'll add, will derive only from a coalescence of historical, current, and speculative thought: we must understand how humans and *topoi* have interacted and do interact to assert the best courses of interaction for the future rhetorical climate we want. Such criticism will be difficult. Early in *De Oratore*, Cicero insists that every responsible orator must first be a consummate student of his culture's knowledge, "[f]or it is from knowledge that oratory must derive its beauty and fullness, and unless there is such knowledge, well-grasped and comprehended by the speaker, there must be something empty and almost childish in his utterance" (1.6.20). Because the velocity and heterogeneity of our rhetorical culture outpaces anything the Roman rhetorical patriarch could have imagined, we are now in a position to add to Cicero's astute thesis. The "childishness" Cicero perceives in the unknowledgeable rhetor

translates not just to using rhetoric badly, but to *being used by rhetoric*. Because we

human rhetors are the medium through which *topoi* must either propagate or expire, we

must accept the role critically. Because the "fittest" *topoi* are often among the most cruel

and divisive, we must alter the conditions of fitness—which is to say, we must alter

ourselves when necessary. In the closing sentences of *The Selfish Gene*, Richard Dawkins

contends, "We are built as gene-machines and cultured as meme machines, but we have

the power to turn against our creators. We, alone on Earth, can rebel against the tyranny

of the selfish replicators" (201). Rhetoricians are poised better than anyone to prove

Dawkins right.

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      Rhetorical Criticism." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77.4 (1991): 385-406. Print.

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   Communication* 5.3 (1991): 229-45. Print.

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   Speech Communication* 43.1 (1979): 26-37. Print.

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Harold Fisch. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984. Print.

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I.R. Titunik. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986. Print.

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Weaver, Richard. *The Ethics of Rhetoric*. South Bend: Regnery/Gateway, 1953. Print.

"We Are the 99 Percent." *Know Your Meme*. Cheezburger, Inc., n.d. Web. 1 Oct. 2012.

Wetherbee, Ben. "The Descent of Evolutionism." Review of *Rhetorical Darwinism: Religion, Evolution, and the Scientific Identity* by Thomas M. Lessl. *Enculturation* 18 (2005). Web. 1 Oct. 2015.

---. "Picking Up the Fragments of the 2012 Election: Memes, *Topoi*, and Political Rhetoric." *Present Tense: A Journal of Rhetoric in Society* 5.1 (2015). Web. 1 Oct. 2015.

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Williams, Mark T., and Theresa Enos. "Vico's Triangular Invention." *Perspectives on Rhetorical Invention*. Ed. Janet Atwill. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2002. 192-211. Print.

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Young, Chris. "Voices." *The Man I Want to Be*. RCA, 2009. CD.

Zappen, James P. *The Rebirth of Dialogue: Bakhtin, Socrates, and the Rhetorical Tradition*. Albany: SUNY P, 2004. Print.

Zompetti, J.P. "The Value of Topoi." *Argumentation* 20.1 (2006): 15-28. Print.

CURRICULUM VITAE

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EDUCATION

PhD, RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION
The University of Louisville (Louisville, KY), 2015
- Dissertation: *Places in the Polity of Rhetoric: Topoi, Evolution, and the Fragmentation of Discourse* (committee: Karen Kopelson, chair; Stephen Schneider; Bronwyn T. Williams; Beth Boehm; Carolyn R. Miller)

MA, RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION
Miami University (Oxford, OH), 2011
- Thesis: *Toward a Rhetoric of Film: Theory and Classroom Praxis* (committee: Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson, chair; Jason Palmeri; John Heyda)

BA, ENGLISH
The University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, MI), 2008
- Graduated with distinction
- Transferred credits from Northwestern Michigan College (Traverse City, MI)

PUBLICATIONS (SINGLE-AUTHORED UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED)

BOOK CHAPTERS & ARTICLES IN REFEREED JOURNALS

"Jameson, Burke, and the Virus of Suggestion: Between Ideology and Rhetoric." *Henry James Review* 36.3 (2015): 280-87. Print.

"The Cinematic *Topos* of Disability and the Example of *Avatar*: A Rhetorical Critique." *Ethos: A Digital Review of Arts, Humanities, and Public Ethics* 2.2 (2015): 40-59. Web.

"Picking Up the Fragments of the 2012 Election: Memes, *Topoi*, and Political Rhetoric." *Present Tense: A Journal of Rhetoric in Society* 5.1 (2015). [10 pp.] Web.

"The Audiovisual Palimpsest: Rhetoric, Poetics, and Heteroglossia in *Mystery Science Theater 3000*." *Reading* Mystery Science Theater 3000*: Critical Approaches*. Ed. Shelley S. Rees. Lanham: Scarecrow, 2013. 13-29 [lead chapter]. Print.

Ben Wetherbee and Stephanie Weaver. "'You Know the Business and I Know the Chemistry': The Scientific *Ethos* of *Breaking Bad*." *Excursions* 4.1 (2013). [17 pp.] Web.

"Toward a Polyphonic Model of Student Coauthorship: A Response to Joseph Harris and Julie Lindquist." *JAC* 32.3-4 (2012): 743-51. Print.

[FORTHCOMING] "*Dystopoi* of Memory and Invention: The Rhetorical 'Places' of Postmodern Dystopian Film." *Recovering What We've Lost: Essays on Memory in Post-Apocalyptic and Dystopian Tales*. Ed. Heather Urbanski. Jefferson: McFarland, 2016. Print. 22 ms. pp.

BOOK REVIEWS

"The Descent of Evolutionism." Review of *Rhetorical Darwinism: Religion, Evolution, and the Scientific Identity* by Thomas M. Lessl. *Enculturation* 18 (2015). Web.

TEXTBOOK CONTRIBUTIONS

"Progressive Profiteering: The Appeal and Argumentation of *Avatar*." *Inventing Arguments*. By John Mauk and John Metz. 3rd ed. Boston: Wadsworth, 2013. 120-22. Rpt. in 4th ed. 104-06. Print.

CREATIVE WRITING

"Schrödinger's Wrist Shot" [fiction]. *Echo Cognitio* Founding Ed. (2013): 26-28. Print.

"Bogie's End" [fiction]. *Xylem: The University of Michigan Undergraduate Literary Journal* 18 (2008): 62-65. Print.

"Casablanca" [poem]. *Dunes Review: Literary Journal of Northern Michigan* 9.1 (2004): 5. Print. [Anne-Marie Oomen Poetry Prize first-place winner.]

PRESENTATIONS

INVITED TALKS

"*Mulholland Dr.* and the Chronotopic Unconscious." Women's and Gender Studies Dept., The University of Louisville. Louisville, KY. Mar. 2013.

SELECTED CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

"Epideixis and/as Cultural Evolution." Paper proposal accepted. Rhetoric Society of America. Atlanta, GA. May 2016.

"Vico's Axioms as *Topoi* of Responsivity." Thomas R. Watson Conference. Louisville, KY. Oct. 2014.

"Utopian Appeals and Rhetorical Borders: AIDS and the *Utopoi* of American Nationalism." Rhetoric Society of America. San Antonio, TX. May 2014.

"Picking Up the Fragments of the 2012 Election: What Do Memes Mean for Rhetoric?" Conference on College Composition and Communication. Indianapolis, IN. Mar. 2014.

"AIDS, Immigration, and the *Topoi* of Post-Crisis American Nationalism." Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference. Stanford, CA. Sept. 2013.

"Polyphonic Coauthorship in Practice." CCCC Research Network Forum. Las Vegas, NV. Mar. 2013.

"Anti-Ethnography and the Rhetoric of Omission: Zooming Out from the *Ruins of Detroit.*" Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture since 1900. Louisville, KY. Feb. 2013.

"Kurt Vonnegut as Rhetorical Theorist." Popular / American Culture Association in the South Conference. Nashville, TN. Sept. 2012.

"*Avatar* and the Topos of Disability." Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association National Conference. Boston, MA. Apr. 2012.

"Assessing Digital Assessment: How to Confront the Current-Traditional Assumptions of
E-Portfolio Systems." Conference on College Composition and Communication. St. Louis, MO. Mar. 2012.

"What Is Cinematic Ethos? Three Theoretical Inquiries into the Rhetoric of Film." Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture since 1900. Louisville, KY. Feb. 2012.

"The Audiovisual Palimpsest: Rhetoric, Poetics, and Heteroglossia in *Mystery Science Theater 3000.*" Southwest Texas Popular Culture and American Culture Association. San Antonio, TX. Apr. 2011.

[With Kevin Rutherford.] "Digital Approaches for Integrating Literature and Composition." Digital poster presentation. Conference on College Composition and Communication. Atlanta, GA. Apr. 2011.

"Replicant Rhetoric: Gender, Humanity, and Ideology in *Blade Runner.*" Tenth Annual Race, Class, Gender, Sexuality Symposium. Oxford, OH. Feb. 2011.

"Film and the Dialogic Student: Using Movies in the Composition Classroom." North Carolina Symposium on Teaching Writing. Raleigh, NC. Feb. 2011.

LOCAL PRESENTATIONS & WORKSHOPS

[With Travis Roundtree.] "Presenting at Academic Conferences." English Graduate Organization. The University of Louisville. Feb. 2015.

[With Amy Lueck.] "Branding Yourself." School of Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies PLAN Workshop. The University of Louisville. Nov. 2012. (Presentation on using online social media to cultivate professional web presence.)

[With Sonya Lawson Parrish.] "Digital Pedagogy in English 112." Digital Writing Cooperative. Miami University. Nov. 2010. (Presentation on using digital media to teach rhetorical and literary analysis.)

CONFERENCE PANELS CHAIRED

"Body and Identity in Digital Spaces." Thomas R. Waston Conference. Louisville, KY. Oct. 2014.

"Apocalyptic Complexities" (2 consecutive panels). Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture since 1900. Louisville, KY. Apr. 2013.

"Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Shirley Jackson, Kurt Vonnegut." Popular / American Culture Association in the South Conference. Nashville, TN. Sept. 2012.

"The Blues and Literary Form." Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture since 1900. Louisville, KY. Apr. 2012.

AWARDS & HONORS

University Fellowship. The University of Louisville. 2011-12, 2014-15.

Henry James Review Fellowship. The University of Louisville. 2013-14.

Carolyn Krause Maddox Prize (interdisciplinary award for best graduate essay in Women's and Gender Studies). Women's and Gender Studies Dept., The University of Louisville. 2013.

Academic Achievement Award. Miami University. 2009.

Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. 2005.

Presidential Scholarship. Northwestern Michigan College. 2004-06.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

THE UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE (GTA/PTL)

- English 310: Writing about Literature (1 section)
- English 306: Business Writing (3 sections)
- English 300: Introduction to English Studies (1 section)
- English 105: Honors Composition (1 section)
- English 102: Intermediate College Writing (1 section)
- English 101: Introduction to College Writing (6 sections)

MIAMI UNIVERSITY (GTA)

- English 112: Composition and Literature (2 sections)
- English 111: College Composition (3 sections)

ACADEMIC ACTIVITY & SERVICE

Freelance academic editor, 2015.

Editorial assistant for the *Henry James Review*, 2013-14.

Chair of the Rhetoric Society of America Student Chapter at the University of Louisville. 2013-14.

Rhetoric Reading Group (affiliate of the RSA Student Chapter at Louisville)

- Cofounder (Mar. 2012) and primary coordinator (2012-14).

- Discussions lead: 9 Mar. 2012, Kenneth Burke's *A Rhetoric of Motives*; 30 Mar. 2012, ibid; 24 Apr. 2012, ibid; 5 Oct. 2012, Mikhail Bakhtin's "The Problem of Speech Genres"; 2 Nov. 2012, selections by Wayne Booth; 20 Sept. 2013, selections by Stanley Fish; 3 June 2014, Aristotle's *Rhetoric*; 1 July, 2013, ibid; 26 Sept. 2014, ibid.

English Graduate Organization (EGO) executive and faulty liaison. The University of Louisville. 2013-15.

Mentor to prospective PhD students in Rhetoric and Composition. The University of Louisville. 2012, 2013.

Submission reader and scorer, *Oxford Magazine* (Oxford, OH). Summer 2010.

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Rhetoric Society of America (2011-present)
- RSA Student Chapter at the University of Louisville (2011-present)

National Council of Teachers of English (2011-present)
- College Composition and Communication (2011-present)

Popular Culture Association (2010-2013)

RESEARCH INTERESTS

rhetorical theory & criticism	film theory
history of rhetoric	multimodal rhetoric
rhetoric & poetics	critical theory & cultural studies
writing pedagogy	rhetorics of science & religion

GRADUATE COURSEWORK

THE UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION
- Rhetoric of Health and Medicine, *Karen Kopelson*
- Composition Studies and the Question(s) of Disciplinarity, *Karen Kopelson*
- Critical Theory and Literacy and Composition Studies, *Bronwyn Williams*
- The Watson Seminar, *Min-Zhan Lu (with guest professors Suresh Canagarajah, Brian Street, and Ralph Cintron)*
- Work in English, *Bruce Horner*
- Research in Composition, *Debra Journet*
- Digital/New Media, *Mary P. Sheridan*
- Teaching College Composition, *James Romesburg*

LITERATURE
- Teaching Literature: Theory and Practice, *Beth Boehm*

- Film, Gender, Sexualities, *Thomas Byers*
- Gender in Science Fiction, *Dawn Heinecken*
- The Work of Ethnography, *Debra Journet*

MIAMI UNIVERSITY

RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION
- The History of Rhetoric, *James Porter*
- The History of Composition, *Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson*
- Style and Eloquence, *Kate Ronald*
- New Media Studies in Composition, *Jason Palmeri*
- The Theory and Practice of Teaching Composition, *James Porter*
- Issues in the Profession, *Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson*

LITERATURE
- Gender and Sexuality in British and Irish Modernism, *Madelyn Detloff*
- The Early Modern Body, *Cynthia Klestinec*
- The Rhetoric of Song, *Cathy Wagner*