

Lecture 8: Hegemony and Rhetoric

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Abstract

The connection between rhetoric and hegemony leads us back to Kenneth Burke's work on political critique and the subtle ways discourse shapes political consciousness. This lecture also looks at how Ernesto Laclau connects rhetoric and the theory of articulation; Joseph Nye's work on soft power; Timothy Borchers' discourse on the work of rhetorician Dana Cloud; and Robert Ivie's thoughts on balancing the opposing notions of identification and division.

Résumé

La connexion entre rhétorique et hégémonie nous ramène aux écrits de Kenneth Burke sur la critique politique et les façons subtiles dont le discours forme la conscience politique. Ce cours examine aussi : la manière dont Ernesto Laclau relie la rhétorique et la théorie de l'articulation; le travail de Joseph Nye sur le soft power (« pouvoir de convaincre »); les réflexions de Timothy Borchers sur l'œuvre du rhétoricien Dana Cloud; et les pensées de Robert Ivie sur l'utilité d'équilibrer les notions opposées d'identification et de division.

Keywords / Mots clés : Rhetoric; Kenneth Burke; Ernesto Laclau; Joseph Nye; Timothy Borchers; Robert Ivie / Rhétorique; Kenneth Burke; Ernesto Laclau; Joseph Nye; Timothy Borchers; Robert Ivie

Introduction

This lecture suggests that several connections can be drawn between rhetoric and hegemony. Hegemony describes a process by which the dominant ideas in a society become widely accepted as true and natural, and for that reason, hegemony could be said to describe a process of persuasion. Rhetoric, however, is not infrequently accused of being apolitical, despite the production of several interesting works showing how rhetorical notions might be effectively applied in political analysis. This lecture will start by commenting about rhetoric and politics more generally before examining how rhetoric relates to hegemony. The beginning point, then, will be propaganda, but the line leading us back to hegemony will be clear.

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The lecture will begin with Kenneth Burke—as he contributed to our understanding of rhetoric as a form of political critique through much of his work in the 1930s during Hitler’s rise to power—and go on to explore hegemony as a theoretical concept. This will involve a discussion of certain ideas regarding politics and rhetoric drawn from Ernesto Laclau and a short description of the relation between rhetoric and the theory of soft power. It will then consider what Timothy Borchers has to say about rhetoric and hegemony in his review of the work of the rhetorician Dana Cloud. Finally, it will explore other works in some detail, including an article by Robert Ivie that focuses on the relations among rhetoric, democracy, and dissent and indicates some of the ways in which a materialist theory of rhetoric might be approached.

Burke’s work on rhetoric and fascism

In the 1930s, with the rise of fascism in Europe, Kenneth Burke began to take note of how people in Europe and North America were reacting to the rise of a propaganda-based politics, and while many of his colleagues decided that the best approach was to toss propaganda aside, Burke wanted to look at propaganda critically. Burke’s approach to propaganda was an unorthodox position insofar as he indicated a certain measure of admiration for those who designed propaganda, though, of course, he never endorsed the totalitarian aims of the Nazis or fascists. He was, however, impressed by the way propaganda adapted itself to different social settings, and this led him to probe how propaganda insinuated itself into art and daily life. He felt that people on the political left in America could learn from the propaganda experts in Germany and could employ similar techniques in spreading a socialist message in the United States. He may have been idealistic and naïve, yet over the course of several interesting articles and talks, he advocated for the use of propaganda practices for the purposes of fighting capitalism.¹

Most of this work was conducted in the pages of the *New Republic*, though Burke also delivered his ideas as a series of public lectures. He came to believe that one should adopt propaganda not as a technique to be used only on select occasions but as a vocation, a way of life. As the writer Debra Hawhee (2013), wrote, “Burke approached propaganda as a vital and daily cultural practice, a thoroughly rhetorical mode of being in the world” (p. 331). Burke addressed the idea of hegemony as a political force with persuasive potential; subsequently, he saw a need to understand precisely what made it rhetorically compelling.

Burke’s somewhat unorthodox way of speaking of propaganda—speaking of it as embedded in our daily lives—initially made enemies of some academics. After all, Burke wanted to retain rather than get rid of propaganda, and many people saw propaganda as fatally infected with immorality. Burke, however, believed that two things were possible: that applying rhetorical techniques to the study of propaganda made it possible to advance a socialist agenda by showing the dangers of fascism, and that these same techniques could be used to show the dangers of capitalism. In other words, rhetoric could be an important analytic tool, but it could also be an important technique. In both cases, it was about fighting fascism and critiquing the injustices of capitalism.

Burke’s most famous critique of fascism, *The Rhetoric of Hitler’s “Battle,”* illustrates some of these points rather well. In this essay, Burke takes Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* seri-

ously as a political text by arguing that the task of the rhetorician is to demonstrate with proper scholarly attention the failings of Hitler's book as a philosophical and political treatise. Criticism that merely dismisses, Burke (1939) claimed, is about as practical as no criticism at all. Or, as he put it:

If the reviewer [of *Mein Kampf*] but knocks off a few adverse attitudinizations and calls it a day, with a guaranty in advance that his article will have a favorable reception among the decent members of our population, he is contributing more to our gratification than to our enlightenment. (p. 191)²

For Burke (1939), then, rhetorical analysis could be understood as having an important part to play in decoding texts to better understand their underlying political context. Moreover, to justify his approach to Hitler's book, he also pointed to a sense of moral obligation. In other words, he felt obliged to treat Hitler's "nauseating" book with urgency because of the potential problems that might come from ignoring it.

Here is the testament of a man [Hitler] who swung a great people into his wake. Let us watch it carefully; and let us watch it, not merely to discover some grounds for prophesying what political move is to follow Munich, and what move to follow that move, etc.; let us try also to discover what kind of "medicine" this medicine-man has concocted, that we may know, with greater accuracy, exactly what to guard against, if we are to forestall the concocting of similar medicine in America. (p. 191)

There is an oracular nature to this passage, for Burke's essay might be read as a rallying cry against the dangers of populism today.³ For Burke, understanding that rhetorical critique constituted a kind of political critique was an important part of the way in which he reconceptualized rhetoric as a functional aspect of all forms of discourse. His criticism of *Mein Kampf* and his other anti-fascist essays of the period were ultimately a form of critical discourse analysis highlighting the power of language to shape public attitudes and direct political energies.

During the 1930s, Burke was a committed anti-capitalist who saw rhetoric as key to understanding the steady intrusion of free-market concepts into daily life through America's principal social and cultural institutions. Burke (1937) originally published his arguments in the pages of the *New Republic* in 1937 with the article, "Reading While You Run: An Exercise in Translation from English to English." The English that Burke sought to translate into English was found in newspaper headlines, for as he explained near the start of the article, "capitalist propaganda is so ingrained in our speech that it is as natural as breathing" (p. 36). Burke was not translating, of course, but clarifying, and throughout the article, he showed how key phrases, words, and terms were used in the mainstream press to present contemporary problems and issues from a specific (read: capitalist) point of view. For instance, one headline contained the word "industry," which Burke argued was being substituted for "big business." As "industry" has a more benign quality than "big business," Burke alleged the headline writer relied on hidden prejudices underlying his or her concept of neutrality or objectivity. In other words, "industry" seems more neutral or objective precisely because it is less likely to upset a newspaper's major sponsors. "Captains of industry" sounds more noble than "captains of big business."⁴

Burke (1937) also noted that in the headline, “Fight for a return to [an] ‘American System,’” the implications are far more complex than the slogan might suggest, insinuating that “If you are wholesome, you love your country; your country is capitalist; to be wholesome, you must love capitalism” (p. 36). In other words, the reference to “American System” was intended to stand in opposition to some other “system,” presumably one that is anti-American. And in the era in which Burke was writing—though this would also apply today—labelling a system “anti-American” would have been equivalent to calling it “anti-capitalist,” even though capitalism itself is a largely *exnominated* term—that is, it is never explicitly used when referring to America.⁵ This argument, Burke admits, is unconvincing when presented in such explicit terms, but that is part of its appealing quality, for it disguises the fact that it is founded on weak logic. Moreover, Burke’s reconstruction of the original headline takes the form of an enthymeme, although Burke also connects it directly to dramatic irony: we know that a character in a play is reading the signs opposite to what they mean, but from our position as spectators, we are powerless to correct him. Thus, we know, at some level, that newspaper headlines are meant for commercial purposes and, therefore, serve a capitalist agenda. But we are still less able to resist their influence than we might commonly presume.

Burke provided many other examples in this article (*dictatorship* is used in a headline where, Burke claims, *social legislation* would be an appropriate translation), and in offering his readers this list, he is able to show how rhetorical analysis can be an effective antidote to capitalist propaganda. In other words, he shows us how everyday language can be used to move audiences in select ways, just as Hitler did in his writings. Such connections made Burke few friends among social conservatives; many people in America were loath to believe that the culture industry could be compared to the indoctrination practiced by the Third Reich. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer would soon come to the United States, however, and repeat and expand Burke’s ideas considerably, making it possible to conceive of Burke as a precursor to critical theory, although he would have likely been uncomfortable in that company. Still, Burke’s early writings show that a political reading of rhetoric—and a rhetorical reading of politics—was certainly possible.

Burke’s influence in this area has been considerable.⁶ A contemporary author who has been influenced to some extent by Burke’s views on politics, rhetoric, and propaganda is the Yale University philosopher Jason Stanley. In his 2018 book, *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them*, Stanley (2018) cites Burke’s essay on Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* as influential in his own research, pointing out that an important aspect of Burke’s argument was his observation that while it is easy to attack Hitler and other right-wing demagogues as having established a cult of the irrational, it is perhaps more important to note that this cult of irrationality is carried out precisely in the name of reason, in the name of what is ostensibly rational. For instance, the fascists often rejected Enlightenment ideals such as equality, arguing they were forced to do so following a confrontation with reality, or natural law. Thus, natural law, or common sense was one of the bases the fascists claimed to have constructed their politics on. This process of normalizing the abnormal has become a hallmark of extremist politics; note how President Trump’s behaviour was systematically normalized by right-wing and even

mainstream media. When some neoconservatives took to calling detention centres for the children of refugees “summer camps,” they normalized the otherwise unthinkable. For his part, Trump could call far-right white nationalists “very fine people” since, in his estimation, they were merely standing for free speech. Such reversals in logic, Stanley argues, are emblematic of the fascist drive to normalize the unimaginable. This process of normalization is, of course, one of the hallmarks of hegemony.⁷

Hegemony

Burke’s work only addressed hegemony indirectly insofar as he was chiefly interested in the subtle ways discourse shapes political consciousness. Despite his frequent protests about capitalism, he was generally aloof from any organized political organizations and political parties. But there is no doubt that he was genuinely concerned about the way the language used by social and cultural institutions could be employed to sway public opinion to market forces and neoliberal principles. To make the connection more explicit than Burke did, I will carry this analysis a bit further.

Hegemony is associated with the work of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, among whose many political ambitions was finding a way to explain the failure of European socialist movements in the early twentieth century. Gramsci argued that political states were able to prevent open insurrection by the workers not by using military force but by maintaining control through more subtle and less confrontational measures. They learned that they could control citizens by means of cultural, political, and moral leadership rather than physical brutality—in essence, control was more effectively achieved by dominating people’s minds, not their bodies. Winning the consent of the governed, which is to be preferred to using the military or police, involves complex processes rooted in governmental and non-governmental institutions and practices. Thus, while Gramsci saw both the Church and the education system as implicated in hegemonic practices, today we tend to add the mass media and the culture industries to that list. For example, Todd Gitlin, writing about American television networks, saw hegemony at work in the way that the broadcast media uniformly convey messages extolling various neoliberal virtues. In other words, the values and principles of the dominant members of society are portrayed on television, Gitlin argued, as though they are both natural and aspirational. The values of the dominant classes are presented as essentially natural since they represent the common sense way of doing things; they are also presented as aspirational models of behaviour that viewers might strive to emulate. According to Gitlin (1979), hegemony entails “the bourgeois domination of the thought, the common sense, the life-ways, and everyday assumptions of the working class. ... [Hegemony] called attention to the routine structures of everyday thought — down to ‘common sense’ itself — which worked to sustain class domination and tyranny” (p. 251). Perhaps it is unsurprising that Gitlin saw hegemony as “a sort of immutable fog that has settled over the whole of public life” (p. 252), applying a more sinister image to characterize Gramsci’s theory.

Whereas some definitions of hegemony tend to suggest its inescapability, Gitlin and others claimed that hegemonic practices are never completely successful given people’s natural tendency to resist being controlled—an inherent opposition to coercion leads them to push back against domination. In addition, very few societies, if any, have ever

been completely ruled by a single set of beliefs. There are always counter-hegemonic struggles at work, forms of resistance to cultural and political domination that challenge the notion that all features of everyday life, as Gitlin points out, can only be made sense of in one way. Nonetheless, in the way that hegemony describes both the condition and the process by which social consciousness is shaped by economic, political, and cultural forces, hegemony can certainly be described as rhetorical.⁸

A specific example of the relation between rhetorical thought and hegemony will help illuminate how hegemonic ideology can be found in everyday practices. To do that, let us turn our attention to France and the work of the cultural theorist Roland Barthes.

In one of the pieces from his classic collection of essays *Mythologies*, Barthes (1957a) writes of a photography exhibit he attended in Paris entitled the Great Family of Man.⁹ The exhibit consisted of photographs of people from every part of the world, but its central theme—its normalizing goal—was to erase the differences between people of different times and places by what Barthes calls a moralizing and sentimentalizing gesture. In other words, the organizers intimated that the differences that might ultimately separate us from one another—differences of region, dialect, culture, religion, ethnicity—ultimately mean nothing because we are all members of humanity: one big happy family. This is an appealing sentiment for many people, but Barthes (1957a) rejects this position as facile. He sees the notion of a “family of man” as a theological imperative that aims to erase historical and other differences in the interest of politics.¹⁰ We are all one and the same, the exhibit proclaimed, because this is what we discover when we are willing to look at ourselves from the point of view of nature, to see ourselves in our essential condition and not as we might view ourselves from our various cultural positions with their associated languages, religions, ethnicities, social customs, cultural practices, gender relations, and so on. Therefore, while it might sound compelling to leave the complexity of culture in pursuit of a more natural account of what it means to be human, Barthes points to the political implications of a strategy that seeks to present itself as beyond politics. Nature is a dangerous word for Barthes, who says that it makes its appearance for the purpose of normalization—the purpose of hegemony, in other words. To invoke nature, Barthes says, is to essentialize people and reduce their array of customs and social practices to trivialities. By proclaiming things are “natural,” we ultimately place them beyond criticism or analysis, for when we declare a thing to be natural, we are simultaneously removing it from history, denying its connectedness to the defining powers of cultural forces, and reducing it to an illusory state of essentialism. Hence, along with many other cultural historians, Barthes points out that what is deemed to derive solely from nature is often described in such terms mainly because it is in the interests of those in power, those who seek to benefit from curtailing questions that ask directly how or why something is to be designated as natural. When things are defined as being part of nature, it is a short move to proclaim them as socially and culturally normal. For example, when we ascribe gender differences to nature—for instance, saying that males “naturally” act in one fashion while females “naturally” behave in a certain way—we establish the conditions for patriarchal domination. Accepting this natural argument does a disservice to all people by following Freud’s notorious claim that sex is “destiny.” Thus, Barthes took issue with the Family of Man photography exhibit because it ultimately avowed that nature is everything and history

is nothing. The underlying proposition of the exhibit, he says, is that if we could just rid ourselves of our prejudices, which have been produced by history, we would realize that all people are the same—a family. Barthes (1957a) takes aim at this logic in a famous passage from the essay:

This myth of the human “condition” relies on a very old mystification, which consists in always placing Nature at the bottom of History. Any classical humanism postulates that if we scratch the surface of human history, the relativity of men’s institutions, or the superficial diversity of their skins (but why not ask the parents of Emmett Till, the young black murdered by white men, what they think of the great family of men?), we soon reach the bedrock of a universal human nature. A progressive humanism, to the contrary, must always consider inverting the terms of this imposture, constantly scouring nature, its “laws” and its “limits,” to discover History there and finally to posit Nature as itself Historical. (pp. 197–198)¹¹

Thus, Barthes (1957a) says that when we strive to naturalize things, to place them in the realm of nature and leave aside their cultural and historical aspects, we are often facing a process in which things have been turned topsy-turvy. He rejects the idea that beneath all history we find nature, arguing that beneath all nature we find history. This is the role played by myth in modern society, he says, replacing historical analysis with the unreflective proclamation of “naturalness.” The Family of Man is a myth founded on a “harmonious display of essences.” When we view something such as the Family of Man exhibit, we risk being seduced by the rhetoric of the myth. As Barthes (1957b) suggests in his essay, “Myth Today,” “myth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things” (p. 255). Whatever success the Family of Man exhibit enjoys is because

a conjuring trick has taken place; it has turned reality inside out, it has emptied it of history and has filled it with nature, it has removed from things their human meaning so as to make them signify a human insignificance. The function of a myth is to empty reality: it is, literally, a ceaseless flowing out, a hemorrhage, or perhaps an evaporation, in short, a perceptible absence. (p. 255)

Human interests are always paramount in the ways we conceptualize and understand the world, and to seek to pass things off as natural, normal, or common sense is to be engaged in the deceptive practices of hegemonic ideology.

Barthes’ ideas further reveal that hegemonic practices might also be constitutive, as they form a kind of “truth” about things such as moral conduct, culturally appropriate ways of acting, gender behaviour, and so on. In other words, in addition to Gramsci’s claim that hegemony is a gradual process that works to shape our understanding of the world without resorting to violence or force, it is also rather insidious. Hence, we should not be on the lookout only for some grand narrativistic maneuvers because hegemony, as Burke said, is nimble and flexible.

Gender behaviour is a further example of hegemony. The notion of gender norms and the constitution of so-called hegemonic masculinity (and hegemonic femininity) is a particularly powerful force in our society. In advanced Western technocratic cultures, such as we have in Canada, it is relatively easy to identify societal gender norms by

appealing to what we conventionally refer to as “common sense.” Of course, common sense is usually less than common, and certainly far less sensible, than many people might presume. Despite advances made by feminism, inequalities continue to characterize contemporary gender relations, in part because we make assumptions about gender and gender roles according to pre-determined beliefs about the sexes that, when taken out of the shadows for examination, we might be embarrassed to find ourselves defending. So why do people hold on to these outdated, dangerous, and often violent beliefs? One reason is that they have been ingrained in the fabric of society as foundational precepts for centuries. Both masculinity and femininity are hegemonic in that they prescribe modes of conduct based on the assumption that biological sex (as determined at birth) is a part of nature, and nature, as Barthes complains, is the metric by which cultural behaviour is defined. If we are born male, we will be masculine because that is natural. Naturalness is often transposed into that which is considered normal.

The idea that gender roles are natural and, therefore, important in shaping our perceptions of what is culturally and ethically normal, is very old, stretching back across the centuries. For example, in his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle (1984) wrote:

[One] action is nobler than another if it is that of a naturally finer being: thus a man's will be nobler than a woman's. (p. 2175)

Just as he assumes some things are naturally virtuous, Aristotle also assumes that men are more capable than women in being virtuous. That is, virtue is more natural to men than it is to women.

We could simply dismiss this passage by collectively agreeing that Aristotle was sexist, but that observation largely misses the point. While his comment reflects a belief that was common to all Athenians, it is less important to observe that Aristotle was sexist than it is to observe *how* he signals that attitude. Specifically, Aristotle understands a man's virtues and actions to be superior to a woman's because it is “natural,” and it is his belief in the naturalness of the difference that is important here. Aristotle is speaking of things that have their truth (such as truth would have been understood in his day), as defined by an overarching belief system in much the same way as you and I might share a commitment to something we regard as true because it derives from one of our belief systems—science, for instance—but perhaps also the teachings of our religious leaders, our parents, or Hollywood actors. Those assumptions might be hard to identify precisely because they are assumptions; that is, they are cognitions we accept without debate or question, sometimes called *ontological presuppositions*. Of course, this is what it means to say that they are natural, or common sensical, because things that are “common sense”—and thereby thought to be true—are unlikely to be questioned. What we take to be true is thus a presupposition that facilitates our understanding of the world. For instance, we say that the Earth is round, not flat, and thus we presuppose its sphericity as a natural assumption for which constant critical examination is unnecessary. Ontological presuppositions are the building blocks that the elaboration of further intellectual development is founded on.

Aristotle was, therefore, taking it for granted that men are superior to women regarding things such as virtue, social and political rights, intellectual abilities, and so on. Unlike

the idea that the Earth is round, belief in the essential superiority of males is the sort of ontological presupposition that warrants serious questioning since its consequences include various kinds of injustice and inequality. In the case of gender norms, this usually appears when men act in ways that have traditionally been defined as feminine, or women act in ways that have traditionally been defined as masculine. But this observation begs the questions: Where do these traditions come from? What makes these performances “natural?”

The philosopher Judith Butler (1999) describes these so-called traditional roles as “intelligible genders.” Our traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity, she says, “institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire” (p. 96). That is, coherence is maintained in the belief that all men will desire women and all women will desire men—where desire and sexual practice are located as aspects of the same regime. To behave as a man in many Western societies in a way that makes this coherence viable, one must perform according to a code understood as hegemonic masculinity; that is, being male (a biological category) must cohere with acting masculine (a cultural category). Thus, Butler says that gender performances are about maintaining social coherence and continuity. Once we settle into particular ways of thinking, believing, behaving, and performing, these ways are naturalized, and it is the task of our social institutions to maintain and enforce these modes of conduct.¹²

These sorts of binary arguments are problematic on several fronts. For instance, we are far more aware than past generations about the fluid nature of sexuality; or, at least, public conversations about non-binary sexualities are considerably more open. Moreover, the politicization of sexuality has led to the formation of numerous groups and organizations dedicated to contesting the debilitating stereotypes that oppress non-binary individuals. Gender and sexuality are also important subjects in rhetoric, where the focus is often on the way that normative discourses attempt to establish heterosexual normativity. Indeed, it is interesting to note that the arguments are often freighted with discursive issues and constructions. Thus, for example, the conservative Heritage Foundation in the United States continues to rail against changes to public education in sex and gender on the basis that such transformations are a broader shift in ideological commitments to so-called common sense. In a similar fashion, arguments favouring the inclusion of broader educational reforms can be found in many places where there is an equal commitment to challenging the “hegemonic binary.”

These are not solely academic matters, of course, for it is important to realize that for large segments of the population, traditional (and often religious) ideas concerning gender remain important for determining the moral codes for social conduct that underscore the lasting power of hegemonic conceptions of sexuality and gender. For instance, in an article that analyzes the conduct of the female spouses of the 2016 presidential candidates, “Whither the Good Wife? 2016 Presidential Candidate Spouses in the Gendered Spaces of Contemporary Politics,” Roseann Mandziuk (2017) argues that one good place to get a sense of hegemonic practices at work—and a good place to see how these practices are built into a particular enactment of rhetoricality—was the political landscape of the 2016 presidential campaign (she includes Bill Clinton in her analysis, by the way, as a political spouse). She writes:

The “good wife” ... must sublimate her desires in support of her husband’s political aspirations. ... Central to the rhetorical performance of a female political spouse is her submission to the dictates of traditional womanhood, especially in deference and devotion to her male spouse and the enactment of domesticity. In the 2016 race the importance of sublimation is keen among the female spouses, even if the stereotype of submission yields to a more complex notion of a marital partnership and the contemporary norms of the female spouse who is employed outside of the home. (pp. 138–139)

In short, even in the case of partnerships between a woman and man where the male is running for high political office, the woman must continue to publicly demonstrate “deference and devotion to her male spouse.” She must conduct herself as a “good wife.” Also note that the apparent flexibility of the cultural script that political spouses must follow can be attenuated by overarching presuppositions about the definition of what is regarded as appropriate. In other words, although most of the women mentioned in Mandziuk’s article work outside the home, they are still being asked to sublimate their own ambitions in service to their male partner’s political aims, and to “perform” their femininity in such a way as to ensure that they can show themselves in command of domestic spaces. It would be easy to say that things have changed drastically since 2016 with the election of Kamala Harris to the position of vice president in the United States, but when you consider the sort of vitriol that continues to be aimed at female politicians in America today—Hillary Clinton, of course, but also Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Gretchen Whitmer, and others—it is obvious that policing the boundaries of what is construed by some as gender-acceptable behaviour goes on with an unabated fidelity to outmoded and often fundamentalist imperatives. Rhetoric, in other words, in the form of oppressive discourse, remains a continual source of hegemonic power. The hegemonic binary is deeply rooted in Western ideals about gender behaviour and will not be easily transformed.

Articulation

This focus on gender and performance, which Butler is famous for exploring, leads us to consider the question of hegemony and articulation in more detail. Political spouses articulate the meaning of femininity rather than proclaim it. They perform their roles seamlessly rather than talk about them; and they strive to achieve a naturalness about these matters—a demonstration that these are the common sense ways of being female—such that no logical argument is really required. It is all about performing a convincing and persuasive role.

Many rhetorical scholars have made similar points, arguing for a *materialist* conception of rhetoric that would replace rhetoric’s long-standing reliance on a *logic of influence* with a *logic of articulation*.

A logic of articulation describes how relations are established between various (and sometimes contested) discourses and practices. It further analyzes how, in the act of drawing these disparate elements together, one asserts a particular kind of logic (articulation) that persuades people of the normative value of these connections without overtly conceding the field to simple influence or persuasion. For example, I might try to argue that things simply go together—say, market economies and individual free-

dom—by demonstrating through historical and sociological examples the connection I believe makes the most sense. But I may not actively attempt to persuade you of this connection, trusting that my demonstration via the notion of articulation will be more rhetorically powerful than the logic of influence.

This form of argument is sometimes known as a *post-foundationalist* or *post-ideological* position since it seeks to establish relations that are not definitively proven in conventional ways that rely on logical argument. The logic of articulation is also important in the way that rhetorical theory has both been embraced and transformed in various political forums. Ernesto Laclau, who sees rhetoric as pivotal to his analysis of radical leftist politics, has developed this notion of articulation. For Laclau, *rhetoric* refers to the contingent and discursive process that brings objective reality into existence by imposing the semblance of a structure on an array of heterogeneous elements to give them identity or meaning. In much the way that hegemony organizes social life according to an internal logic whereby meaning is acquired in the act of interpretation according to specific principles and values, Laclau sees that process as being fundamentally rhetorical. As Laclau argues, we must recognize the irreconcilability of competing world views because even though we might seek totality, we will only ever achieve partiality. We might want a universal concept of democracy, say, but only partial illustrations or representations are ever possible. So, we ultimately “choose” one representation—neoliberal capitalism, for example—and we allow that singular expression to stand for the whole. But it is contested, debated, denied, and denigrated by various participants and agents, and thus a form of hegemonic rhetoricality makes one mode of democracy stand apart as emblematic of the entire field.

How is it the case, though, that meanings are established between uneven and not necessarily parallel concepts within the totality? And how is it that when a single concept is made to stand for the whole, it can articulate a radical political ethos? In the article “Why Constructing a People is the Main Task of Radical Politics,” Laclau (2006) suggests that the construction of “the people” occurs as a series of interrelated links in a causative chain of articulation. To put that more plainly, when we say, “the people,” as in, “the people will not sit idly by while their freedoms are taken away,” to whom does “the people” refer? How are “the people” constructed?

Laclau says that this process occurs because of the logic of articulation, and that this logic of articulation is rhetorical insofar as it is an effort to create a sense of belonging, or as Burke would say, consubstantiality. Laclau (2006) offers several explanations of this process, including

Any demand starts as a *request*; institutions of local power, for instance, are asked to meet the grievances of people in a particular area—for example, housing ... [T]he second dimension of our analysis [concerns] the social process through which a request is transformed into a *claim*. How does this mutation take place? ... [I]t happens through the operation of the equivalential logic. People whose demands concerning housing are frustrated to see that other demands concerning transport, health, security, schooling, and so on are not met either.... [T]he frustration of an *individual* demand transforms the request

into a claim as far as people see themselves as bearers of rights that are not recognized. These claims are, however, limited, for the referential entity to which they are addressed is perfectly identifiable—in our example of housing, the town hall. But if the equivalence between claims is extended ... it becomes far more difficult to determine which is the instance to which the claims are addressed. One has to discursively construct the enemy—the oligarchy, the establishment, big money, capitalism, globalization, and so on—and, for the same reason, the identity of the claimers is transformed in this process of universalization of both the aims and the enemy. ... Once we move beyond a certain point, what were requests *within* institutions became claims addressed *to* institutions, and at some stage they became claims *against* the institutional order. When this process has overflowed the institutional apparatuses beyond a certain limit, we start having the people of populism. (pp. 654–655)

Laclau describes a process that speaks to articulation with the aim of showing how the logic of articulation functions both rhetorically and hegemonically. Laclau says the formation of “a people” can begin when citizens bring forward a request to their local representatives. Perhaps they want to see more frequent monitoring of city parks for garbage, or perhaps they are concerned, as he suggests, about housing. But soon this request is transformed into a claim, a process that he describes as taking place through “the operation of equivalential logic.” What he means is that the group of neighbours who have come together to request better housing note that there are other people, other citizens, who are also bringing forward requests concerning civic issues, such as health or schooling. At this point, those requesting better housing come to realize that while their issues may differ from those of other citizens, they can be combined as expressions of an equivalent problem: their basic rights as citizens. Thus, their individual requests become claims. They now see themselves as having rights that they believe are not being satisfied; therefore, they present their requests as demands before a political entity such as city council. In this case, the city hall, or civic government is what he calls “perfectly identifiable.”

In other words, the identity of the institution where their claims should be pressed is obvious, for there is an entity, the mayor and city councillors, that is responsible for the issues relevant to the citizens’ demands. However, this is not always the case for, as Laclau points out, there are times when people find it hard to identify the institution to direct their claims to. If you are concerned about climate change and form alliances with anti-logging groups and protestors concerned about the loss of farmland, for example, it might be more difficult to identify the organization or institution to which you could effectively present your claims. Thus, Laclau (2006) says these groups, which have formed through equivalential logic, will “discursively construct the enemy” (p. 655). Instead of their local city council, groups might protest the influence of big money, capitalism, or globalization. Thus, in the process of discursively constructing an enemy—that is, naming through discourse a power bloc called *capitalism*—we also witness the social construction of *a people*. What began as individual requests directed at an institution are transformed into claims for essential rights addressed to institutional bodies. However, the institutional actors, such as city halls, municipal governments, and even federal agencies, are eventually replaced, Laclau says, with discursively constructed entities such as “the oligarchy” or “the establishment.” And in this moment, a social movement known simply as “the people” is created. They are connected at a higher level

of abstraction than appears in their individual interests. Moreover, they articulate connections in a non-causal fashion. They are separate and united despite their respective projects being constituted from what appear to be initially rather different requests. Though housing, schooling, and the environment are not readily understood as being causally related, supporters of these various movements can form common cause in their opposition to a discursively constructed enemy, such as neoliberalism. The single entity to which the initial request is addressed gives way to larger constellations of institutions until there is no single institution to which such claims (or demands) might be presented; instead, it is the whole institutional system itself.

Laclau's idea connects to various protest movements around the globe, such as the Occupy Movement or Black Lives Matter. Allegations that such movements are disorderly for their refusal to establish clearly delineated leadership structures is one of the reasons they challenge the conventions of media coverage. Having a focused statement—a logic of influence—is rather different than having multiple modes of popular construction—a logic of articulation. Under the logic of articulation, then, alliances are formed between groups that might not initially have regarded themselves as connected. Their causes are different, their motivations vary, and their composition might have little overlap. But they come to realize that they are connected in a substantial way: they are opposed to oppressive power structures intent on keeping them divided to maintain control. As the realization of this commonality becomes increasingly widespread, these groups might begin to connect, to literally articulate. They become members of an identifiable group—a people, Laclau says—because their association, their affiliation, their sense of belonging is itself the common cause of their unity. They see themselves as alike whether they are agitating on behalf of housing or a living wage. Their individual mandates might be different but the universality of their opposition to repression ultimately shows how deeply consubstantial they really are.

Laclau's theory of articulation is a complicated one, but the key thing to take away is that a logic of articulation can be more important than a logic of influence. We can be persuaded by relations of articulation to the same extent that more conventional forms of association might be seen as rhetorically significant. This is an idea that would be congenial, I suspect, to many of the early rhetoricians, especially Aristotle. But it is not the only contemporary approach to rhetoric and hegemony to consider. Another way of conceptualizing the relation between politics and rhetoric that has been gaining steam in recent years is the idea of soft power.

Soft power

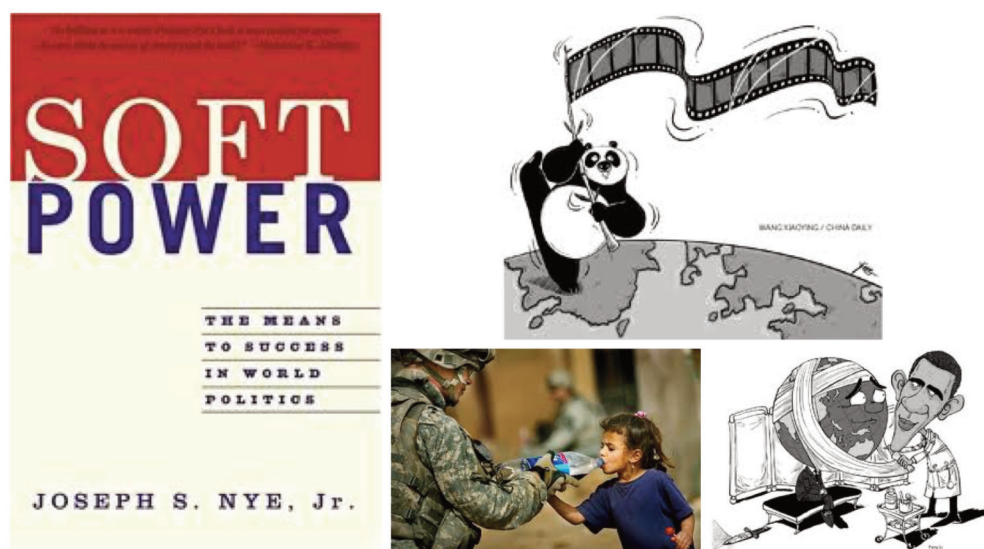
It can be argued that the concept of hegemony has yielded some of its territory to the notion of soft power, the idea that states, institutions, nations, and governmental and non-governmental agencies seek to get what they want not by means of force but by enlisting the support of those they wish to control or influence. In other words, the notion of soft power resonates significantly with ideas that animate the field of rhetorical studies.

According to Soft Power 30 (n.d.-b), a website that maintains an online ranking system that scores individual countries on their use of soft power, the essential aspect of soft power is its repudiation of hard-line strategies of coercion:

Soft power shuns the traditional foreign policy tools of carrot and stick, seeking instead to achieve influence by building networks, communicating compelling narratives, establishing international rules, and drawing on the resources that make a country naturally attractive to the world. (para. 2)

This definition, with its focus on the state's attractiveness, shows why soft power is considered "soft" even as it demonstrates how the concept can be translated into the rhetorical notion of persuasive consubstantiality. Aristotle argued that ethos is crucial for the rhetor, and he included expertise and attractiveness among the attributes contributing to ethos. This resonates clearly with the central concerns of soft power. Soft power seeks to gain compliance by demonstrating a nation's "softer" side by exploiting those qualities inherent to the country that form positive affective associations around the globe. Compassionate foreign aid replaces belligerent foreign policy (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Soft Power



Unlike the more forceful tactics that might be employed in seeking compliance by practitioners of hard power, soft power largely entails symbolic and discursive tactics in pursuit of its goals. Indeed, the best-known analyst of soft power—and the person who formulated the concept—Harvard University's Joseph Nye (2004), says soft power “co-opts people rather than coerces them” (p. 23). The exercise of

soft power, Nye argues, happens mainly through three channels: a country's culture, political values, and foreign policies. I want to briefly consider each in turn.

The realm of culture is vast in terms of soft power, but Nye cites Hollywood movies and television programs as exceptional illustrations of the cultural form of soft power. The idea is that in viewing American television, for instance, people in other nations are co-opted into believing the promise of the America dream. In other words, viewers in other countries slowly come to accept American cultural hegemony through exposure to the purported benefits of the American way of life.¹³ The appeal of cultural products in the context of soft power applies in the case of other countries, too, of course. Canadians sometimes quip that hockey is our number one export, and while the comment might be intended as humorous, there is certainly some truth in it. The scholar Jacob Udo-Udo Jacob (2017) makes this exact point about British football:

In addition to the huge revenue the Premier League brings to the British government, it also brings the British way of life to millions of hearts every week. It is

not just the beautiful game of football that is transmitted, it is also the sheer passion of the British spectators on the stands that is projected, match after match, week after week. The passion yet dignity of the spectators, the grandeur of the stadium, the quality of the refereeing and the beauty of the English language intensified via the passion of the commentators combine to make the Premier League Britain's greatest and most valuable soft power asset. (p. 142)

Even though Britain has cut military spending and introduced harsh immigration laws, Jacob (2017) says that the country's international "pulling power has hardly declined" (p. 142). And a principal reason, he says, is the allure of its football culture—along with the continuing appeal of the royal family! The rhetorical influence of cultural products can hardly be overstated in the domain of soft power.

The second way soft power is conveyed is through what Nye (2004) calls political values. These include things such as dedication to democracy, a commitment to human rights, and the celebration of racial and gender equality. It is important, he says, that countries practice at home the values they seek to export to other parts of the world. "Perceived hypocrisy is particularly corrosive of power that is based on proclaimed values" (p. 63). Hypocrisy regarding values can sometimes be a subjective matter, however. Whereas Americans might see nothing hypocritical in maintaining the detention centre at Guantanamo Bay and their nation's military efforts at eliminating terrorism, citizens in other countries are deeply offended by what they see as a disconnect between proclaimed and practiced values. Canada's treatment of its Indigenous people similarly raises questions about our commitment to global human rights. In short, a nation must practice the virtues underlying the values it champions if its soft power is to earn international respect. To be rhetorically persuasive, nations must be consistent in practicing what they preach.

The third channel through which soft power is conveyed is foreign policy decisions. At times, Nye concedes, the distinction between values and foreign policy is not easily determined, for a country's foreign initiatives are largely shaped by its preferred values. Perhaps the key difference, then, is that foreign policy generally entails the pursuit of self-interest in the sense that each nation is seeking to advance its individual goals even as it wrestles with the need to be respectful of other countries' equal commitment to preserving and advancing their agendas on the international stage. Thus, Nye suggests that what is often more important to soft power in foreign policy planning is the form in which the policy goals are framed. Nye does not mention Burke, but his interest in the presentation of foreign policy recounts some of Burke's ideas about the importance of "correct form" to the task of achieving co-operation. There is, in other words, an obvious harmony between Nye's view that international policies must be defined with an eye to what he calls their "style" and Burke's idea about the power of form to help to bring about identification and persuasion. "Soft power depends in part on how we frame our own objectives," Nye (2004) says, for "policies based on broadly inclusive and far-sighted definitions of the national interest are easier to make attractive to others than policies that take a narrow and myopic perspective" (p. 67). Keeping the channels of communication between competing powers open is a good way to think of foreign policy, Nye suggests, since a stable and organized international order is really a form of public good.

It would be useful to reflect on how Nye, the architect of soft power, conceptualizes the connections between his work and that of Gramsci. Nye has consistently acknowledged the legacy of hegemony theory in his own work, but in his view, soft power captures more precisely the complexity of the interconnected world than he thinks is possible with the concept of hegemony.¹⁴ Hegemony, he says, is less able to explain the reciprocal relations between nation states when each exerts its own brand of soft power in an effort to attract and persuade. This complexity, Nye (2004) says, is evident in the fact that in the contemporary world “power is widely distributed and chaotically organized among state and nonstate actors” (p. 20), and thus the notion of hegemony, he suggests, is simply no longer widely applicable.

Nye notes that our ideas and definitions of power have changed a good deal since Gramsci’s time. Indeed, once Michel Foucault’s (1995) theories about the “microphysics of power” attracted widespread interest among philosophers and political scholars, a considerable broadening of ideas about political, social, and cultural power led to a substantial reshaping of the traditional definition of power as the ability to get people to do what you want.¹⁵ While Nye’s formulation of soft power does not contribute to the Foucauldian notion of biopower, it is evidence of a continuing interest in reshaping many conventional ideas about relations of power.¹⁶

However, not everyone who has been influenced by Nye is inclined to draw such a sharp distinction between soft power and more conventional theories of hegemony. David Kearn (2011) has written that hegemony continues to be of “implicit centrality” (p. 66) to the model of soft power. This same argument has appeared in other works by scholars across the globe who contest the value of separating soft power too drastically from its kinship to hegemony.¹⁷ What is more important in the present context, however, is the relation between rhetoric and soft power, and here we find a more robust connection. Owing to the principle of attraction—that is, making an individual, a state, or a policy sufficiently attractive to people—soft power suggests a relationship with rhetoric that has impelled some commentators to mention soft power’s legacy as deriving more from Aristotle than from Machiavelli; that is, more from persuasion than from coercion.

Nye says that the essence of soft power lies in values, and in creating a sense of legitimacy for a nation’s international aims, it is certainly fair to regard it as a kind of state-level theory of ethos. For instance, Nye says that Canada is one of the states whose political influence is greater than our hard power would permit; that is, we get things done with soft power because Canada is regarded as a reliably attractive and even seductive actor on the international stage. What makes Canada attractive is its commitment to democracy and freedom, along with a historical willingness to accept refugees. Of course, while soft power is contrasted with the militaristic force of hard power, the military can also use soft power: Canadian peacekeepers, for example, often offer relief or aid following natural disasters. Hence, the focus of soft power is on the activity rather than the pre-defined conceptions of the actors.

Nye argues that the ratio of soft to hard power in the coming decades is bound to increase owing to the network society of global communication. The information revolution makes it much easier to project soft power globally. At the start of the twenty-first

century, the information revolution and globalization greatly enhanced Western, especially American domination, but as new technologies spread, American pre-eminence has begun to decline.¹⁸

Soft power resources are difficult to control. Many of its crucial resources are outside the legislative reach of governments, and their effects depend heavily on acceptance by the audiences. Moreover, soft power resources often work indirectly by shaping the environment for policy, and sometimes it takes years to produce the desired outcomes. In all such cases, however, one of the consequences of the exercise of soft power is to present the military, the police, or the state as attractive. Certainly, there are elements of Barthes' notion of mythology involved here. But, of course, soft power and hard power are abstract and somewhat misleading terms in their own way, and not all forms of rhetoric or hegemony can be reduced easily to one or the other.

Borchers on hegemony and rhetoric

As the author of the course textbook, Timothy Borchers, perceptively indicates, discussions of ideology and hegemony derive from the Marxist tradition—not because Marx and Engels invented ideology and hegemony but because the writings of Marx and subsequent Marxists and neo-Marxists most fully developed theoretical work concerning ideology and hegemony. Moreover, Marx saw his theoretical work—his study of capitalism, for instance—as a necessary complement to the practical work of resisting political, cultural, and economic domination. In other words, Marx famously argued that there should be no separation between theory and praxis, that our material lives and our cognitive lives are united dialectically. “Life is not determined by consciousness,” Marx (1998) wrote, “but consciousness by life” (p. 39).

Borchers also indicates the important role of materialism in conventional Marxist thought. Dialectical materialism explains the constitution of society, culture, and thought as predicated on the real physical objects and conditions of our lives. In other words, ideas are shaped by material circumstance—they do not just drop out of heaven into our heads. This is important in Marxist theorizing because it pushes back against mechanisms of domination such as the divine right of kings, the invisible hand of the market, and other forms of idealism used to justify exploitation and control. The materialist position says that many of the things that we are told are natural, essential, and unmediated are really products of historical development that real actors, engaged in real labour and using real materials, have struggled to produce. Just as Marx famously explains how commodities are the result of actual labour power and particular social relations of production, so too the cultural norms we grow up with have their basis in historical materialism. Indeed, the materialist conception of history is the key explanatory practice Marxists use to demonstrate that the base does not merely lay beneath the superstructure but ultimately determines its actual configuration.

Borchers shows how these ideas play out in contemporary rhetoric by citing the work of Dana Cloud. Cloud is an inspiring writer who has done some remarkable rhetorical analyses on issues such as psychotherapy and labour unions, and the application of her work within a Marxist framework is insightful. Cloud is concerned with the way in which rhetorical discourse can be used to advance hegemonic positions.

First is the *materialist view of rhetoric*. This is the argument that certain rhetorical forms can be deployed to conceal political and economic forces. The materialist view of rhetoric, therefore, is interested in showing that language itself can be used as a mechanism for restricting our knowledge by offering sanitized or euphemistic expressions and representations. Even though we are aware that there are always actual material forces at work in the world, sometimes it is simpler, and perhaps more comforting, to take refuge in a sort of willing blindness and focus only on the manifest symbol rather than its underlying base. For instance, it can be convenient to suggest that “justice was served” in a court case because it is easy and comforting, even as we may well be aware on some other more materialist level that race, age, sexual orientation, and class are all variables in the way that justice is ultimately administered. But using certain linguistic constructions, such as “justice was served,” serves an important political function that is generally connected to the interests of the ruling elite. As Borchers notes, one of Cloud’s examples is the notion of “collateral damage” from the Gulf War. Collateral damage has the ring of both the accidental and the inevitable; you cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs, and you cannot liberate a country without killing its innocent citizens. Moreover, the idea of *liberation* can itself be a form of ideological subterfuge insofar as the liberation of Kuwait was ultimately based on returning its citizens to the autocratic control of the country’s royal family. A materialist rhetoric approaches its subject intent on seeing the underlying material conditions by which the phenomenon in question can be explained.

Cloud’s second notion of the relation between hegemony and rhetoric is the idealist view of rhetoric. This view of rhetoric sees it as determinative of social and material relations. Drawing from a range of thinkers, including Foucault, Louis Althusser, and others in the structuralist and post-structuralist traditions, Cloud (1994) argues that the critical agenda initiated by Marx—that is, the critical agenda by which we read material constituents and forces as determinative—has been taken into a different direction focused more on discourse than materialism, more on ideology than on economics. The result is what she calls “a politics of textuality” (p. 143) rather than a politics of materiality. She is thus interested greatly in the work of Kenneth Burke, who inaugurated the tradition of critiquing texts for the way that they mystify and legitimize capitalism. As Borchers points out, Cloud focuses on the idealist approach to rhetoric as evident in the way people understand reality as constructed from the persuasive texts they access and appropriate. In other words, the idealist rhetoric looks less and less often at underlying material and economic conditions, and more and more at the interplay of texts.

A focus on texts and textuality also has the effect of separating people as material bodies from the ideas they themselves produce; a process known as reification. A rhetoric of reification, then, would be the study of how ideas are given a thing-like quality in being thought about in strictly textual terms. Some people in the anti-psychiatry movement, for instance, claim that mental health professionals are persuaded by the results of psychological testing more than they are persuaded by their experience of the client. Another example is the way that test scores tend to reify intelligence—the Stanford-Binet IQ test, for instance—in an abstract textual artefact.

Cloud’s third reading of a Marxist contribution to rhetoric concerns is what she calls *the relativist position*. In the Marxist tradition, this would be the view that rhetoric cre-

ates reality. It fits with various forms of relativism, including the position of the sophists, by emphasizing the existence of multiple discursively constituted realities, the unknowability (or even the impossibility) of reality. Adopting the relativist position, as Borchers notes, denies the critic a firm position from which to offer a moral or epistemological critique. As Cloud (1994) herself writes, “relativism affords the critic no privileged perspectives by which to judge economic or political realities” (p. 145). One significant problem with the relativist position, then, is that by ascribing power to texts, and by suggesting that no privileged position exists from which to judge the texts morally or epistemologically, one can wind up producing analyses that never consider the material conditions or economic forces ultimately at play. If we see society not as a set of material relations but as a set of competing reality definitions—and definitions that are unfixed, free-floating, and malleable—we are opting for a version of postmodernism with all its attendant difficulties.

This final section will examine the work of the rhetorician and communication scholar Robert L. Ivie. Ivie has written extensively about rhetoric, democracy, and public protest, though he is always quick to point out that he never wants people to reduce dissent to mere protest. He is especially interested in applying his rhetorical theories to better understanding the world of politics and has done some recent work on war. His co-authored book, *Hunt the Devil: A Demonology of US War Culture* (Ivie & Giner, 2015), is a history of imperialist war rhetoric that analyzes the image of the devil as a tool for inciting hatred against a political enemy. Ivie is interested, in other words, in the way that evil is constituted in Satanic imagery, and how these images are used to constitute one’s enemies as irredeemably wicked. This focus on the discursive construction of evil neatly aligns with his interest in the role of democratic dissent as a counter-hegemonic force that works to sustain rather than undermine democracy. As Ivie (2015) writes, “A healthy democracy encourages the rhetorical act of dissent as a right of free speech and an antidote to political repression” (p. 49).

Ivie’s democracy and dissent

In the article “Democratic Dissent and the Trick of Rhetorical Critique,” Ivie (2005) presents a lively and sometimes complicated argument concerning, among other things, the way that rhetoric can be used in the practice of establishing a position of “nonconforming solidarity” (p. 277).

To begin, Ivie situates his analysis in post-9/11 America, with a specific focus on the changed attitudes toward political dissent that characterized that country’s response to the terrorist attacks. He points out that dissent was seriously stifled in the post-9/11 environment because challenges to the president’s “war on terror” tended to be interpreted by White House supporters as un-American and potentially dangerous to American interests internationally. In other words, what was taken as “natural” after 9/11 was acquiescence to government exhortations to stifle unpatriotic talk—which was implicitly understood as any criticism of the government—and to repress the urge to express dissent regarding American foreign policy. But Ivie argues that dissent has never been a stranger to democracy; indeed, he claims that dissent is essential to democracy even though it struggles for legitimacy in times of war and crisis. Consequently, it should be the function of the state to encourage dissent during times

of war and crisis to enhance democratic processes rather than impeding dissent, which is the tendency in such periods.

Ivie calls dissent a *rhetorical trick* because it is a double articulation. On the one hand, dissenters must share the fundamental values of those they protest and those they protest with. On the other hand, dissent is, by definition, a contrary opinion, one that runs counter to the ideological beliefs of the powerful. This double articulation is the non-conforming solidarity principle referred to above; the rhetor does not conform, but even in the act of nonconforming, expresses solidarity.¹⁹ This paradox runs throughout much of Ivie's work.

War and democracy are both forms of struggle, Ivie (2005) points out, but there are important differences. One is that democracy regards its others as political adversaries. On the other side, war views its others as sheer enemies. Moreover, an attitude of war will attack democracy in its search for absolute control, regarding everyone who stands opposed to it as enemies. In other words, when assuming a war-like stance, one designates one's adversaries as enemies. War constructs everyone as either an ally or an enemy, and this binary opposition, which is evidence that one has adopted an attitude of war, further shows how that language can be used ideologically. To see the other as an adversary is to remain willing to show them respect. Labelling the other as an enemy, however, is to strip them of all right to be treated respectfully. On this point, Ivie's work reflects Burke's ideas about language, politics, and attitudes. Hence, to abandon democracy in favour of a war-like stance is to repudiate democratic principles or as Ivie claims, "War in the name of democracy is a sign of democracy's weakness rather than its strength" (p. 278). An attitude of war is an imperialistic attitude, and this means that to express dissent during war is to risk being seen as antagonistic to the narrative being spun by political leaders. When the government calls us to war, we are expected to take to our stations, not to question the wisdom of our leaders' proclamation.

Ivie (2005) invokes Burke's views in his analysis, suggesting that by establishing political adversaries, democracy aims to create "relations of consubstantial rivalry and political contestation" (p. 278). In other words, democracy seeks to regard political antagonists in terms of the double articulation mentioned earlier: political contestation suggests a difference of opinion, while consubstantial rivalry suggests that one's opponents are consubstantial, or similar in important respects. Thus, he says that "where war reduces the image of a rival to the figure of pure enmity, democracy seeks to articulate more complex characterizations of adversaries that consist of differences intermixed with similarities" (p. 278). This is crucial to Ivie's analysis because he sees democracy as being constituted precisely from this balance, or dialectic, of contradictory forces. To put Ivie's point a bit more concretely, it takes conflict and contestation to have a vibrant, meaningful state. However, the differences that exist at the heart of this contestation must be tempered by the overriding similarities that keep mere adversaries from becoming outright enemies. As Ivie (2005) writes:

Without dissent, there is no democratic polity [state] of adversaries and thus no politics, only forced unity and unmitigated enmity that is the end of politics *per se*. (p. 279)

This is a crucial point for Ivie. Dissent is critically important to democracy, especially during times of war and crisis. Why? Because it is during a crisis that the governing forces often try to consolidate their control by exploiting the emergency to advance their powers. It is exactly at such times that the state will try to curb debate, thereby restricting democratic principles—though the state will undertake these measures supposedly in the interest of preserving democracy! Moreover, as Ivie further suggests, acts of violence sometimes increase in direct relation to the amount of suppression introduced by the authorities. Democracy must engage and not suppress dissent. If it suppresses dissent, other, potentially violent, outlets will be sought.

Now, rhetoric is the site of struggle for many forms of dissent. The rhetorical domain is where political actors articulate their differences from accepted policy even as they express their consubstantiality (similarity) to others in society. Debate is always a rhetorical act since it is intended to engage and persuade others of the correctness of one's position. Consequently, democracy must accept that the struggle for legitimacy that characterizes dissent is only one of its struggles; others are the struggle to make one's voice heard, to mobilize linguistic resources in service to one's cause, and to engage in meaningful political activism. Ivie points out that if political agents did not have this dialectical quality of being both similar and dissimilar, there would be no need to express our common experience. Communication is structured from this dialectic of similarity and difference, which is represented in persuasive language. Thus, Ivie (2005) writes that

Dissent, like other forms of rhetoric or symbolic action, walks a wavering line between division and identification, inducing cooperation among factions where otherwise victimization occurs all too readily and leads seemingly effortlessly to murder and war. (p. 280)

Our political adversaries must be joined but “separate, identified though distinct, and communicative yet polemical” (Ivie, 2005, p. 280). This claim derives from Burke's notion of consubstantiality. Ivie describes his own theory as *consubstantial rivalry*, which he sees as paradigmatic of democratic dissent. What happens in war and crisis is that any form of disagreement with the policy enacted by the authorities might be deemed inadmissible, for during times of crisis, political conformity is preferred to democratic contestation. The problem, as Ivie sees it, is how best to preserve dissent and polemic in times of war. How can we continue to exercise our democratic right of dissent (and thereby strengthen democracy) when significant forces, including political authorities, are against us?

Ivie suggests that one way we can begin to see dissent operate effectively in a climate of war and crisis is through the micropolitical forms of resistance associated with the work of Michel de Certeau (2011). This is a position commonly associated with people in the popular culture tradition and refers to the notion that escape and evasion are possible when we turn the cultural resources of the dominant culture against those who establish that culture. Thus, we frequently see subcultural resistance—or counter-hegemonic practices—as a mode of micropolitical resistance. Ivie sees political dissent as capable of operating in the same fashion. Resisters can turn the linguistic resources of the elite on their head: Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, and Bill Maher, for example, have the ethos to exercise the sort of critique Ivie refers to as *rhetorical trickster*. It is

certainly common to hear Donald Trump's own words, or interviews with extremist politicians, being deployed as a weapon against him.

But Ivie is not unaware that de Certeau's ideas have limited application; the world is not changed by popular music any more than the hippies decisively shifted it off its axes. But he is also wise enough to note that dissent is effective because it is adaptive and dynamic. Like a good speaker who knows how to engage an audience, the dissenter can use the techniques of rhetoric to remain one step ahead of the power bloc and avoid the trap of "discursive fatalism" (subjects are completely constituted by knowledge and power) and an "overzealous belief in the autonomy of human action" (Ivie, 2005, p. 282). Dissent is tactical in de Certeau's work. It resists being incorporated into the machinery of capitalism, but it does not exaggerate its own agency. It operates inside the opponent's territory, Ivie says, but it is always a critique of language that operates to unsettle otherwise settled power relations. Ivie (2005) says that

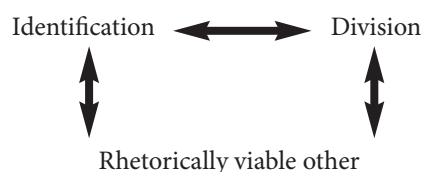
no regime of power can dominate every aspect of social and political life, just as no form of dissent can operate autonomously beyond the political practices it critiques. Dissent is a collective and continuous process of transformation. (p. 281)

Ivie turns to the ideas of Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Burke, and Roland Bleiker to explain the idea that the rhetorical critique offered in dissent operates to challenge traditional cultural categories. What is important to Ivie (2005) is the idea that dissent preserves democracy even as it attacks "troublesome reifications" (p. 284). Moreover, it is worth emphasizing that Ivie sees all this transpiring in a context in which dissent can maintain its sense of allegiance to the very power structures it critiques. It uses the various techniques of rhetoric, including, and perhaps most tellingly, consubstantiality. Ivie (2005) writes:

Just as metaphor frames rhetoric to provide a rich heuristic for dissent, with dissent understood as the critique of rigidified conventions, oppressive hierarchies, and narrow perspectives, the operation of dissent as a form of democratic political struggle depends on constituting the Other as an adversary rather than an enemy. Negotiating the precarious line between division and identification is the constant but crucial challenge of sustaining a rhetorically viable Other. (p. 284)

This final line is central to Ivie's argument, especially as it raises a few questions: How do we balance the opposing notions of identification and division? If we are successful in negotiating this precarious line, what is the ultimate purpose of negotiation? Is it possible to keep things in balance when the tension between the constituent parts is so great? Ivie sees this task as essential because we need to work hard at keeping democracy alive in times of crisis. And the only way to do this, he suggests, is by embracing and expanding our notion of nonconforming solidarity (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Robert Ivie's paradox of nonconforming solidarity



This is ultimately the principal challenge according to Ivie (2005): maintaining an adequate “balance between identification and division, similarity and difference, so that democratic rivalry is enabled in an atmosphere of tensions” (p. 285). Difference and dissent are important if only because total uniformity of opinion is totalitarianism. But when we are in an atmosphere of tension (such as post 9/11), the impulse for uniform thought will increase. Complete uniformity of opinion can be attractive when it displaces dissent and permits the authorities to focus single-mindedly on the crisis at hand. But without dissent, without political contestation, without the constitution of the rhetorical adversary, there is only dictatorship. Hence, it is important to challenge authority precisely at those moments when authority is least likely to welcome being challenged. True and proper dissent, then, must combine what Ivie (2005) poetically refers to as the “sharp edge of criticism” and the “reassuring embrace.” Credible dissent persuades to the extent that it effectively balances the tension between “affirming and disconcerting the political order” (p. 286).

Although Ivie was writing in a post-9/11 environment, the importance of his thinking can easily be extended to the current moment, when assaults on democracy occur with alarming frequency. Rhetorically viable others seem hard to come by in polarized political climates. And with the rise of conspiracy theories in so many parts of the globe, the tendency to transform adversaries into pure enemies has grown. Is nonconforming solidarity possible in a world where the main ambition of some of our most important politicians is the destruction of democracy itself?

Notes

1. An excellent overview of the scholarly and public response to propaganda in the 1930s—and Burke’s role in these debates and discussions—is offered by Jodie Nicotra (2009) in “Dancing Attitudes in Wartime: Kenneth Burke and General Semantics.”
2. The word *attitudinizing* is one of Burke’s more notorious neologisms.
3. We are more attuned today to the problem of conspiracy theories, perhaps, than we are to propaganda, though they share certain similarities. Julien Giry and Dogan Gürpınar (2020), for example, argue that conspiracy theories are an important tool of propaganda in authoritarian regimes. For a concise and excellent overview of conspiracy theories more broadly, see Michael Butter’s (2020) book *The Nature of Conspiracy Theories*.
4. Economist Tyler Cowen’s (2019) book *Big Business: A Love Letter to an American Anti-Hero* presents an interesting history of the reasons why people have come to love and detest big business. His use of the term *anti-hero* in the book’s title is a clue to understanding that history.
5. Barthes’ (1957b) theory of exnomination first appeared in *Mythologies*, where he says that by not being named, something is thereby treated as “natural.” When we specifically name (nominate) something—“female engineer,” “Communist Cuba”—we are indicating that what is “natural” is that which requires no such naming. In that sense, hegemonic ideology is at work in exnomination and plays a potent rhetorical role.

6. A valuable history of Burke's life in the 1930s that touches on his influence on subsequent intellectuals is *Kenneth Burke in the 1930s* by Ann George and Jack Selzer (2007).
7. I will add that Stanley's work on fascism has been criticized for his alleged tendency to conflate conservatism and fascism. This argument is powerfully articulated by the philosopher, Peter Ludlow (2018).
8. Ralph Miliband (1990) offers a particularly well-known account of counter-hegemony.
9. The exhibit originated in the United States where it was called the Family of Man. When it made its way across to France, it was retitled the Great Family of Man.
10. According to Barthes, much of the text accompanying the exhibit's various photographs was steeped in religious language.
11. Many books have been written concerning the murder of Emmett Till. I would recommend one by Devery Anderson (2017).
12. In Aristotle's time, one of the roles ascribed to Zeus was to maintain this sort of "natural" state across the whole of the cosmos. Thus, religion was a defining institution for hegemonically acceptable conduct.
13. Canadian writer Joyce Nelson (1987) captured this idea well with her definition of American television programming as the "herald of the American empire" (p. 120).
14. Writers who have discussed the relation between soft power and hegemony include Geraldo Zahran and Leonardo Ramos (2010).
15. Byung-Chul Han's (2017) work is a recent effort to extend Foucault's ideas and further retheorize the concept of power.
16. When asked specifically about the connection between Foucault's ideas of power and his own theory of soft power, Nye said: "I found Foucault fascinating to read and very insightful, but hard to apply in my approach to international relations. He may be right that everything is infused with power, but that level of abstraction does not help provide analytic distinctions that are useful to policy choices" (quoted in Wong, 2019, para. 7).
17. For example, Yulia Kiseleva (2015) raises this point in her work on Russian soft power in her article "Russia's Soft Power Discourse: Identity, Status and the Attraction of Power."
18. As mentioned earlier, there is an online ranking system that scores individual countries on their use of soft power across several categories: digital, culture, enterprise, education, engagement, and government (Soft Power 30, n.d.-a).
19. You might notice a parallel between Ivie's idea of non-conforming solidarity and Plato's metaphysical dualism. In both instances, two apparently opposite concepts are brought into a mutually reinforcing alignment.

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