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by

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Enduring Character:

The Problem with Authenticity and the Persistence of Ethos

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by

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Dedication

To Colleen, Trish, Gwen and Ron.

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Enduring Character:

The Problem with Authenticity and the Persistence of Ethos

Eric Matthew Dieter, Ph.D.
The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

Supervisor: Patricia Roberts-Miller

This dissertation is interested in how people talk about character in a variety of public spheres. Specifically, it explores the tangled relationship between authenticity and ethos, or what is taken as the distinction between intrinsic and constructed character. While this dissertation does not presume to settle the question of authenticity's actuality, it does discuss the ways authenticity cues in rhetorical acts continue to influence how "sincere character" in those acts is understood, even as audiences exhibit shrewdness in recognizing that character is a purposeful manifestation of the rhetor. The fundamental phenomenon this dissertation seeks to describe is how people, with better and worse success, negotiate the dissonance between valuing character as authentic and as presentation and representation. Character in this view is a much richer and more paradoxical concept than many discussions of the term admit. A too-diluted study of ethos limited strictly to pinpointing credibility in an argument makes it difficult to articulate why an exhibition of character sometimes works and sometimes flops. Ethos in

its fullest complexity is, and is not, constructed by any single act; it is the consequence of narratives, both of those narratives, and also what we say about those narratives; it is something we know about a rhetor, at the same time that it comes from what the rhetor claims to know; it is, most important, an appeal to authenticity, even when we know ethos is discursively, *kairotically*, and socially constructed. This dissertation offers an expanded definition of ethos as rhetorical transactions that rhetors and audiences mutually negotiate in order to determine the extent to which all sides will have their rhetorical needs met, and the extent to which all sides can assent to the those needs. The dissertation, using the works of Wayne Booth, Kenneth Burke, and Chaïm Perelman as its primary theoretical structures, offers pedagogic implications for these mutual negotiations.

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Chapter I:
*Audiences Remaking Ethos Remaking Discourse,
and Wayne Booth Remaking Everything*¹

My dissertation makes two big claims: one, Americans exalt the value of authenticity in public discourse (and also in personal life, but that is a different discussion), and two, this exaltation can get us into hot water, rhetorically speaking. The purpose of my dissertation is not really evaluative, though I do believe that the gap between our exaltation of authenticity and any actual rhetorical effects of that exaltation can lead to distorted, discouraging, and perhaps damaging public conversations, especially those political, but educational and cultural ones as well. But my goal here is not to prescribe how to have better public conversations, whatever my beliefs: often, offering prescriptions while describing rhetorical phenomenon runs the risk of implying corrective behavior. It is not my goal in this dissertation to help people clear their wrong thinking and have better conversations. My goal, instead, is to chronicle a kind of cognitive dissonance that lingers in public discourse between our desire for authenticity, our intuition that authenticity is a problematic concept, and our knowledge that authenticity is often constructed. We acknowledge that authenticity was rendered irreparably unstable, even inconsequential, in the wake of various social and academic trends such as expressivism, postmodernism, and social constructivism. The rub,

¹ Portions from the latter half of this chapter focusing on Booth are accepted for publication in an upcoming volume of *Composition Studies* as a blended part of a co-authored article entitled “The Art of Being Persuaded: Wayne Booth’s Mutual Inquiry and the Trust to Listen” with Marsha Lee Baker, Western Carolina University, and Zachary Dobbins, Eckerd College. This dissertation contains no work from either Dr. Baker or Dr. Dobbins.

however, is that in our public conversations we often still rely on authenticity as a marker of rhetorical, and even ethical, rightness.

Our reliance stems from an assumption, this dissertation contends, that authenticity is unambiguous: that we, despite the inherent incertitude of rhetorical communication in action, can still know something essential about our interlocutors, even if we cannot always judge their meanings. Authenticity provides cues with which we can try to judge the worth of rhetors via their rhetorical acts. Almost unconsciously we seem to draw lines between that which is taken as authentic and that which is taken as inauthentic, and we do this over and over, across fields as different as literature, pedagogy, and politics. Given our penchant for authenticity, there is value in recognizing what cues we take as authentic, even as we seem to appreciate the rhetorical, and even ethical, limits of trusting a concept that we know is fraught, freighted, perhaps even illusory. But I do not take it as a responsibility of my dissertation to resolve the existence of authenticity, a question bravely (and better) explored by philosophers. Nor do I not take it as a responsibility of my dissertation to settle why we crave authenticity, a question ably (and better) investigated by social scientists.

My focus here is rhetorical, and my approach pragmatic: my dissertation takes as a given the craving for authenticity in public discourse, and while I will not presume to explain why we possess that craving, my dissertation will explore the consequences, specifically, the rhetorical effects, of that craving. That my dissertation limits its focus to public discourse is useful for exploring these consequences in productive ways. Since this is not an attempt to explain authenticity in its entirety, but rather a discussion of how our

craving for authenticity has rhetorical effects in public conversation, it is beyond the purview of my dissertation to decide the importance of authenticity in situations of intimate and personal psychology. It is imprudent to assume that authenticity in intimate familial and marital situations works the same way that it does in communal situations: both the personal and the public spheres rely on rhetoric for communication, of course, but perhaps they do not rely on the same kinds of rhetoric for the same purposes. And in the end, my dissertation is not concerned with the reality of authenticity; whether or not there is such a thing as authenticity matters little when studying its rhetorical influences and impacts. Regardless of whether or not authenticity is real, it has rhetorical effects, and those consequences are the focus of my dissertation. Authenticity, then, is like the existence of God: whatever the actual status of God's existence, religion will continue to exert significant control on cultural and political spheres. Or authenticity is like a planet that cannot be seen by naked eye but whose location can be tracked by looking at its gravitational effects on surrounding objects.

To begin, let us define authenticity as an external manifestation of internal genuineness. We will complicate this definition more deeply in the dissertation, but in most cases, when we expect rhetors' authenticity, we expect them to be unaffectedly and indubitably who they say they are, or, more precisely, we expect the character implied in their rhetoric to align with their actual character in some way. We expect rhetors to employ sincerity, which this dissertation takes as the main strategy of authenticity in rhetoric, with veracity and frankness. Evidence of our deep fixation on the authentic, our compulsion to seek out and reward authenticity, our drive to actually be authentic, and

our desire for an unwavering authentic self, is frequently and emphatically manifested across a wide spectrum of public conversations, popular and scholarly.

It is everywhere: for instance, the May 2007 issue of *Fast Company*, a tech-focused business magazine “where ideas and people meet,” features an article by journalist Bill Breen about corporate brands’ “quest for authenticity,” where Breen offers advice on the qualities it “take[s] to be authentic,” including “a sense of place,” “a strong point of view,” “serving a larger purpose,” and “integrity.” Breen addresses paradoxical questions like “Can you be authentic when you’re trying to be authentic?” *The Daily Show*, a satirical news program, “comes across as authentic in large part because it self-consciously declares itself to be fake,” he writes, while ubiquitous coffee franchise Starbucks “can rise to prominence by creating an imitation of Milan’s espresso bars—and then be pilloried (by its own chairman, among others) for not staying true to that fabricated experience.” The takeaway for readers is this statement: “What’s authentic is not always real, and what’s real is not always what it seems.” That Breen’s statement is seemingly pregnant with meaning despite being utterly confusing is exactly the sort of hot water I think we get ourselves into when we rely on authenticity cues to gauge rhetorical intentions without analyzing more fully how those cues are developed and understood by interlocutors.

This mutability of authenticity is simultaneously echoed and undermined in a June 2008 issue of *Psychology Today* in which one article, also on branding, explains the “profound effect” of “brand logo exposure” on our behavior, while another article, this one a linguist’s study of the discourse particle “like” as “a misunderstood word,” warns

that “stereotypes alter our perceptions.” The branding article quotes psychology professor Gavan Fitzsimons explaining that, “Every brand comes with a set of associations” that activate “our motivational systems” leading us “to behave in ways that are consistent with the brand image.” When asked to answer questions, those exposed to the Disney logo answered “more honestly” than those exposed to the E! Entertainment network logo, because, after chronic exposure to Disney’s logo, people apprehend in the logo the sort of innocence and integrity Breen advises companies to achieve. The Disney logo, with its scribbled, loopy lettering, including the fat, happy circle dotting the “i,” is disarming and whimsical enough, apparently, either to convince people that the company is similarly authentically harmless, or, if not convinced, at least willing to accept. Collectively we seem to shrug: if Disney Co. wishes to exude childlike impressions of guilelessness and playfulness, who are we to disabuse them? What right do we have to say that those impressions are not so, even if the company’s corporate actions occasionally fail to meet their own presented standards? Even if we know that the connotations characterizing their corporate identity are carefully constructed to create that effect, the perception that those connotations are authentic persists, which, my dissertation argues, is the same as saying they are allowed to persist by us, their audience.

Disney’s authenticity becomes, to quote Smokey Robinson, “really, really, real” because of the way it makes us feel, not because it is, in fact, a fact.² “Truth is what resonates,” claims linguist Alexandra D’Arcy in the linguistic article from *Psychology Today*. While her study reveals that men use “like” as a filler word with the same “overall

² This highly charting song is called “Being With You,” from the 1981 album of the same name.

frequency” as women, the perceptions that “Women are gossipy chatterboxes,” and “Teenagers are incoherent” persists: “Any language myth that agrees with these general ideologies,” she explains, “makes sense to us.” Just as Disney’s cuteness is allowed to exist in the face of their calculating corporate dealings, the perception of a linguistic stereotype’s power to define a community is also allowed to persist. That a stereotype has an ideological resonance (or not) says more about the reception and application (or not) of the stereotype by audiences than any valid content it might possess. So, Smokey is cooing at us once again: perhaps the really, really, real is all in our mind? Breen, Fitzsimons, and D’Arcy, taken as representative examples, all seem tacitly to acknowledge some variation of the pop phenomenological proverb that perception is reality. To wit, Breen quotes Seth Godin, author of *Permission Marketing*, “If you can fake authenticity, the rest will take care of itself.”

The blanching sensation many people experience upon hearing the oxymoronic phrase “fake authenticity” is precisely the dissonant experience my dissertation explores. Why does that phrase sound funny to our ears even though we are pretty good at acknowledging and accepting authenticity as always partly real and partly constructed? Why does it offend our sensibilities when either someone or something presented as authentic is exposed as having an image, especially since we seem already to recognize that images, particularly in public arenas political and social, are by definition identities built, polished, and methodically presented? What exactly are our sensibilities when it comes to defining the authentic and discerning it from the inauthentic? ““Authentic,”” Breen relates, “is derived from the Greek *authentikós*, which means ‘original.’ And

unfortunately, there's no recipe for originality. Each brand must build its own primary source code for the authentic." If there were a recipe for originality, though, it might sound like Karen Wright's "8 Rules for Authentic Living," the coverstory in that same June 2008 issue of *Psychology Today*. This article, featuring an introductory photo spread of a young woman in various moods (e.g., pensive, chipper, forlorn, satisfied) contending with, and often posing within, an armful of empty picture frames asks if we "are up to living an authentic life?" "Authenticity is," the title's kicker proclaims, "one of our deepest psychological needs," and Wright's article describes attempts by social psychologists Michael Kernis and Brian Goldman to quantify our ability to meet this deep need. Fulfilling our need to be authentic has a longstanding philosophic tradition according to Wright, who succinctly details in about a dozen paragraphs the quest for "some pure and enduring touchstone of I-ness" in Western thought, highlighting the divide between Platonic discovery versus existentialist invention of self.

The "technical description" Kernis and Goldman create to define authenticity emphasizes "the unimpeded operation of one's true or core self in one's daily enterprise," and Wright concludes that "Becoming authentic, then, means accepting not only contradiction and discomfort but personal faults and failures as well."³ "Self-awareness"

³ A wide net is easily cast when researching authenticity, especially across disciplines, but the abundant catch is overwhelming to sort, and cannot practically be included here in its entirety. Representative examples of authenticity in the popular press include both James Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine's *Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want* (2007) and Andrew Potter's *The Authenticity Hoax: How We Get Lost Finding Ourselves* (2010), offering a range from the instructional to the skeptical. Eminent philosopher Charles Taylor's slender but cogent *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1992) approaches the

is the foundational skill needed to achieve your authentic self, and a sidebar offers eight “acts of authenticity” that can help, though there is a parenthetical admission that these acts are “(sometimes conflicting).” “Be Deliberate,” “But Not Too Deliberate,” it advises; also, “Cultivate Solitude,” but “But Stay Connected.” While we can accept, since it is beyond the interest of my dissertation to argue, that self-awareness is a positive personal trait to cultivate, Breen, Godin, Kernis and Goldman, et al. never broach the question of why authenticity is the ultimate desired goal of that cultivation. While they are all relatively upfront about the fluidity of authenticity, and honest about its constructed nature, none dispute the value of a self conceived of as having authenticity and being authentic. But what would perceptions of rhetorical identity look like divested of this concern for and valuing of authenticity? What happens if we say that a really real authenticity is unimportant, or, more kindly, if we become simply authenticity agnostics?

The first thing that happens if we say that having authenticity and being authentic are picayune concerns is that we need likewise reappraise sincerity, the performative mechanism of authenticity. Which is not to say that authenticity and sincerity are devalued: as stated at the outset, my dissertation does not presume either to prove or disprove the existence of authenticity and sincerity, and it does not presume to speculate on whether or not anyone can really ever be authentic and have authenticity. Being an authenticity agnostic means that these speculations are unnecessary. In other words, questions about being authentic may be important, or they may not, but in either case the

topic from an academic perspective, while fellow philosophy professor Charles Guignon’s *Being Authentic* (2004) takes the middle ground.

inescapable effects, resulting from the audience's expectations of authenticity, remain and can be examined. Audiences still, as briefly illustrated above, concern themselves with how rhetorical acts are perceived as authentic: unavoidably and understandably, we care about what rhetors have to say, and we care about how and why they say it. We care even though intellectually we recognize that, to crib from literary critics Wimsatt and Beardsley's famous proclamation, "The poem belongs to the public."

So, too, does the argument belong to the audience, and it is this concept that forms the core of my dissertation. When we speak of cues present in rhetorical acts that audiences use to try to judge the authenticity of rhetors, we are speaking of several habits all at once: 1) the aforementioned craving for a really, real authenticity that may or may not be actual, and is beyond the scope of the present discussion, though it nevertheless exerts an undeniable influence that can be explored, 2) the recognition that authenticity is constructed, a character formulated by rhetors and injected into their rhetorical acts, generally in order to increase the likelihood of persuading the audience, or, in other words, the presented ethos of the rhetor, and 3) a recognition that authenticity and sincerity, as rhetorical subsets of ethos, are cues that entail assent in audiences as often as, and as much as, persuasion. It is this last habit that interests me most in this dissertation, or, more precisely, this third habit's relationship with the second's, specifically the way that rhetor ethos and audience assent are mutually negotiated in rhetorical acts. It is a habit that I think receives not enough attention in rhetorical scholarship and rhetorical education, at least proportionate to what I consider its importance in fully understanding how public discourse often unfolds.

The following three chapters attempt to bring attention to this relationship between rhetors and audiences in developing and understanding ethos in action. Each chapter takes as its focus case studies, specific public conversations illustrating our craving for authenticity and its rhetorical consequences, and analyzing what I will call the transactional relationship between particular audiences and rhetors in those conversations. Chapter II focuses on conservative politicians, especially President George W. Bush and candidates Sarah Palin and John McCain, and their relationship with political consultants and pundits. Chapter III focuses on Barack Obama's first presidential campaign in 2008, and the relationship between the candidate and voters. Chapter IV focuses on a trio of instances, beginning with a popular culture example, Oprah's Book Club and the fear of the false memoir, before moving on to two pedagogic examples, one concerning the teaching of quotation in composition classes, the other the relationship between college teachers and student-athletes in compositions classes. Before we transition to these case studies, I want to take time to discuss more thoroughly the nature of the transactional relationship between audience and rhetor, especially concerning the employment and understanding of the ethos appeal: that task takes up the remainder of this first chapter.

Audiences seem unwilling and unable to disconnect the content of the message from the character of the messenger, a hesitancy that strikes me as a logical and appropriate way to engage with and in public discourse. (By public discourse I mean simply the widespread, multifaceted, multimedia discussions surrounding issues of civic importance.) In the spheres of pedagogy and politics especially, we often do, and should,

concern ourselves with the rhetors' motivations and intentions. In fact, we often make their intentions central to our understanding of the rhetorical situation in which their arguments exist, and there is no reason to trouble what I see by this point in the rhetorical discipline as a truism. What I would like to suggest, though, is that authenticity cues in rhetorical acts create relationships between rhetors and audiences that allow for, even require, a sort of rhetorical mediation, though that word suggests a process both more directly contentious and collaborative than, as we will see, it actually is. The key point is that ethos is transactional, and understanding how it functions as a transaction, along with the limits to which rhetors and audiences can make transactional demands of each other in public discourse, requires dissecting the power dynamics inherent when rhetors and audiences engage in rhetorical acts. Ethos understood in this way is, my dissertation argues, a good lesson and valuable discursive tool for scholars and students.

To be fair, this transactional argument is implicit in Book 2 of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, and it is not my mission to revise understanding of what Aristotle meant, especially since several intelligent analyses, such as Jakob Wisse's *Ethos and Pathos from Aristotle to Cicero* (1989), Eugene Garver's *Aristotle's Rhetoric: An Art of Character* (1994), Baumlin and Baumlin's edited volume *Ethos: New Essays in Rhetorical and Critical Theory* (1994), Robert Hariman's edited volume *Prudence* (2003), and Michael Hyde's edited volume *The Ethos of Rhetoric* (2004), already exist. I am much more interested in discussing extrapolations of the Aristotelian conception of ethos, especially in regards to, as mentioned before, our deep fixation on authenticity frequently and emphatically manifested across a wide spectrum of current public

conversations, popular and scholarly. A perusal of recently published college course rhetoric textbooks illustrate the tendency to draw the boundaries of ethos' efficacy hard against the rhetor, discussing expertise, credibility, and trustworthiness, and leaving audiences little space on which to plant their own ethotic flags.⁴ But if we accept that

⁴ Of thirty well-known undergraduate rhetoric textbooks published between 2000 and 2007, only two mention time as a component of ethos, and both of those only momentarily. Gilyard et al. state that students can “establish” their “authority” “by speaking with authority and knowledge over time,” and Browne and Keeley claim that pertinent questions to ask when evaluating “appeals to authority as evidence” are “Has the authority developed a reputation for frequently making dependable claims” and “Have we been able to rely on this authority in the past?” While these two texts imply a temporal dimension missing in their colleagues’ works, neither Gilyard, et al. nor Browne and Keeley adequately explain why time is an important component of ethos building. For most rhetoric textbooks—twenty of thirty—defining and/or engaging the term “ethos” is a matter of glossing a highly functional language of standard Aristotelian extraction, though the same number either supersede or suffuse the grammar of ethos in favor of the more broadly conceived “character.” Similarly, many (sixteen of thirty) prefer “authority,” and “credibility/credentials” (fifteen of thirty), while others focused on “expertise” (eight of thirty) and “trust” (twelve of thirty). Most textbooks engaged several of these terms synonymously, and are thus represented in multiple headcounts: for instance, Charney, et al. define “ethos” as “our capacity for trust,” and also later discuss the significance of credentials and strategies for “adopting an authoritative role.” Similarly, Lunsford and Ruskiewicz write that, “You can thus make ethical appeals to any audience by demonstrating that you’re knowledgeable—you know what you’re talking about and can make your case...an expert can be anyone with knowledge and experience...trust indicates the power of arguments based on ethos/character...,” while Memering and Palmer write that, “The most important attribute of any writer or speaker, Aristotle said, is ethos, the writer’s character,” and Ramage, et al. write that, “Ethos (Greek for ‘character’) refers to the credibility of the writer/speaker,” etc. A few engage Aristotle’s language directly, though none more than Covino, who tells students that, “the *ethos* of a speaker is persuasive when the speech demonstrates (1) *phronesis*, or what we might call practical wisdom or common sense; (2) *arête*, or moral virtue; and (3) *eunoia*, or goodwill toward the audience.” The purpose of this brief survey is not to diminish the functionality of these textbooks, but to point to a vacuity in rhetoric pedagogy concerning the transactional nature of ethos, with its simultaneous emphasis on the rhetors and audiences. See: Gilyard, Keith, Deborah H. Holdstein, & Charles I. Schuster. *Rhetorical Choices: A Reader for Writers*. New York: Penguin Academics, 2004: 546. Browne, M. Neil & Stuart M. Keeley. *Asking the Right Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking*, Seventh Edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004: 110-112. Charney, Davida

rhetorical acts, especially when they concern matters of authenticity, create a transactional relationship between rhetors and audiences, we have to acknowledge that audiences' assent to rhetors' ethos is as important as rhetors' construction of their ethos. When we say that we discuss the power dynamics within this transactional relationship, nothing more is meant than a give and take between rhetors and audiences about who gets to dictate, and to what extent they get to dictate, how the ethos present in a particular rhetorical situation is defined, discussed, and understood. The transactional function of ethos in these rhetorical acts occurs even in situations that are textually mediated, as in the grading of student writing, and asynchronous, as in the debates-then-elections cycle. Granting that audiences have the ability to dictate in negotiation with the rhetor the form and function of ethos present in a particular rhetorical situation offers us a tactic for analyzing the effects of authenticity without getting bogged down in concerns over authenticity's actuality.

We worry more, for instance, about who our candidates for office are, instead of what might result from their potential elections. The result is that we often elect to leadership candidates who seem to be (and might actually be) good people, but we do it because we equate being a good person with being a good leader. But, of course, modern

H., et al. *Having Your Say: Reading and Writing Public Arguments*. New York: Pearson Longman, 2006: 66, 75-78, 418. Lunsford, Andrea A. and John J. Ruskiewicz. *Everything's an Argument*, Fourth Edition. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007: 39-40, 65. Memering, Dean & William Palmer. *Discovering Arguments: An Introduction to Critical Thinking and Writing Readings*, Second Edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2006: 23-24. Ramage, John D., John C. Bean, & June Johnson. *Writing Arguments: A Rhetoric with Readings, Brief Edition*, Sixth Edition. New York: Pearson Longman, 2004: 75. Covino, William A. *The Elements of Persuasion*. New York: Longman, 1997: 7 (original emphasis).

campaign politics are predicated on building and promoting a good character regardless of whether or not the candidate actually has a good character, a decidedly inauthentic activity the goal of which is the deliberate and tightly controlled presentation of an authentic self using strategies outlined in tech-business and pop-psych magazines. We are not shocked to learn either that candidates do not write all of their own speeches, or that candidates in modern American campaigns are treated as brands, constructed by committee, and polished to a high shine. Yet voters take what they say—along with everything else about them, from the cost of their haircuts, to the color of their ties and pantsuits, to the people with whom they sleep—as indicative of who they are. Our craving for authenticity accompanies, and perhaps even fuels, our acceptance, despite our awareness that perception is not necessarily reality: we want a real wizard, but are not totally disenfranchised when we realize that the wizard is actually just a person, propped up by a constructed ethos to make them seem wizardly to us. I am asserting, in other words, that we worry (or think we are worried) about identity in public discourse when what really matters is identification in Kenneth Burke’s sense of that concept, a notion I will explore more fully in Chapter III.

For now, we can say simply that identification is a serviceable criterion by which to evaluate the transactional relationships in ethos-laden moments because it offers a alternative to drawing too-stark lines between the authentic and the inauthentic. As I have tried to suggest, by removing the sense of responsibility to scrupulously pinpoint authenticity in rhetorical acts, space opens for what I consider a pragmatic and productive analysis of how audience and rhetors interact within those acts. Instead of judging the

quality of rhetors and their rhetoric based on the extent to which we as audiences think we can accurately perceive their authenticity, removing that need to judge opens space for finer distinctions in how and why arguments are made. In short, (and here I will drop my prohibition against prescription for one brief moment), fully embracing what we already tacitly accept—that in public discourse the inauthentic-authentic pairing is always a transactional relationship between rhetors and audiences developed via ethos—we can have better public conversations.⁵ But it is crucial to repeat that this transactional relationship holds value for rhetorical studies regardless of what may be authenticity’s status as an *a priori* reality.

None of which is to suggest that ethos itself is a straightforward concept, especially in modern public discourses. Professor Marshall Alcorn describes the fundamental problem plaguing ethos in the poststructuralist world: “It seems we cannot have, at the same time, both a theory that explains the rhetor’s presence in a text and a theory that fully describes the plural disseminations of textual codes” (17). Many scholars are in agreement with Alcorn’s sentiment: eminent political rhetorician Kathleen Hall Jamieson, for one, claims that, in the wake of a ceaselessly increasing electorate, “direct

⁵ My use of the language of pairing terms like authentic/inauthentic is indebted to Chaïm Perelman’s “dissociation” of “paired terms” (*New Rhetoric* 415-421), the foundational pair of which is expressed:

Appearance

Reality

I will discuss dissociation of the appearance-reality pair more fully in Chapter IV.

experience of the character of a speaker is unattainable for most of those called on to judge public discourse.” Further, given the ceaselessly increasing ubiquity of technology- and image-driven media, “we see a potential leader through the filter provided by pseudo-events, news bites, or nuggetized ads and then can know for certain only that most politicians do not speak their own words,” meaning, she concludes, that, “ethos is a less reliable anchor for belief” (240).⁶

Jamieson’s anxiety is understandable for several reasons, not least because of the real possibility that rhetors, especially politicians, may lie about their character in order to manipulate audience attitudes and actions. Rhetors may develop and present an ethos that aligns with either the audience’s expectations or their own sense of themselves, but not actually with rhetor themselves: because lying rhetors can still give off the appropriate cues, they may seem authentic without being authentic. Even Burke acknowledged a strand of identification that “often brings rhetoric to the edge of cunning” (*Rhetoric* 36). The threat behind this strand of “cunning identification,” which Burke defines as

⁶ Jamieson’s large body of research on presidential politics is valuable to my dissertation, even if much of it is not directly quoted. Most especially, see *Eloquence in an Electronic Age* (1990, the source of the above quotations about an anxiety that has only sharpened over the ensuing twenty-plus years), *Packaging the Presidency*, Second Edition (1992), *The Press Effect* (2003, with Paul Waldman), and *Presidents Creating the Presidency* (2008, with Karlyn Kohrs Campbell). Additionally, for similar discussions beyond Jamieson that emphasize the rhetorical dimensions of presidential politics and the presidency, see Roderick Hart’s *Campaign Talk* (2000), Leroy Dorsey’s edited volume *The Presidency and Rhetorical Leadership* (2002), Vanessa Beasley’s *You, The People* (2004), Kurt Ritter and Martin Medhurst’s edited volume *Presidential Speechwriting* (2004), James Aune and Martin Medhurst’s edited volume *The Prospect of Presidential Rhetoric* (2008), and George Edwards’s *The Strategic President* (2009). Similarly issues are addressed from a popular press perspective in Robert Schlesinger’s *White House Ghosts* (2008). Special recognition goes to Robert Hariman’s *Political Style: The Artistry of Power* (1995) for its illuminating discussion of the ethical consequences of rhetoric in politics.

protecting “an interest merely by using terms not incisive enough to criticize it properly,” is that audiences who are “not too exacting in the scrutiny of identifications that flatter their interests” leave their “philosophy of life” “open,” as Burke puts it, “to either attack or analysis.” Even a dissertation trying to be non-prescriptive would not advocate that audiences leave themselves vulnerable for verbal “attack” through rhetorical inattentiveness, but the thought of audiences opening themselves up for “analysis” seems a less frightening prospect. In order for transactional relationships in rhetorical acts to fully function, audiences should, as we will see below, give rhetors a certain default level of trust. It goes without saying that rhetors should not, by default, abuse this trust, but the fact that they occasionally do helps explain Jamieson’s anxiety about the unreliability of ethos as an “anchor for belief” in modern public discourse.

Her anxiety is also clearly driven by the phenomenon underwriting my dissertation: if authenticity’s protean nature makes it too slippery to grab, and if that slipperiness undermines ethos reliability in public discourse, then it is easy to see how our belief in the value of ethos is unmoored. My response, outlined in the following chapters, is that we can remove some of the anxiety by focusing on the effects of authenticity cues in rhetorical acts, rather than focusing on a belief in either the presence or absence of authenticity itself. We do not need to concern ourselves with believing in rhetors. We do not need to concern ourselves with essential identities in public rhetorical situations, but we need to concentrate on how identifications are manually, mutually, and publicly constructed between rhetors and audiences (or when they are not, which is equally instructive). We do need to concern ourselves with believing rhetors, to the extent

that rhetors and rhetorical situations make this type of inquiry possible. The transactional relationship, then, has analysis at its center, despite Burke's warning about leaving yourself open to it. For audiences, the key to avoiding identification of the "cunning" variety is not to shut out rhetors for fear that "false or inadequate terms" may be "imposed upon us from without by some skillful speaker" (*Rhetoric* 35). Audiences should remain vigilant for deceptive rhetorical practices, of course, but more important for Burke and for my dissertation, is vigilance in audiences against "self-deception," against, as Burke phrases it, the false and inadequate terms that "we impose upon ourselves, in varying degrees of deliberateness and unawareness, through motives indeterminately self-protective and/or suicidal." I take Burke's point to be that audiences can do themselves a lot of damage, but they also exercise a remarkable amount of control over rhetorical situations, way more, in fact, than they are usually given credit for, often even by themselves. This control is being perpetually enacted across various public spheres: think about the relationship between teachers and students, between pop icons and fans, between politicians and voters. Rhetorical studies often focuses on the rhetor, which undoubtedly offers insightful ways for understanding the exigency, motivation, and construction of arguments, but this cult of personality approach obscures the public nature of most arguments studied in rhetoric and composition classes. In public is where audiences are, so my dissertation will look at how rhetors meet audiences in this rhetorical commons.

The series of photos from *Psychology Today* of the young women framing different versions of her self (page seven above) become an appropriate visual metaphor

for this public meeting between rhetors and audiences. A picture frame indicates something explicitly set apart for public display, just as an argument is a linguistic gesture drawing attention to some finite aspect of larger public debates. In both, the presence of an audience is acknowledged, and that acknowledgement changes the value and validity of authenticity cues because it opens the argument, and, by extension, the rhetor, for analysis (and perhaps attacks) by audiences. Audiences, even if they are not explicitly addressed, cannot be ignored; it is the audience who decides the efficacy of an exhibited identity and how that exhibited identity influences the audience's understanding of and assenting to associated identifications. This is not perception as reality, but reception. My dissertation's goal is to thoroughly examine a few of these connections between authenticity cues and identification, and my argument throughout is that it is not authenticity but ethos that is important to analyzing public discourse. The work of well-respected and well-known (and, from my perspective, usually always spot on) rhetorical scholar Wayne C. Booth helps define the sort of productive ethos that I wish to promote in my dissertation, and helps indicate the pedagogic implications that my dissertation will return to in Chapter IV and the Conclusion. When "ethos" is used throughout the rest of my dissertation, this is what is meant.

In 2004, Wayne Booth summarized a significant strand of rhetoric's potential: "when our words and images remake our past, present, or future," he writes, "they also remake the personae of those of us who accept new realities." He admits that, "this potential is overlooked and understated," but that our attention is rewarded with a plenary understanding of how "You and I are remade as we encounter the remakings" (*Rhetoric*

17-18). His summary culminates a career-long emphasis on ethos, and what makes Booth's concept of ethos iconoclastic and functional for students, teachers, and scholars is its conviction in the nonnegotiable necessity of including, right along with that of the rhetor, the ethos of the audience in every nook and cranny of every rhetorical domain. Before expanding on that assertion and some of its pedagogic implications, I think I have to concede that characterizing Booth's career as emphasizing ethos is a little like claiming that Sinatra's career emphasized crooning, or that Jordan's emphasized jumpshots.

Booth's work on ethos, producing bountiful, game-changing discussions about both character and ethics, manages to embrace its progenitors while still being *sui generis*, and it is this intellectual gracefulness and social graciousness that has made it a touchstone for all subsequent discussions of ethos in contemporary public life. My word "emphasize" deeply understates the centrality of ethos to Booth's work; we may even go so far as to say that ethos is the loam from which all his constructive rhetorical theories and their attendant rhetorical practices flourish. Implied in my concession is the caveat that this chapter need not discuss exhaustively all that Booth has to say about ethos, ethical conversation, and conversations about ethics. Indeed, it can be difficult determining where best to begin reviewing all he has to say on the subject. But since I have already quoted from 2004's *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric*, the last book Booth published while he was alive, we can begin there, working our way back through some of his other major works to 1974's *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, the book whose pragmatic firmness and public focus informs this dissertation.

In his *Rhetoric of Rhetoric*, Booth promotes what he calls a “faith in ethos”: a defense of transparent rhetorical interactions in the same vein as scientist and philosopher Michael Polanyi’s “fiduciary commitment” that encourages “the importance of trust,” “a point,” Booth contends, “too often ignored” (64). Booth’s emphasis on trust grows from his doggedness in treating education as a democratic enterprise treating democracy. As John Dewey asserts in *Democracy and Education*, democratic education is “the realization of a form of social life in which interests are mutually interpenetrating, and where progress, or readjustment, is an important consideration,” especially since democracy, for Dewey, and, I think, for Booth, “is primarily a mode of associated living,” and “of conjoint communicated experience” (67-68). Later we will see how, from the perspective of democratic pedagogy, we ignore rhetorical trust at our own rhetorical peril, but for now we can trust Booth when he tells us that it is only in a state of authentic and mutual confidence that engaged rhetors and audiences achieve the most productive and least harmful level of rhetorical understanding, what Booth calls “listening-rhetoric,” the “deepest” form of which is “rhetorology,” which, as Booth explains it, is “the systematic probing for ‘common ground’” where rhetors “move or try to move,” he writes, “beyond original beliefs to some new version of the truth” (11, 46-47).

Trust and Truth: this is heady stuff, for sure, but its immediacy and practicality is made plain when we approach what Booth calls “the rough center for this whole book,” that is, “the sorry consequences of poor education in rhetoric” that “threatens our lives” (89). I probably do not need to rehearse what those threats are, though I will point to the recent debates about healthcare, the debt ceiling, and immigration reform, all with their

partisan rancor, discursive indecorum, misleading coverage, and generally self-serving atmosphere of incivility and unciviness, as alarming examples. But what is worth repeating is Booth's pedagogic antidote for poisonous public rhetoric: "It is only by experiencing the sheer fun and personal profit of genuine listening, followed by really productive argument," he explains, "that students can embrace the highest virtue of all: respect for others, producing trustful exchanges" (99).

Here, in a single sentence, we get Booth's recommendation for healthy rhetorical living. And while it does not offer specific suggestions for classroom activities (though in other spots he advocates Socratic-type classroom instruction), it does offer a thorough set of pedagogic doctrines, where teaching students to use rhetoric is to teach them to use it pleurably, profitably, productively, and, yes, perhaps sometimes even persuasively. In short, without a hint of sarcasm, and with great esteem, the goal is to use rhetoric as Wayne Booth uses it. One of Booth's former students, Meri-Jane Rochelson, herself a scholar and teacher, writes that, "Wayne Booth taught by example," which, she claims "was more than appropriate in a man who dedicated much of his life's work to exploring the ethos of the narrator and the ethics of narration." "[F]or what is teaching," she asks, "but telling stories of one kind or another and enforcing their significance by telling them with both conviction and integrity?" (37).

And in the thirty-plus years separating *Modern Dogma* from *Rhetoric of Rhetoric* we see remarkable consistency in the major threads of Booth's narrative tapestry: the persistent centralizing of ethos, the ethical implications of that centralizing, and the educational implications for teaching rhetorical ethos and reading ethics, as well as

reading ethos and rhetorical ethics, to our students. In 1988's *The Company We Keep*, Booth begins by defining the two terms, ethos and ethic, highlighting especially their sameness: "The word 'ethical,'" he writes, "may mistakenly suggest a project concentrating on quite limited moral standards," continuing, however, that he is "interested in a much broader topic," namely "the entire range of effects on the 'character' or 'person' or 'self.'" For Booth ethical criticism is obviously much more, and much more interesting, than judging the morals of rhetors and their texts, though certainly moral judging occurs. More expansively, though, the act of judgment itself is inescapably essential to ethical criticisms. While ethical criticism, he continues, "need not begin with the intent to evaluate, their descriptions will always," he concludes, "entail appraisals of the value of what is described," adding "there are no neutral ethical terms" (8).

As for the term "ethical," Booth admits that it "must cover all qualities in the character, or ethos, of authors and readers, whether these are judged as good or bad" (8). More important to Booth is the unavoidable proposition that ethical appraisals are not limited to the ethos of the rhetor, but include another "center for ethical criticism," namely the ethos of audiences, and their "responsibilities" to rhetors (8). The bulk of *The Company We Keep* traces the result of viewing ethos as a reciprocal crosspollination between both rhetors and audiences, and criticism as the act of investigating and judging those crosspollinations. There are, of course, better and worse ways to judge, and Booth's work is full of counsel for differentiating and practicing the better from the worse,

though, again, admittedly and unfortunately, this dissertation cannot fruitfully survey them all.

An example, however, is a primary focus of his 1979 book *Critical Understanding*, where Booth hopes, and helps, to develop in audiences a “sense of respect for the text without which no reader will ever move beyond first impressions” (274). But Booth confesses that audience impressions, both critical and personal, are not unimportant, though he urges audiences to remain intentionally aware of when, why, and how their impressions are superseding the meaning of the text. Or, in other words, to recognize when, as audiences, our own ethos is “violating” that of the rhetor’s residing within the rhetoric, ignoring our responsibility to the rhetor to be a coequal “center for ethical criticism.” Thus, as Booth explains it, there is “a great deal of distinction between questions internal and external to a ‘framework,’” which gives rise to his division between “understanding” and “overstanding” texts (41, see 235-256, 335-339). The goal of responsive ethical criticism is to be “committed to delaying that shift,” from understanding to overstanding, “for as long as humanly possible,” Booth notes (41, see 243).

For Booth “understanding” and “overstanding” are necessary habits of critical listening if someone wants to genuinely comprehend a text. As Booth explains it, “Texts and modes for dealing with them will die unless each generation of readers can learn both the arts of recovering what the texts demand and the arts of seeing through, judging, repudiating, transforming, and re-creating texts” (*Critical* 256). The order in which these habits are employed is crucial: First, understanding, which involves asking the most

appropriate questions for discovering the text's (and rhetor's) intentions. Second, overstanding, which involves asking "inappropriate" questions so audiences can appropriate those intentions for their own use. Booth discussed the pedagogic implications in an interview a few years before his death: as students "read the works," he explained, "they're involved in ethical differences and have to make judgments. If they don't, if they finally simply succumb to the sympathies demanded by the work, then they may very well end up having adopted the ethical values they shouldn't. On the other hand, if they don't succumb in some sense, they don't even 'get' the work" (Kraftchick).

Broadly, Booth argues for giving rhetors their due, or, more precisely, for giving ourselves over to rhetors whose transparent and mutually inquiring use of rhetoric is deserving of it, meeting them, as it were, where they dwell: "a style that is good" he claims, "not only tends to carry us with him [sic]—it ought to," a claim he admits is "risky" (152). The risk, in part, is that we will give ourselves over to the wrong kinds of rhetors, those who are deceitful and manipulative, underinformed and misinformed: in short, those who either do not possess, or have actively rejected the highest rhetorical virtue of respect Booth promotes in *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric*. But the reward, in part, is a deeper appreciation of the ubiquity and usefulness of the "ethical proof," which in *Modern Dogma* Booth defines as "the art of taking in by contagion" (144). Though even this definition retains the resonance of the risk inherent, particularly any unpleasant connotations of the word "contagion," it is constructive, I think, if we remember the Latinate etymology of contagion as denoting merely a "touching," the pleasantness or unpleasantness of which depends on exactly what is touching what. Or, for Booth, a more

accurate if grammatically improper phrasing might be ‘who is touching who,’ since, as we have seen, ethical criticism is only possible when rhetors and audiences are in contact, made communal with one another.

I argue that, taking Booth at his word, in this case is contagion, we can think of ethos as including the discrete characters of both the rhetor and audience, sure, but also the unique intellectual space created where those two distinct characters interpenetrate. This view of ethos, where the whole is greater than the sum of its constituent parts, gives us a useable apparatus for tracking and translating the dynamic interactions of modern public life, though this view is actually quite classically rooted. Rhetorician Michael Halloran offers us a brief etymological history: “In contrast to modern notions of the...self,” he writes, “ethos emphasizes the conventional rather than the idiosyncratic, the public rather than the private.” “The most concrete meaning given for [ethos] in the Greek lexicon,” he continues, “is ‘a habitual gathering place,’ and I suspect that it is upon this image of people gathering together in a public place, sharing experiences and ideas,” he concludes, “that its meaning as character rests. To have ethos is to manifest the virtues most valued by the culture to and for which one speaks” (60). We have seen which virtues Booth valued most in society, and which he wished most to manifest in students, though perhaps we can take a few additional minutes to appreciate why.

“There is a sense,” rhetorical scholar Frederick Antczak claims, pushing on Halloran’s history lesson, “in which every discourse functionally defines a kind of relationship, a distinctive community in which it engages its audience by the particular activities of understanding and interpreting it requires” (“Teaching” 18). Booth goes even

further: “If I think of myself not as an atomic unit bumping other atoms but as a character—as someone doing my best to enact the various roles ‘assigned’ me,” he writes in *The Company We Keep*, “I discover that there are no clear boundaries between the others who are somehow both outside and inside me and the ‘me’ that the others are ‘in’” (239). Booth’s collapsing of the rhetorical creator and the rhetorical receiver brings to mind Kenneth Burke, who was also deeply interested in how ethos influences judgment, and his twin notions of “consubstantiation” and “identification,” once eminently proclaiming that “The so-called ‘I’ is merely a unique combination of partially conflicting ‘corporate we’s’” (*Attitudes* 264). Indeed, for Burke, identification “is hardly other than a name for the function of sociality” (266). Just as Aristotle, whom Booth cites on the matter, suggests that we are “political animals” because we become vitally human only after we enter and engage in the *polis* (see *Politics* 1.2.9), Booth believes that “the isolated individual self simply does not, cannot exist.” On this point there is, again, a faint echo of Burke in Booth: “Not to be a social self,” Booth warns, “is to lose one’s humanity” (*Company* 238).

When Booth speaks of teachers helping their students to “embrace the highest virtue of all: respect for others, producing trustful exchanges,” we can now better understand that task as being politically attentive, where attending to the political in the classroom connotes the exact opposite of teaching the sort of hyper-partisan intractability focused on winning at all costs we have seen in, say, the healthcare debate. Instead, Booth charges teachers to work on “serving,” as he explains it in 1988’s *The Vocation of a Teacher*, “our universal need for political savvy.” “All our political life,” he continues,

“is conducted in one or another form of rhetoric.” And, in case teachers miss the high stakes of their service, he adds, “Working together in symbolic exchange is in fact our only alternative to tyranny” (118). So, along with pleasurable, profitable, productive, and sometimes persuasive, we can add political to our list of pedagogic doctrines offered within Booth’s work on ethos. It is fairly obvious why teaching political savvy is crucial, but the basic reason is succinctly summarized by Antczak: “in democracy,” he writes in his book on *The Rhetoric of Democratic Education*, “the quality of the community and the character of its politics are determined by the quality and character of the people who constitute it” (3).

A fruitful approach to teaching political savvy is unsurprisingly to teach ethos, particularly the ethical narrative that Wayne Booth promotes: that is, teaching ethos as substance, defining the character transferred into a rhetorical domain by the rhetor and audience, but also, teaching ethos as social process, defining the contagion between the two. Teaching both gives students a justification for, and guidance in, judging the extent to which the rhetor and audience are interpenetrated, as well as the extent to which those discrete substances are made mutual and mutually made. Judging, ultimately, the amount of respect between rhetors and audiences in a given rhetorical domain for the purpose of determining the appropriate extent of trust required for productive public argument to proceed. In other words, we negotiate from individual ethical substances an agreeable social ethos, and we do so by, recalling Halloran’s translation of ethos as a “habitual gathering place,” but cribbing from Booth in *Modern Dogma*, by “dwelling in” other people’s ethical substance long and deep enough to understand their intentions, to

understand how those intentions influence the larger public, and to understand the way we, as the audience, are overstanding rhetors and their social effects (see 116, 172). Or, in still other words, “our basic idea” Dewey writes, is “that character and mind are attitudes of participative response in social affairs” (233).

In many ways, what Booth’s ethical narrative of contagion brings to mind is the educational dimension, particularly as it is defined by Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca in their *New Rhetoric*, available in epideictic rhetoric, which, as Perelman famously notes, “has significance and importance for argumentation because it strengthens the disposition toward action by increasing adherence to the values it lauds” by “establish[ing] a sense of communion centered around particular values recognized by the audience” (50-51). (We will discuss further the educative aspects of epideictic rhetoric in the next chapter.) “Epideictic,” scholar Dale Sullivan explains, bridging the connection between Perelman’s epideictic education and Booth’s “in-dwelling,” “has an educational function in that it brings the audience into the ethos, or dwelling place, of a culture” (72). The epideictic form helps rhetorical teachers appreciate and apply Booth’s ethos in our classrooms, and the end result of bringing audiences into the ethos of a culture is that “Part of the ethos of the society,” as Sullivan writes, “is its definition of participation in society, its definition of citizenship, and its definition of what it takes to participate effectively,” “that is,” he concludes, “its definition of virtue” (73). (We will also discuss further the influence of epideictic rhetoric on civic discourse in the next chapter.) Which Booth, I think, would clearly consider a good goal for rhetoric instruction, because “rhetorical studies,” as Antczak suggests, “can describe the variety of

identifications that were successful and can explore the nature of that success. The range of these identifications and of their successes delineates,” he concludes, “the range of identities that were meaningful and valuable and powerful in the American community at that time” (*Thought* 201).

Booth’s ethical narrative of contagion, as a social mechanism for rhetorical understanding, instantiates Antczak’s point, suggesting that in order to determine what is communally valuable, rhetorical acts must be constantly subjected “to meaningful communal inquiry” (*Modern* 148). But taken as a pedagogic method, it requires a bit more unpacking. “[A]lthough he had some good ones,” Rochelson recalls, Booth’s “pedagogy [was] unlikely to be taught through rules or guidelines” (37). Indeed, in *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric*, Booth’s own view of instructing virtuous rhetoric, that is, instructing rhetoric classes that stress civics, respect, and trust, is actionable, but comes in the form of a question: “How many students,” he pointedly asks, “are learning to think about why building a community of mutual trust is better than winning this or that material reward?” (99).

As teachers attempting to answer that question for ourselves in order to help our students answer it for themselves, we get, as promised, and by way of conclusion, to that portion of *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* that I believe is most pertinent to this dissertation’s argument, namely, his discussion of “Value Terms and Substantive Proofs” (see 145-158). Beforehand, Booth inquires: “what is a ‘self’ in this rhetorical view?” His response again echoes Burke’s “conflicting corporate-we’s,” explaining that the self “is essentially rhetorical, symbol exchanging, a social product in process of

changing through interaction, sharing values with other selves” (126). Those shared values can be thought of as the consequence of contagion, I argue, the byproducts of contact. Tracing how those discrete values become shared is the educational benefit of the epideictic, or what Booth calls the “demonstrative.”

And for Booth it is “true that extreme public displays of commitment always say something real to anyone seriously inquiring into the values at stake in any conflict” (145). Serious inquiry entails not forgetting “that the way we establish values is the way we establish anything: by earning communal validation through trying them out on other” people (146). Here, then, is perhaps more of a rule for turning Booth’s pedagogic doctrines on trust into instructional ethical practice than we anticipated: get students to 1) articulate their values, 2) test those values on others, 2.5) no, really, listen to other people’s values, 3) prepare to have their own values revised as they “touch” the values of others, and most important, 4) embrace the fact that changing your values will “remake” you. Each of those four steps centralize students and their texts within Booth’s ethical narrative, giving them opportunities to make their arguments “not just self-satisfying,” he promises, but “validate[d]” “in the courts of communal exchange” (148). Following Dewey, who famously stated that “no idea, can possibly be conveyed as an idea from one person to another,” Booth’s best classroom advice might be, and this is passim throughout his work, to guide students towards those exchanges while giving them the space to make for themselves the means and ends of their communities that will eventually, inevitably remake them, if they are constructed respectfully, mutually, and trustfully (121).

Booth, in introducing the critical essays of his mentor, Ronald Crane, concluded by stating that Crane's "kind of humanistic scholarship has no established name and that parallels to his kind of work are extremely rare," setting for "humanistic scholarship a complex, exacting task" (xxi). I think it is fair to take Booth's epideictic praising of Crane and transfer it to the praiser himself. Booth's work on ethos is friendly and pragmatic, but sets for scholars, teachers, and, indeed, for society, an exacting task of listening, not just to what we each are saying, but to who we each are when we say it.

Chapter II:
Ethos, Epideictic, and Apple Pie: Teaching Voters about American Character(s)

Noted under the heading “things every American voter knows” is the presumption that if prominent and photogenic politicians write a book, whether it is a memoir or a manifesto, most probably they will, some time in the near future, run for the presidency. Despite their protestations, frowardly offered with firm dismissal and flirtatious smile, voters know this presumption is a good bet. Rick Perry wrote one of these books, *Fed Up!*, in November 2010, but Perry serves only as an indicative, and hardly singular, example. (Barack Obama’s own campaign-priming book, *The Audacity of Hope*, appeared in October 2006, and he officially declared his candidacy less than six months later.) Perry is the longest-serving governor of Texas, having assumed office in December 2000 from departing president-elect George W. Bush. Subsequently, Perry won the next three quadrennial gubernatorial elections, and may be, to use the vernacular of Perry’s west Texas homeland, fixin’ to run again in 2014, though he has said that he will not.⁷ Perry prefaces *Fed Up!* by permitting that, “cynics will say that I decided to write this book because I seek higher office.” “They are wrong,” he stresses, adding, “I already have the best job in America” (xvii).

Perry announced the official launch of his presidential campaign in August 2011, less than a year after the publication of *Fed Up!*, and after spending most of late 2010 and early 2011 working the national television circuit, from *Fox and Friends* to National Public Radio, the *Today Show* to the *Daily Show*. His blooper-prone presidential

⁷ For an account of the Perry campaign in action, see chapter eight of Sasha Issenberg’s *The Victory Lab: The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns* (2012).

campaign ended six months later, in January 2012, but here we are less interested in the conclusion of his campaign than in its kickoff. More generally, we are interested in the form and function of this odd genre of presidential campaign memoirs and manifestos: what purposes do these memoirs serve; what do they tell us about candidates; and how can they induce the electorate?

Assuming Governor Perry did not write *Fed Up!* because he sought higher office, why did he write it? “I wrote this book,” he attests, “in the hopes that it will lead to a new conversation about the proper role of government in our lives” (xvii), a thesis he follows with ten chapters of what he calls “a definitive work on the Tenth Amendment” (189). Those ten chapters concentrate, unsurprisingly, on many of the *raisons d’être* of contemporary canonical conservatism, which, along with Perry’s deliberative framing, suggests a future-focused book outlining an explicit set of small-government policies for which Perry, if called to serve, will advocate. While *Fed Up!* does offer some actionable advice, particularly in its closing pages, the book asserts, more often than not, a point of view rather than points of policy. “Our primary lines of defense against the tyranny of an expansive and meddlesome federal government are the states,” Perry exhorts in a representative instance (134). In another, he counsels that “restoring” the Founding Fathers’s “vision will enable us to live according to our beliefs and our values, and to prosper,” he writes in crescendo, “free from interference from a faraway bureaucrat, legislator, or judge” (16). These broad perorations are the kind against which Perry’s intended audience are unlikely to disagree, an acknowledgement that clearly adulterates the deliberative aspirations of the book in a counterintuitive way for a candidate

attempting to explain how he will govern to a nationwide electorate. Most campaign memoirs follow to various extents, (including, as we will see in the next chapter, Obama's) the same rhetorical inclination as *Fed Up!*

Instead, indeed, despite their ostensibly deliberative dispositions, these books are best considered solidly epideictic in their form and function, and not simply because they are chock-a-block with commendation (for things “fine,” *kalon*) and condemnation (for things “shameful,” *aiskhron*) for all the obvious attractions dotting the political landscape along the campaign trail, but also because they are, as Robert Danisch writes, “constitutive of self, identity, and community” in a style typical of the epideictic mode (*Pragmatism* 120, see “Power” 292 and Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1.9). There is an ongoing disciplinary discussion about classical rhetoric's insistence on the suitability of epideictic in the political sphere: Isocrates and Plato, instructs Brian Vickers, gave “epideictic a social function, reinforcing the norms of public morality” (55), whereas Timmerman and Schiappa note that Aristotle “deemphasized the social and political importance of epideictic” (75). Without putting too fine a point on those distinctions, my sense is that Isocrates' version of a civically comfortable epideictic proves more efficacious when evaluating the memoirs and other campaign habiliments of modern American politicians than does Aristotle's attentiveness to the strictly ceremonial, though always expectantly ethical, prowess of the *phronimos* engaged in praise and blame. I prefer Isocrates' conception of epideictic if for no other reason than I find convincing Elizabeth Markovits's caveat, which we will address further later, that “using appearance to determine interiority” is “deeply problematic for contemporary democratic political life”

(207).

Also, it is fairly easy to assent to Gerard Hauser's claim that epideictic "addresses" a "civic need," since, he writes, "before citizens can imagine the possibility of a vibrant public realm, they require a vocabulary capable of expressing public issues and experiences of publicness" (6). Providing this vocabulary of publicness is a characteristic ambition of campaign memoirs; even if they coquettishly nominate themselves to take the helm, these books at least craft a ship of variably sturdiness for the electorate to embark, and plot a course of variable smoothness for navigating them to some civic shore. These vocabularies need not be relentlessly neoteric in order to influence the electorate to imagine the possibilities of the public realm, since the epideictic mode of campaign memoirs usually trades in what Danisch calls "telling the history of the present," ("Power" 293) and what Dale Sullivan labels "the rhetoric of orthodoxies" ("Ethos" 117). *Fed Up!* assuredly capitalizes on *au courant* anger and anxiety expressed by Tea Party groups, covering axiomatically conservative issues such as the "far-reaching...administrative state" (Chapter 5) and the activism of "unaccountable judges" (Chapter 6). That these memoirs undermine their own deliberative orientations by accenting presently orthodox values is not only an understandable but fundamental dimension of epideictic's ability to "produce," as Danisch puts it, "an intangible sense of public judgment about questions of virtue, not specific policies or laws" (121).

Employing epideictic rhetoric to manifest an "intangible sense of public judgment" is most prominently outlined in Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's *New Rhetoric*, where they described it as having "a lenient tendency," by which they mean that epideictic "tries

to establish,” as they say, “a sense of communion centered around particular values recognized by the audience” (51). The plural possessive pronoun of *Fed Up!*’s subtitle, “Our Fight to Save America from Washington,” makes this communion evident, and this joint struggle becomes a refrain throughout the book, as Perry makes his values commensurate, or, in Burke’s argot, “consubstantial” (which we will discuss more fully in the next chapter) with his audience: “The federal government is not some magical oracle on high,” he writes, “This is *our* government. We get to decide, not them. And frankly,” he chastens, “I am sick and tired of too many of us just sitting around hoping that one day these guys will wake up and actually do the right thing for their country” (174-175, original italics). The punning title’s jibe about being fed up at the federal government is playful, but Perry’s frank acrimony, especially coupled with Perry’s widely reported irascible quips about Texas secession, gives the pun a sharper edge that may unsettle many unintended audiences, which, theoretically, is a majority of the electorate. But as we tell our students: specific intentions for specific audiences are the currency of perceptive analysis, which is to say that what saves *Fed Up!* from being mordantly propagandistic is that Perry is dealing, as Perelman puts it, “with topics which are not an object of controversy to his audience” (52). Instead, *Fed Up!* can be said to serve an educational function, whereby Perry is “commissioned by a community,” Perelman explicates, “to be the spokesman for the values it recognizes,” although it is probably more accurate to call the campaign memoir a job application that, once its educational value is accepted, is retroactively commissioned as speaking for the community (52).

We discussed Perelman's commentary on the educational aspects of epideictic in the previous chapter, and will return to it more fully below, so I will not over-examine it at this point, though I do want to reinforce that he strongly believed, as he states in *The New Rhetoric and the Humanities*, that epideictic is "essential from an educational point of view" (6). Hauser contends that even Aristotle's classical conception of epideictic "italicizes an essential didactic element necessary for a smoothly functioning public sphere to exist" (17). It is not that epideictic has simply the potentiality to influence "intangible sense of public judgment" if it is adroitly employed by strategic rhetors, but that it has, *a priori*, "an effective and distinctive part to play," Perelman extols, "namely, of bringing about a consensus in the minds of the audience regarding the values that are celebrated" (6). Which is not to say that being a skillful rhetor is unimportant: as Poulakos and Poulakos note in their accessible study of classical rhetorical theory, epideictic rhetoric is always about display, a point that Perelman eagerly picks up (*Classical* 145, see 61-67). "In the epideictic, more than in any other kind of oratory," Perelman explains, "the speaker must have qualifications for speaking on the subject and must also be skillful in its presentation" (*New Rhetoric* 52). But I would argue that, given the "essential didactic element" of epideictic, an inartistic rhetors' lack of rhetorical savvy does not preclude, though it may admittedly blunt, the educational effectiveness of their rhetoric, which is good for presidential campaign memoirs that are either logically defective, stylistically deficient, or obviously the product of a mishmash of overburdened staffers working under tight deadlines.

That said, campaign memoirs, despite their essential, distinctive role in crafting

audience consensus, and despite whether or not they are ghostwritten, will ultimately always be about candidates, which is really a way of saying that the accretion over time of candidates' public rhetorical actions establishes their ethos. And "Since epideictic rhetoric is about character and ethos is the portrayal of character," Sullivan relates, "there is a natural link between the two" ("Ethos" 117). With the reminder that ethos is the portrayal of character, we can avoid what Eugene Garver labels the "mistake" of inferring "a real character distinct from such artful character," a point we will press more firmly in Chapter IV (196). In fact, separating innately possessed from facilely exhibited ethos supplies epideictic its educational core, not just because it enunciates, as Perelman convincingly suggests, communally and *kairotically* appropriate values, but because it constructively models for audiences how to hold those values, and how to incorporate those values into their own exhibited ethos, leading to a perpetuation of those values across the civic sphere. In other words, as Garver puts it, "Because ethos is superficial, it is often...conventional, and audiences learn the conventions" (197). In the case of campaign memoirs, it does not hurt, of course, if it also helps to get out the vote.

In *Fed Up!* and similar political books, ethos maintains its classical function as a rhetorical "habitat" (see Halloran, Yoos) where rhetor and audience come together for the specific purpose of preserving convention. The process of turning a book into a habitat is explained by Michael Hyde in his introduction to a volume on the "ethos of rhetoric": "discourse is used to transform space and time into 'dwelling places,'" he writes, riffing on the etymology of ethos, "where people can deliberate about and 'know together'...some matter of interest," and this "use of our inventive and symbolic capacity

to construct dwelling places,” he continues, is “stimulating and aesthetically, psychologically, socially, and perhaps theologically instructive.” (xiii). But in our contemporary civic, and increasingly decentralized digital, world, we have lost, by and large, our traditional opportunities (e.g., the festival, the funeral) to effectively engage epideictic rhetoric on a *polis*-wide scale, even though we have not lost our need to preserve conventional values. “Acts of celebration and display, occasions for the articulation of excellence and tradition, claims for common values and beliefs, and the use of a speaker’s ethos, skill, and aesthetic sensibilities,” Danisch notes, “were all essential rhetorical processes for the maintenance of democracy in classical Athens” (*Pragmatism* 122).

And what was good for Athens then remains useful now when praising Americans in America (see Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* 1367b). For as overweening and opportunistic as campaign memoirs often prove, they serve a useful purpose in what Markovits forebodingly summarizes as our “mass-mediated representative democracy,” because in them we find a chance to “dwell” together long enough to solidify the conventions of the community for whom these memoirs are intended, which is another way of saying that campaign memoirs are educative moments where the ethos of the electorate and the candidate are hybridized (207). In this view, ethos is usefully defined by Stephen Yarbrough as being “interactional,” which he describes as “the set of social relations we project upon a situation that determines how we interact with things”; “We are not our particular beliefs,” he continues, “we have particular beliefs...because of how we stand toward the world ethically” (170). Ethos, in Yarbrough’s view, is really just a “familiarity

with the *topoi* used habitually to solve certain kinds of problems and answer certain kinds of questions” (171). Defining ethos as a practical *techne* for approaching and resolving social and civic concerns amplifies the utility of campaign memoirs, and it compliments Perelman’s directions that, “The orator’s aim in the epideictic genre is not just to gain a passive adherence from his audience but to provoke the action wished for” (7). Or, as Rick Perry writes, in what works as a curiously trenchant epigram for this strand of operative rhetorical theory: “In short, it is not enough to be fed up. We must act” (15).

But the picture of overloaded staffers working tirelessly for their candidate hovers in our minds because it highlights the assembled nature of candidates on the campaign trail. There are some interesting observations to be made about how political operatives influence public perception of the leaders for whom they operate. We can, as example, review a November 2002 speech by Karl Rove at the University of Utah (where he was once a student) entitled “What Makes a President Great” as a study of how a ubiquitous pattern of ethos is constructed by rhetors.⁸ Rove’s speech outlines several “changeless characteristics” of great presidents: 1) “clarity of vision...clarity about the goal, if not always clarity about the method,” 2) “consistency of purpose, but a willingness to change strategy in moments of crisis,” 3) “for good or ill, the legacies that have been left to them by the previous presidents,” 4) “an internal self-confidence,” 5) “a healthy respect for public opinion, but not to be dictated by opinion polls,” 6) be a “successful coalition

⁸ Several books help explain Rove’s relationship with Bush, including his influence on crafting the candidate, and then, the president’s image (and ethos): see James Moore and Wayne Slater’s *Bush’s Brain* (2003) and *The Architect* (2006), Craig Unger’s *Boss Rove* (2012), and Rove’s memoir *Courage and Consequence: My Life as a Conservative in the Fight* (2010).

builder,” 7) “surround himself with a strong team,” and, finally, 8) “there must be a readiness to act and a comfort in deciding.”

Thirteen months after the 9/11 attacks, and four months before the start of “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” Rove’s speech sits on its own knife edge, with America sandwiched between its own “deadly dangers.” In retrospect of course, it seems easier to draw straight lines between the eight characteristics Rove defines as essential to presidential greatness and the well-documented rationales employed by the Bush administration to engage, promote, and defend the March 2003 invasion of Iraq. For Rove, most of these eight characteristics come down to leader as ultimate “decider,” the term Bush was humorously derided for employing in April 2006.⁹ But the term appears in the middle of Rove’s 2002 speech: “One of the great easy deciders was Theodore Roosevelt,” he explains, following with a story of Roosevelt’s decision to build the West Wing “where the garden conservatories were,” a decision lamented by Roosevelt’s wife: “In 1857, Buchanan began building these ornate glass conservatories. Over the years, they had grown and grown and grown. It was a great social highlight of Washington to be able to go, particularly in wintertime, to see the orange trees with the First Lady. Mrs. Roosevelt did not want the conservatories to be removed. She lobbied the architect to find another location for the West Wing. He reported this to Roosevelt, who in characteristic style said, ‘Smash the glass houses.’”

⁹ In Rove and Bush’s defense, there are a handful of instances in the OED of the use of “decider,” starting in the mid-sixteenth century, with none newer than the late nineteenth century, most dealing with either biblical scripture as ultimate arbiter, or the championship of a series of horse races.

Rove is not merely recounting an amusing historical anecdote, but describing what he clearly believes to be an indispensable quality of political leadership in America: national leaders must smash what is comforting to the electorate in order to build something in its place that is new and necessary, that advances national interests. Rove's 2002 speech attempts to generate adherence in his audience so that such descriptions of the desire for *sui generis* leaders are accepted as inevitable and logical and even imperative. This acceptance is sought, and often occurs, even though the exactitude of what voters accept is evidentially questionable because of the snugness with which those requisite characteristics—what we should call the leader's ethos—fit the situations in which they were described. In other words, we accept it even though we sense there is a rhetorical manipulation afoot. Put differently, Rove cannot create Bush's authenticity because, if authentic denotes some inherent reality, that would be a paradoxical rhetorical effort. But Rove can create the rhetorical climate where the audience takes the Bush he presents as authentic, or more precisely, where the desire to take Bush as authentic is heightened. Viewed this way, sincerity is the byproduct of a rhetor's attempt to construct ethos; it is the line up to which audiences will say, "We accept your authenticity, the actual versus perceived authenticity of which is unimportant."

The rhetorical massaging gains traction when the leader manifests the ethos described by the operative as if it were intrinsic to the leader and not a construction of the operative. This is exactly what happened when Bush, four years after this speech by Rove, dubbed himself "the decider." Despite the ribbing Bush took for his lexical misuse, most Americans seemed to understand what it meant, in part because of Rove's

preexisting and persistent ethos-building. Elsewhere, as in this speech, that decider-ness is presented as an inherent Bush characteristic. This formulation of the reciprocal Bush-Rove (leader-operative) relationship, not shockingly, calls into question the viability of adjectives like “misuse” and “his,” suggesting that the operative-constructed ethos of the leader qua leader is not necessarily synonymous with the character of the leader qua individual, though they may wish voters to believe it so. With this managed reciprocity in mind, the most fascinating part of Rove’s 2002 speech is not even in the body proper, but during the subsequent Q&A session when an audience member tosses Rove a slider of a question:

Audience Member: Mr. Rove, it is a real privilege to have you here. One of George W. Bush’s greatest assets seems to be that his opponents always underestimate him. Perhaps you could maybe shed some light on why people seem to do that, and as one who truly knows the president, maybe you could just shed a little light on what makes the president such a great leader and such a good man.

Rove’s response is worth unpacking in its entirety because what follows is approximately eight hundred readily available and highly cogent words, suggesting that, though this response was extemporaneously delivered in response to the audience member’s specific question, its content was not spontaneously generated in Utah, November 2002.

The way Rove embodies Bush as an Everyman has been well-documented, but the practice is perhaps never as immediately obvious as in Rove’s response to the audience member’s question. They underestimate him, Rove begins, “I think because he

is from Midland, Texas, and his idea of a vacation spot is Crawford, Texas, rather than Hyannisport.” But, he immediately continues, “He is one of the best-read people I have ever met. He was a Yale undergraduate, a history major. He has a great sense of history and its forces. He is the first president to be an MBA, a Harvard MBA” Rove announces, “I think a great deal of it is his personal characteristics.” The antecedent to that “it” is left unclear, but we can bridge the gap easily enough: Rove closes the circuit between the general, historical “changeless characteristics” that make presidents great and the “personal characteristics” of this particular president: “He is a person who is centered...I think he is also someone who is driven by a vision.” Here another instance of reciprocity is generated. “Clarity of vision,” a subjective and widely applicable concept, can technically apply to any declaration Bush makes, Rove knows, but such self-conscious and expansive labeling reinforces, reflexively, the notion that the label indicates an essential characteristic of Bush. In fact, this label indicates precisely the sort of constructed, injected ethos to which audiences can, as we will see in the next chapter, decide to assent.

The benefits of presenting an invented, injected ethos as reflexive should be obvious: since audience acceptance is crucial for political success, and audiences remain concerned about authentic exhibitions within campaigns, couching the constructed as the essential, and then pointing out that essential character in action, meets the audience halfway where they want to live, so to speak. Even in the face of massive public disapproval, Bush’s declarations, stemming from his “clarity of vision,” cannot be criticized as tone deaf and stubborn because, to restate Rove’s changeless characteristics,

Bush's persistent adherence to his "vision" exhibits an "internal self-confidence." Or, as Rove explains more fully in answer to the student's question about Bush as "such a great leader and such a good man:"

He knows what he believes. He knows he is not always right. He has an ease in making decisions. He has a vision of where he wants to go, a comfort that he is going to do the best he can do, and if people don't like it, he is going back to Crawford, Texas and mosey around his sixteen hundred acres, get a new pair of boots, watch baseball games, and read some good books.

This statement concludes Rove's response to the student, and it is here that we see Rove emphatically conflating the conceptual "great president" with the current president, a man who likes both to "mosey" and "read some good books." A great president maintains "a healthy respect for public opinion, but not to be dictated by opinion polls," while Bush "is going to do the best he can do;" a great president must be maintain "a readiness to act and a comfort in deciding," while Bush "has an ease in making decisions." "[H]e is successful because he is a person who is entirely comfortable in his own skin," Rove summarizes. Rove's response embodies scholar David Runciman's claim that "To rule in a modern state is by definition to play a kind of double roll—that of the everyman who is also the only person with real power" (39). These kinds of character value statements straddle a line between description and assertion, a stance that complicates not just their rhetorical function, but the reliability of authenticity cues within the acts in which that rhetoric is functioning.

If Rove's speech consists of more than simply descriptive declamations celebratory in focus, i.e., the classical epideictic mode, then what (else) is its function? The answer perhaps is that it operates as a sort of Trojan horse epideictic from whence the rudiments of political bulwarks are raised. Rove hypothesizes that most presidents are not "called upon to deal with the greatness of the times," and it is obvious within his speech that Rove wants his audience to believe that Bush in the pre-9/11, early 2000s was exactly such a rare leader at exactly such a rare time. So, the purpose of his speech, beyond approbation, is to prepare the earth for the building of those bulwarks. That someone in the audience asks Rove to explain why Bush was "such a great leader and such a good man" illustrates how readily that preparation can be accomplished, or, in other words, how readily receptive and friendly audiences are willing to accept a leader's (or candidate to be a leader) constructed ethos as rhetorically homonymic for the leader's essential character.¹⁰ In building bulwarks, it seems, if the operative forges the shovel, the audience is likely to do the digging.

In their *New Rhetoric*, Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca suggest that, "the speaker engaged in epideictic discourse is very close to being an educator." Since the function of the epideictic mode is conventionally celebratory, they explain, "what he is going to say does not arouse controversy" because the speaker is "simply promoting values that are shared in the community" (52). In this sense, Rove is an educator, if by that term we understand the act of education as the establishment of a reiterable framework by which the world is made intelligible for audiences. Less kindly, it is an

¹⁰ And we can, I think, take this young man's question as legitimate. There's no evidence I can uncover suggesting that he was a plant.

education where the educator both defines the word and quizzes its meaning. The problem with their explanation, though, is that their assumption that “no immediate practical interest is ever involved” fails to acknowledge the dual-purpose epideictic mode highlighted here by Rove. I would argue that Rove’s speech had definite “practical interests” beyond panegyric: for Rove it was the (re)introduction of Bush’s character, and more significantly, the casting of that character as authentically Bush’s, so both can act as pre-established, or, seemingly intrinsic, keys waiting for audiences to unlock the justifications behind, for instance, the administration’s posture towards the global war on terror, preemptive invasion, and post-9/11 foreign policy. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca are absolutely right, though later chapters will outline some limits to it, that speakers’ “own authority” over audiences helps them “increase the intensity of adherence to values held in common by the audience and the speaker.” Certainly Rove, et al. understood and utilized this fact, illustrated by the Bush administration’s rhetoric leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, even before the tragic events of September 2001.

In the second presidential debate of the 2000 campaign, Bush proclaimed that, “I think the United States must be humble and must be proud and confident of our values, but humble in how we treat nations that are figuring out how to chart their own course.” Later, he would expand on that statement, claiming that, “If we’re an arrogant nation, they’ll resent us; if we’re a humble nation, but strong, they’ll welcome us. And our nation stands alone right now in the world in terms of power, and that’s why we’ve got to be humble, and yet project strength in a way that promotes freedom.” Bush’s comments are interesting because they illustrate the administration’s seamless transition, in terms of

both rhetoric and policy, from freedom projected to freedom protected that occurred between 2000 and 2003. And given contemporary uneasiness with the 9/11 attacks (situated in the middle of this three-year period), it is understandable that critical questioning was in short supply, especially considering the conscious construction of Bush's character as prepared for this sort of extraordinary crisis.¹¹ Pyszczynski, Solomon, and Greenberg's *In the Wake of 9/11: The Psychology of Terror* suggests that Bush's post-9/11 ethos derived from "his image as a protective shield against death, armed with high-tech weaponry, patriotic rhetoric, and the resolute invocation of doing God's will to 'rid the world of evil.'" In other words, American's own post-9/11 "worldview defense" dovetails with the sort of qualities and characteristics presciently expressed by Karl Rove in his 2002 speech from above, i.e., "a readiness to act and a comfort in deciding," "an ease in making decisions," "a consistency of purpose, but a willingness to change strategy in moments of crisis," and "an internal self-confidence," a willingness, when necessary, to "smash glass houses."

In November 2001, Wall Street Journal columnist Peggy Noonan presaged Pyszczynski, Solomon, and Greenberg's speculations, and even Rove's cogitations, on the Bush ethos:

The charismatic figure Mr. Bush follows is the last big American president, the last who had the massive presence of a battleship, Ronald Reagan. People kept wondering last year during the election if Mr. Bush had it in him to be a Reagan. I

¹¹ Certainly not all audiences seamlessly and unilaterally accepted the administration's rhetoric, but exceptions, like former *Knight Ridder* (now *McClatchy*) reporters Jonathan Landay and Warren Strobel, are noteworthy.

thought maybe he did. But now as I watch him I think: Truman. Harry Truman did it all through gut and instinct and character. He was a good man who loved his country. He loved to read history and could quote Ovid, but he was no intellectual, not a man of strikingly original thought; his mind wasn't so much creative as quick, and solid as a rock. He grew into the job, on a steep learning curve, forced by history to absorb facts and decide quickly. He didn't know about the atom bomb until the first week of his presidency. Mr. Bush has been on a similar steep curve, forced to absorb and decide quickly, and his decisions too seem to have been issued from a mind that's quick and solid as a rock.

Three years later (in May 2004) she writes that, "I think Mr. Bush is admired and liked after three years of war, terror, strife and recession because people have eye." "They look at him, listen to him, and watch him every day," Noonan continues, before concluding:

They can tell that George W. Bush is looking out for America. They can tell he means it. They can see his sincerity. They can tell he is doing his best. They understand his thinking because he tells them his thinking. They think he may be right. They're not sure, but at least they understand his thinking . . . Americans do not think Mr. Bush has a persona to dazzle history, they think he is the average American man, but the average American man as they understand the term: straight shooter, hard worker, decent, America-loving, God-loving.

For Noonan, Bush's "resolute invocation of doing God's will to 'rid the world of evil'" is precisely what was called for in those troubled times. She applauds presidential characteristics that utilize "gut and instinct and character." She appreciates that Bush is

not an intellectual, but could, theoretically, like Truman, “quote Ovid.” And she values a president who does “his best,” so long as “he means it.” Indeed, she wants her president to be sincere, to be a “straight shooter,” to be Runciman’s “everyman” with all the power. Noonan wants the “worldview defense” president; a president who projects a “protective shield” behind which civic audiences may huddle during confusing and confused times.

One reason the electorate accepted, even resonated with, those moments when Bush’s non-interventionism (pre-2001) shifted towards subtle interventionism (2001-2003), then shifted again towards his embracing of preemptive invasion (post-2003) is, I suspect, because his ideological migration seemed unsurprising and apropos given the circumstances of crisis. As Noonan points out in her column titled “Plainspoken Eloquence” (after Bush’s “axis of evil” *State of the Union* address in 2002), “A great gut plus a reliable character is maybe the exact perfect mix for any president, but certainly for a wartime president.” In other words, he acted as a “natural leader,” who alone is capable of incarnating a national attitude that explains and sanctions the political response. Or, more accurately considered, because of the rhetorical groundwork laid by Bush, his dutiful operatives, and encouraging pundits, audiences were more likely to accept as “natural” his administration’s response as fortuitous interplay of extraordinary circumstances and individual character. It is certainly not a foregone conclusion, my dissertation argues, that audiences are automatically accepting, but it is logical that audiences are likely to be more receptive when so much effort goes into shaping the rhetorical situation in ways that make acceptance both situationally understandably and, frankly, cognitively easy.

Just as those qualifications Rove outlined in his 2002 speech about what makes a president great do not necessarily represent intrinsic character as much as an epideictic proposition that audiences can (and must) ultimately either accept or reject, so too is the national attitude to be incarnated up for negotiation. The trouble, clearly, is what happens when an audience is disinclined to negotiate, let alone assent. Does the leader's ethos become authoritative by default simply because of the inherent authority of the office? Can someone who possesses uncontested authority be considered a "natural" leader, since there is no method for testing the substantiality of that naturalness? "I wrote to one of Mr. Bush's aides the other day," Noonan relays in her 2001 article, "a smart and gifted man, and he sent back a note saying the most moving thing that has happened to him the past two months is 'seeing that George Bush is a great man—a truly great man.'" The note asserting Bush's greatness from an administrative insider that Noonan takes as evidence of Bush's innate greatness is emblematic of the way accepting natural, unmediated ethos is often the end of a long process of calculated strategy intended to manage the authenticity cues present in rhetorical acts directed at the electorate.

If Noonan, like the University of Utah audience member who called Bush "such a good man," merely accepts an obviously constructed version of Bush's ethos as natural instead of recognizing the mechanism of rhetorical strategy, perhaps she did not presage Rove after all. I quote Noonan at length above because I think it is instructive to notice the difference in tone between the first block quotation, written in 2001, and the second, written in 2004. In the first quotation Noonan reflects on what she sees as Bush's Harry Truman-like quality to make quick decisions "from a mind that's quick and solid as a

rock.” This Bush, like Truman, could conceivably quote Ovid, admittedly no intellect, but possessed of “strikingly original thought.” In the second quotation there is a subtle shift: gone is the “strikingly original thought,” replaced by a stolid “average American man.” Now, Bush is a president whose thinking Americans “understand.” He is not a dazzling “persona,” but Americans think he may be “right” nonetheless. In between the 2001 and 2004 quotations by Noonan is Rove’s 2002 speech emphasizing Bush as Everyman, suggesting a correlation between the rhetorical practices of political operatives and the taking up of those rhetorical acts by the electorate, as represented by Noonan, in the “reiterable framework” discussed earlier. We see, perhaps, the results of Rove’s role as a Perelmanian epideictic educator in the rhetoric of Noonan.

It is entirely possible that George W. Bush is an all-around great person; it is more likely that he is part great and part less great, just like the rest of us. In any case, my point is not to argue with either Noonan or Rove about whether or not Bush was a natural leader and a great man. As stated at the outset of my dissertation, I am disinterested in anything other than the effects of authenticity cues on rhetorical acts. More broadly, we can wonder if the notion of natural leadership is either *a priori* or *a posteriori* phenomenon. That is, can leaders act natural, or does performance of natural leadership require a rooting in something authentic? What, even, is connoted by that word “natural?” Someone who possesses essential leadership, genuine leadership, unaffected leadership, unrestrained leadership, etc.? Noonan wants her leader to be a “straight shooter,” because it is important, for her, that voters “can see his sincerity.” It is in the

application of and relationship with sincerity that I think we get to the rhetorical heart of the natural leader.

In his December 2009 *New Yorker* riposte to former Alaskan Governor Sarah Palin's then-recently released autobiography, *Going Rogue: An American Life*, journalist and American political historian Sam Tanenhaus exclaims that Palin "offers the erasure of any distinction—in skill, experience, intellect—between the governing and the governed." And though it is clear where Tanenhaus stands on the matter, the question of whether or not the erasure of distinction between the governing and the governed is good, bad, or indifferent is one that hovers, purposefully without decisive answer, over this chapter. Tanenhaus is similarly confident in his answer on the consequences of any erasure of distinction, another hovering question that this chapter, this time more decisively, attempts to answer. If the distinction between governing and governed is erased, did the governing become more like the governed, or vice versa? Tanenhaus articulates exactly what distinctions Palin's public presence has erased by comparing Palin, using a move from Noonan's playbook (though with different results), to her Republican contemporaries and idols. There is a contemporary figure like Colin Powell, "perhaps the one remaining figure in American politics who could plausibly present himself as a hero in the classic sense," not just for his military record, but because he maintains an "aura of remoteness." Harry S Truman, whom Palin lionized in her 2008 Republican National Convention speech, was driven, according to Tanenhaus, by an "appetite for betterment" that helped him prepare "for some future exemplary role" in a "historical destiny that he hoped, against all odds, he might someday fulfill." Even

Ronald Reagan, Palin's biggest ideological crush, and the man who, Tanenhaus claims, "personified the ideal of the citizen politician," and "immersed himself in solitary preparation" while "cultivating an air of almost imperial remoteness." For Tanenhaus, to summarize, the defining characteristic of the governing is an aspiration to "the heroic ideal," which includes the long development of intellectual exactitude, the will to succeed, and a slight personal detachment from the surrounding world: a demanding and commendable mixture of Matthew Arnold, Rocky Balboa, and Frank Sinatra.

On the other hand is Palin, full of "opportunism," "persistent self-aggrandizement," and seemingly most horrific, an "insistent ordinariness" while lacking "the sense of moral or intellectual progress." "She (or her collaborator)," Tanenhaus points out about *Going Rogue*, "sprinkles nuggets from Plato and Pascal, but is more convincing when she cites a motivational maxim from 'author and former football coach Lou Holtz.'" To be fair, it is not that Tanenhaus dislikes ordinariness; his complaint is that Palin's dwelling on her own ordinariness "is not an expression of humility but of egotism, the certitude that simply being herself, in whatever unfinished condition, will always be good enough." By most accounts Sarah Palin probably does possess a heavy egotism, so Tanenhaus is accurate to conclude that, "The true meaning of Palinism is Sarah Palin." Even Republican stalwart, and, as we saw, Bush apologist, Peggy Noonan agrees: "Her presentation up to the end has been scattered, illogical, manipulative and self-referential to the point of self-reverence. 'I'm not wired that way,' 'I'm not a quitter,' 'I'm standing up for our values.' I'm, I'm, I'm."

But when Tanenhaus reduces Palin's interactions with the public to a manipulative strand of identity politics shrunk from the broad conventions of social groups to a conservative "singular self," he too quickly condenses the binary gravitational pull between Palin and her audiences, as does Noonan when she barbs Palin, writing that she "wasn't thoughtful enough to know she wasn't thoughtful enough." And what Tanenhaus and Noonan dismiss, or at least do not discuss in their relatively brief articles, is that the extent to which Palin's insistence on "ordinariness" is a manifestation of her run-wild egotism is of relatively little consequence to the resulting rhetorical effects. By limiting their investigations to trying to determine precisely how much ego Sarah Palin possesses, and then trying to measure how much of that ego seeps into her public presentations, they make the recurring and common mistake of overemphasizing the importance of needing an authentically stable Sarah Palin in order to understand her rhetorical and political influences on public political discourse.

Critics simultaneously and paradoxically emphasize the degree to which Palin's insistence on ordinariness protests, for them, too much, while simultaneously emphasizing what they take as her unrelentingly actual ordinariness: the former makes her disingenuous and unfit for leadership, and the latter makes unexceptional and unfit for leadership. In other words, they claim that she is authentically ordinary while also claiming that she is playing up her ordinariness for the sake of her audience, using both claims as evidence of her unfitness to lead. This chapter concedes that those two thoughts can both be either true or false, and happily conflictual, since it is largely disinterested in whether or not someone is, ontologically speaking, faking it. As we will see, knowingly

lying to the electorate is widely different from cultivating character, but cultivating character is not so different, rhetorically speaking at least, from possessing in some inherent sense authentic character.

Noonan's problem is that she can never really pinpoint for certain the "I" behind all of Palin's "I'm" statements, or ever really know for sure that she had, even if she could. But that does not stop her from trying: "She was limited in her ability to explain and defend her positions, and sometimes in knowing them," Noonan indicts, "She couldn't say what she read because she didn't read anything," concluding, "She was utterly unconcerned by all this and seemed in fact rather proud of it: It was evidence of her authenticity." Noonan's tone—"she was out of her depth in a shallow pool"—reveals her judgment about the quality of Palin's "evidence," and we can appreciate Noonan's frustration with a potential national political leader who seems underprepared for office, even willfully so. But what seems most to steam Noonan is the same thing that vexes Tanenhaus: the erasure of any distinction between the governing and the governed. What bothers them is not just that Palin did not read books and newspapers, but that she used not doing so to insist upon erasure, to insist, as Noonan suggests, that not doing so was evidence of an ubiquitous and authentic American ethos of ordinariness that she, Sarah Palin, shared with her audience, much to the chagrin of those politicians with "heroic ideals."

That Palin often referenced during the campaign the heroism of her presidential running mate, Arizona Senator John McCain, whose years in Hoa Lo Prison as a prisoner of war were an undeniably tragic and atypical experience, seems to undercut her

insistence on ordinariness, which it very well might if we accept the way Tanenhaus and Noonan have framed its use as a stable egotistical quality rather than, as we will discuss, a multi-interlocutory public arrangement. “To the most powerful office on Earth,” Palin claimed of McCain during her 2008 Republican National Convention (RNC) speech, “he would bring the compassion that comes from having once been powerless ... the special confidence of those who have seen evil, and seen how evil is overcome,” continuing that, “A fellow prisoner of war, a man named Tom Moe of Lancaster, Ohio, recalls looking through a pinhole in his cell door as Lieutenant Commander John McCain was led down the hallway, by the guards, day after day.” “When McCain shuffled back from torturous interrogations,” she concludes, “he would turn toward Moe’s door and flash a grin and thumbs up, as if to say, ‘We’re going to pull through this.’ My fellow Americans, that is the kind of man America needs to see us through these next four years.”

It is a little unclear exactly what “kind of man” Palin thinks McCain is and America needs: the kind of man who possesses a compassion born of powerlessness; the kind of man with the special confidence to overcome evil? Certainly these, but also, it seems, the kind of man who, though a mid-level Naval officer returning from daily torturous interrogations, still has the fortitude to give his fellow POW a commonplace goodwill gesture. Tanenhaus might claim that any act of defiance makes McCain heroic, but Palin seems impressed by the gesture itself: the ordinary thumbs up. I think it is fair to suggest that what Palin takes away from Tom Moe’s story is that, even in the face of unimaginably difficult circumstances, McCain managed to insist on the ordinary. His rank and family connections did not matter, or, more accurately, were subsumed to the

task of communicating with, connecting to his fellow POWs. “It’s a long way from the fear and pain and squalor of a 6-by-4 cell in Hanoi to the Oval Office. But if Sen. McCain is elected president, that is the journey he will have made,” Palin explains, adding, “It’s the journey of an upright and honorable man.” But it is crucial that this uprightness and honor is not limited to senators and presidential candidates from established Navy families: for Palin this upright and honorable man is, “the kind of fellow whose name you will find on war memorials in small towns across this country.” In fact, the “only” distinction between the presidential candidate and those men who are represented on those small-town war memorials is that McCain “was among those who came home.”

I find Palin’s rhetoric at this moment, and many others like it, interesting because it comes across as tautology. The Lou Holtz quotation Tanenhaus glibly references in his review of *Going Rogue* epigraphically begins the book’s first chapter: “I don’t believe that God put us on earth to be ordinary,” the former football coach at the University of Arkansas and Notre Dame is quoted as saying (1). As the first words we encounter when reading Palin’s memoir, we can perhaps give them merit as a sort of summative statement on the “American Life” afterward described. But what is the implication? That Sarah Palin sees herself as living a life that is more than ordinary? Or, and I think this interpretation gives an internal consistency to her rhetoric, that there is no such thing as an ordinary life, regardless of matter how mundane or eventful the experiences comprising that life have been?¹² The obvious tautology is insisting on ordinariness while

¹² Perhaps the most perceptive and trenchant explanation of Palin’s national political career is director Elia Kazan’s 1957 film *A Face in the Crowd*, starring Andy Griffith as Dusty Rhodes, a drifter whose discovery and promotion by media executives turns him

listening to Coach Holtz's exclamation that God does not want us to be ordinary. It is the same tautology that underwrites Palin's epideictic mode during her 2008 RNC speech about her running mate: McCain has experiences that are dramatically not ordinary, and these have helped forge his character and prepare him for national leadership, but it is the everyday aplomb he exhibits during those trying experiences that are most worth concluding the encomium, and the speech in its entirety. Quoting mid-century conservative columnist Westbrook Pegler, Palin, in the same RNC speech, introduces her résumé to the electorate: "We grow good people in our small towns, with honesty, sincerity, and dignity." Shifting away from Pegler, she begins her own rumination on small town America:

I know just the kind of people that writer had in mind when he praised Harry Truman. I grew up with those people. They are the ones who do some of the hardest work in America who grow our food, run our factories and fight our wars. They love their country, in good times and bad, and they're always proud of America. I had the privilege of living most of my life in a small town.

At this point Palin's rhetoric is typical election panegyric, singing the praises, to bend a phrase, of the Athenians to the Athenians. There is a whiff of the same tautology of

into a nationwide folksy populist sensation and, eventually (and, we all know, inevitably) into a power-hungry kingmaker who uses demagoguery to amass further fame and fortune even while continuing to spin a yarn of himself as an ah-shucks everyman. After he is exposed as a fraud, we see him in his newly built mansion, tuxedo askew and bourbon half drunk, standing near a once-congratulatory but now indicting rally sign reading, "There's nothing as trustworthy...as the ordinary mind—of the ordinary man." It is unclear if the implication is that Rhodes, despite his humble beginnings, was an extraordinary person all along, a wolf in sheep's clothing, or if this ruination is the way the world ends for all ordinary people whose reach exceeds their grasp.

ordinariness that surrounds Palin's description of McCain, though this time around it centers on Harry Truman, a man whose honesty, sincerity, and dignity are a result of being "grown" in a small town. The same Harry Truman who Tanenhaus suggested felt an inescapable "historical destiny" for which he voraciously prepared.

And yet again, the same tautological whiff surrounds Palin's own tale of herself. Clearly she counts herself among Pegler's "good people" grown in small towns:

I had the privilege of living most of my life in a small town. I was just your average hockey mom and signed up for the PTA because I wanted to make my kids' public education better. When I ran for City Council, I didn't need focus groups and voter profiles because I knew those voters, and knew their families, too. Before I became governor of the great state of Alaska, I was mayor of my hometown.

Palin's "privilege" of living in a small town inculcates an ordinariness in her, which she quantifies in herself as "just your average hockey mom." In her telling, this average hockey mom-ness gave her an advantage with voters when she decided to run for public office because she knew the voters; she knew the citizens in her small town in the sense that she was actually acquainted with them, but in another sense she "knew" them because she was like them. ("Like them" relates, of course, to Kenneth Burke's concept of identification, particularly identification's potential to allow separate substances, i.e., discrete socio-rhetorical entities, to "act-together" in "consubstantial" ways, a phenomenon we will explore more fully in the next chapter.) The rub, of course, is that most citizens do not think of their fellow citizens as voters, and most do not parlay small

town local councilships into statewide governorships, national presidential campaigns, and countrywide autobiographical book-signing tours.

Tautologies like these, i.e., focusing on the ordinary in the extraordinary, are easily dismissed on the campaign trail as the contradictory and clumsy rhetoric of someone who is not ready for the political primetime, because tautologies, as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca put it, “will be criticized as totally uninteresting, since it teaches us nothing new” (*New Rhetoric* 216). But Perelman believes we can better understand the value of tautology if we reduce the “charge” of tautology, which “amounts to presenting an assertion as the result of a definition, of a purely linguistic convention, which tells us nothing about the empirical relations which one phenomenon may have with another.” “It presupposes,” he continues, “that the definitions are arbitrary...and independent of experience.” There is no evidence that Palin has read Perelman’s *New Rhetoric*, but her public performances on the 2008 campaign trail suggest that she intuits his meaning that definitions can never be fully understood independent of experience, and that rhetoric can never be accomplished without taking into account other people’s experiences, as indicated by their use of unique definitions. “But inasmuch as this is not the case,” Perelman confirms, continuing, “inasmuch as definitions are connected with a theory which can provide original insights, the charge of tautology loses its force.”

In the case of Sarah Palin, though extrapolated to other political candidates easily enough, the definition in focus for Sarah Palin is Sarah Palin. If we remember the charge ending Tanenhaus’s article, that, “The true meaning of Palinism is Sarah Palin,” we get a sense of the less robust ways to view Palin’s public rhetoric, in action and effect,

especially when we add in his subsequent punchline: “—nothing more and nothing less.” But as a popular political and cultural phenomenon, and as a rhetorical entity, there is clearly more to Sarah Palin’s “Palinism” than selfishness and sophistry, even if we accurately admit that those elements are also present. The task, as I suggested earlier, is tracing out the theory that makes Palin’s tautologies internally consistent, linking definitions to the experiences that influence them in equitable ways that produce understanding and reduce misunderstanding in her audiences. And, as I mentioned earlier, Palin developed a theory of ordinariness during her campaign run and subsequent public performances. The “status” of the theory, Perelman explains, “is tied to that of the definitions on which they are based.” Or, as he helpfully reiterates, “Use is made of a formal identity between two terms which cannot be identical if the statement is to be of any interest” (217).

In early October 2008, during the one and only Vice Presidential debate, moderator Gwen Ifill asked Palin about her experience: “The conventional wisdom, Governor Palin, with you is that your Achilles heel is that you lack experience.” Palin’s response, in part, offers a glimpse of her theory of the ordinary:

My experience as an executive will be put to good use as a mayor and business owner and oil and gas regulator and then as governor of a huge state, a huge energy producing state that is accounting for much progress towards getting our nation energy independence and that’s extremely important. But it wasn’t just that experience tapped into, it was my connection to the heartland of America. Being a mom, one very concerned about a son in the war, about a special needs child,

about kids heading off to college, how are we going to pay those tuition bills? About times and Todd and our marriage in our past where we didn't have health insurance and we know what other Americans are going through as they sit around the kitchen table and try to figure out how are they going to pay out of pocket for health care? We've been there also so that connection was important.

For Tanenhaus, Palin's response will no doubt sound egotistical and tautological, further damning evidence that "the certitude that simply being herself, in whatever unfinished condition, will always be good enough." But I think that something else is going on here, or, at least that Palin would not agree that Tanenhaus's evidence is so damning. Searching equitably for internal consistency means accommodating that, for Palin, being executive of a state is valued the same as being executive of a family, both offering a set of leadership skills that can be usefully shuttled between different situations for which leadership is needed. This formulation seems to collapse the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary, resulting in, for Palin, a workable status along the axiomatic, and tautological, lines that, "to consider everything extraordinary is to consider everything ordinary," and vice versa. We can offer alternative theories from Palin on how different situations need different leadership skills, or we can criticize her for being underprepared for the position that she seeks based on her own definitions, but to accuse her of insincerity, to suggest that she knows that governors and mothers are not the same sort of leader but is hoping clumsily to spackle over that difference, is simply to overrun her yoking of experience to definitions with our own.

We can productively quarrel with candidates, with whom many of us are bound vigorously to disagree, while giving her public rhetorical presence, despite our vigorous disagreements, an equitable reception and investigation.¹³ In the case of Sarah Palin, this may mean acknowledging her collapse of the ordinary and the extraordinary into a uniform well of experience from which a person so willing can pull for political sustenance, whether they are corporate raiders, community organizers, or familial caregivers. And it may also mean acknowledging when, by her own theory, she makes rhetorical missteps, as when, during a North Carolina fundraising speech in late October 2008, she extolled the virtues of “these wonderful little pockets of what I call the real America,” and expressed her joy at “being here with all of you hard-working, very patriotic, very pro-America areas of this great nation.” If there is little distinction between Lieutenant Commander McCain and Tom Moe, or between Palin as Governor and Mom, then it is fairly obvious how drawing a distinction between “real America” and some presumably unreal anti-America exhibits an internal fallacy eroding her theory’s status, threatening to shift her rhetorical footing from the tautological ground rescued by Perelman, to the arrogantly pleonastic.¹⁴ In a CNN interview days after her North

¹³ Vigorous disagreement has a lot to do with emotional responses to argument, of course. For a thorough contemporary overview of emotion, or what he calls “moral intuition,” in public spheres, see Jonathan Haidt’s *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* (2012). Of similar interest, see W. Russell Neuman, et al.’s edited volume *The Affect Effect* (2007) and Drew Weston’s *The Political Brain* (2007).

¹⁴ For a review of the uses of civility and incivility in Palin’s campaign, see chapter two of Susan Herbst’s *Rude Democracy* (2010). Herbst’s characterization of Palin as “a fine exemplar of using incivility in strategic manner” strikes me as an accurate way to frame the Palin campaign’s M.O., but I do not think that was the entire story of her rhetorical

Carolina speech, Palin apologized for suggesting that some parts of America are more “real” than others, but the phrase stuck in the public consciousness as both a rally cry and a punchline, depending on the way audiences read Palin’s verdict on America as a verdict rendered on herself: either she was a small-town, straight-talking maverick, or she was a backwoods, backwards ditz.¹⁵ Having taken Perelman’s advice to pay attention to the specific (and perhaps unique) definitional usages at play in the rhetorical statements of others helps us discover “original insights” in tautologies, but we are not obligated to accept those insights. In fact, attentiveness to definitional usages, while offering maximal respect to rhetors, gives audiences expanded opportunities to dissent more explicitly to rhetors whose rhetorical acts we find unconvincing, incomplete, and duplicitous.

Even more pragmatically, attentiveness to definitional usages in rhetorical acts obviates the responsibility to worry ourselves too much about accurately reading authenticity cues, especially those concerned with guessing if the manifestations of sincerity are either artless or strategic. The remainder of this chapter will discuss the difficulties inherent in this generally self-imposed responsibility to guess. From its etymological emergence in English in the mid-sixteenth century, sincerity has denoted purity, and it is hard upon this original usage that sincerity comes to denote genuineness, straightforwardness, and, as the OED phrases it “freedom” from falsification,

effects (57). For (an admittedly less useful) companion to Herbst, see Benjamin DeMott’s *Junk Politics: The Trashing of the American Mind* (2004).

¹⁵ A transcript of that interview on CNN, from 21 October 2008, is available at <<http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/10/21/palin.sitroom.transcript/>>.

dissimulation, and duplicity.¹⁶ Beginning a series of lectures on sincerity and authenticity at Harvard in 1970, Lionel Trilling succinctly defines sincerity as “a congruence between avowal and actual feeling” (2). In the introduction to their volume on the way sincerity and rhetoric “play themselves out in cross- and intercultural confrontations,” the editors Ernst van Alphen and Mieke Bal write, “Traditionally, sincerity concerns a natural enactment of authenticity anchored in, and yielding, truth.” “Moreover,” they continue, “sincerity is considered fundamentally corporeal rather than textual” (1). Soon, however, trouble arises.

First, David Runciman reminds us that we must “acknowledge that some element of hypocrisy is inevitable in our political life,” conceding that “it becomes self-defeating simply to try to guard against it” (12). Trilling’s approach is even more direct: discussing the “historical account of sincerity,” informs the reader only a few pages after his definition of the word that sincerity will experience “its eventual decline, the sharp diminution of the authority in once exercised” (6). Alphen and Bal write that “Though many no longer believe in the traditional notion of subjectivity, sincerity, it appears, has been more difficult to relinquish, and thus remains,” they conclude, “unreflectively present in many social discourses” (3). Nearly forty years after Trilling announces the slow death of sincerity, scholars continue to note its doggedness.

¹⁶ See R. Jay Magill Jr.’s *Sincerity* (2012) for an ancestry of sincerity (a “moral idea”) traced across art, culture, and politics, historic to contemporary. Magill’s text is briefly bookended by concerns over Palin’s sincerity, and he concludes, rather unhelpfully, that “Sarah Palin is certainly sincere in her belief that she is a maverick. She’s just not right about it” (232). As I have tried to indicate throughout, I am less interested in judging whether or not she is right than in exploring why she thinks she is right, and, even more interestingly, exploring why some audiences think she is right.

It may be, however, that Trilling and these contemporary scholars are not so far apart after all. Alphen and Bal contend that the fallout from poststructuralism's undermining of subjectivity is that the "acting aspect" of sincerity can be more accurately perceived; sincerity "consists of a performance," "a 'doing' instead of a 'being'" (3). This doing-centric performance encompasses those rhetorical habits we see enacted in the memoirs of candidates and the public maneuvering by their campaign staffs. The implicit argument is that, today, sincerity is considered fundamentally textual rather than corporeal. Trilling does not go as far as suggesting that sincerity's traditional dimensions of genuineness and freedom from dissimulation—an increasingly appropriate choice of word, given Alphen and Bal's insistence on the "theatricality" of sincerity's performance in current public discourses—are completely relinquished, but he does admit that:

If sincerity has lost its former status, if the word itself has for us a hollow sound and seems almost to negate its meaning, that is because it does not propose being true to one's own self as an end but as a means... The moral end in view implies a public end in view, with all that this suggests of the esteem and fair repute that follow upon the correct fulfillment of a public role (9).

Like Alphen and Bal, Trilling seems here to acknowledge that sincerity remains "present in many social discourses," though the action of his lectures is to make that presence decidedly "reflective." Sincerity, for the editors, "is an indispensable affective (hence, social) process between subjects" (5). Trilling is less esoteric: after ending with the "correct fulfillment of a public role," he confesses, "I did not deliberately choose that last word [role]. It came readily—naturally—to hand. We nowadays say 'role' without taking

thought of its original histrionic meaning...But the old histrionic is present whether or not we let ourselves be aware of it, and it brings with it the idea that somewhere under all the roles there is Me, the poor old ultimate actuality” (9-10).

Whether or not there is, in fact, an “ultimate actuality” burdened and obscured by having to perform other roles in social discourses is not really the focus of either this chapter or this dissertation, being perhaps more readily and usefully resolved in the pages of a psychologist’s dissertation than in a rhetorician’s. For our purposes it is Trilling’s conclusion that proves useful, at least so far as aligning his definition of modern sincerity with those of scholars like Alphen and Bal: “It is surely no accident,” he says, that:

the idea of sincerity, of the own self and the difficulty of knowing and showing it, should have arisen to vex men’s minds in the epoch that saw the sudden efflorescence of the theater...In this enterprise of presenting the self, of putting ourselves on the social stage, sincerity itself plays a curiously compromised part. Society requires of us that we present ourselves as being sincere, and the most efficacious way of satisfying this demand is to see to it that we really are sincere, that we actually are what we want our community to know we are. In short, we play the role of being ourselves” (10-11).

The takeaway for Trilling is that if “we sincerely act the part of the sincere person,” the result is that “a judgement [sic] may be passed upon our sincerity that it is not authentic” (11). I suspect the reason Trilling believes sincerity’s role (as it were) in social discourses is “curiously compromised” is precisely because of the “fundamentally textual nature” of non-traditional sincerity that Alphen and Bal value.

Though it takes some teasing out, in her essay near the end of Alphen and Bal's volume, Maaïke Bleeker helps us articulate what it is we value about a fundamentally textual variety of sincerity: if the problem with sincerity in modern discourse, as she pinpoints it, is that of "knowing [or not] the relationship between a person's inner motivation and her or his external performance," her solution is to work on "accepting the fundamentally theatrical character" of sincerity, especially as it plays itself out in realms political (247, 256). "The idea of representational democracy," she continues, "is fundamentally theatrical in the sense that it is not based on political actors acting on their own accord but on political actors acting for others and representing their interests or, at least, having to give the impression of representing the interests of those they represent" (256-257). If we accept that an inherent responsibility of political actors is to represent, to perform, the interests of their constituents, an acceptance easily given, a deceptively startling implication arises, which Bleeker summarizes well for us: "What is needed, therefore, is not that [political actors] say what [they] think is sincere and true to [their] inner beliefs, but rather that we can trust what [they] say" (252). Bleeker is suggesting that we become unconcerned with the "mimetic gap" between the character of a political actor and the character played by that actor. Instead, "What is required in politics is not sincerity or authenticity," she posits, "but reliability" (252-253).

The wisdom of Booth's method of assenting suggests itself again. In a quotation we will discuss more fully in Chapter IV, Booth describes the fundamental "art" of assenting as "assessing degrees of reliability" (*Dogma* 157). Part of the value of this modern conception of sincerity, what Bleeker labels a "sincere simulation," but what we

can also refer to as an image, is the self-contained acknowledgement that political actors, i.e., candidates and politicians, “act as sincerely as possible, not according to their own intentions, but to the presumed intentions of those they represent,” requiring them to “incorporate a point of view about these political acts, including assumptions about what would look convincing, true, and right” (259). In other words, politicians are as obligated to read their constituents as constituents are to read politicians, meaning that campaigning requires more interactive effort than developing and dropping into the field a blinkered ethos treated as a brand for voters to rate and rank the same way they would competing sodas. “The fact that politicians have learned to manipulate images,” Booth assuages, “means simply that it is harder to obtain relevant indications of character, not that indications of character are no longer relevant” (157).

But the main value of a modern conception of sincerity, one that emphasizes its textual nature, is the proposition for how and what voters read when they hear and see the performances of political actors. Paying attention to political “theater,” for Bleeker, “is not a matter of spectacle, exaggeration, or make-believe, but a matter of becoming aware of how we are implicated within what we see and how we see it, and how this in turn is implicated in the performance of others addressing us” (259). That voters find “reliable” those politicians who “look convincing, true, and right” is hardly revelatory, as we previously discussed with Rick Perry and George W. Bush, but to recognize that the reliability of politicians is really a rubric for determining the extent to which they perform for us, and not, as we might assume, themselves, our political truths and falsehoods, is decidedly more so. Sincerity in modern politics, then, is not freedom from dissimulation,

but its encouragement, if we understand dissimulation to mean the inhabiting by actors of a particular and situationally appropriate political role. What is inescapable, however, is the extent to which voters define these roles, even if often we act out our own role as impassive, but perpetually annoyed audience.

Presidential campaign manager (most prominently for Howard Dean in 2004) Joe Trippi claims that, because of wider distribution of social technologies, and, I will add, because of increased articulation of modern conceptions of sincerity as a text with a fluid subject, voters now find themselves in “the empowerment age” (4). Political candidates who either ignore or underestimate the empowerment of voters run the risk of offering them a version of their candidacy that, even if it is unperformed and authentic, is too static, too unresponsive, and too misaligned with the voters’s points of view to be taken as reliable. That said, I think Elizabeth Markovits usefully brings “textualized” sincerity back to familiar territory: “The value of sincerity is easy to see,” she writes, “we don’t want liars and obfuscators to have a platform in our deliberations” (21). Bleeker, who writes that, “What is needed in today’s globalized world is an awareness not only of how politicians’ behavior incorporates points of view, but also a conception of ‘us’ in relational terms,” may argue that even the lies and obfuscations reflect a “‘we’ exist[ing] as a political body with a history of actions that we may or may not approve of or know about, but that are nevertheless part of how ‘we’ are being looked at by others” (261). If a politician promotes an untruth while performing a “sincere simulation,” a potential implication of Bleeker’s argument is that untruth also is representational of the voters’s desire, even if it is simultaneously self-serving to the politician. Would voters elect

someone they thought was sincere and straightforward even if his straightforwardness did not represent what they believed, Bleeker wonders. Would they, she concludes, even recognize the politician's sincerity "if it had not represented their point of view?" (253). If voter tastes for candidates are like Goldilocks's for porridge, the difficulty for political candidates to get the balance between authentic self-expression and sincere representation just right is fairly evident. Most candidates would do well to mind Markovits's words that a political actor "is not only not deceitful, but also offers a complete account of the relevant information," while remembering Bleeker's claim that relevant is a dynamic term largely determined situationally by voters (21). In the 2008 presidential primary election cycle, Sarah Palin seemed to have taken Bleeker to heart while forgetting Markovits.

Palin may have presumed that the primary function of the autobiographical sketches she offered to the public was to convert her personal experience into political ethos, but the reaction of voters to her narratives suggests that this presumption was rhetorically oversimplified, not least because the conversion is assumed to happen automatically, as if by some verbal-alchemical process that is arhetorical. Regardless of their campaign and post-campaign finer points and foibles, it is important to recognize that the rhetoric of candidates usually suggests that they assume that their individual enactments of sincerity are simple and straightforward. Voters, as represented by the media and their own words, seem to understand those enactments in ways more varied and mercurial than the candidates anticipated. Palin, during her RNC speech, knowingly proclaimed that, "From the inside, no family ever seems typical," adding comfortingly,

“That’s how it is with us.” The statement is interesting because it simultaneously aligns Palin’s own family with those of her perceived audience while noting the fundamental incapability of ever successfully achieving such an alignment because of the mischievous paradox that all families are the same in their differentness, a paradox reminiscent of Tolstoy’s happy and unhappy families that is deflated by her next statement: “Our family has the same ups and downs as any other—the same challenges and the same joys.” There is illogical trace in these lines, but their syllogistic accuracy matters less in this speech than the space they open up for Palin to offer an extensive introduction to her family life:

Sometimes even the greatest joys bring challenge. And children with special needs inspire a special love. To the families of special-needs children all across this country, I have a message: For years, you sought to make America a more welcoming place for your sons and daughters. I pledge to you that if we are elected, you will have a friend and advocate in the White House. Todd is a story all by himself. He’s a lifelong commercial fisherman...a production operator in the oil fields of Alaska’s North Slope...a proud member of the United Steel Workers Union ... and world champion snow machine racer. Throw in his Yup’ik Eskimo ancestry, and it all makes for quite a package. We met in high school, and two decades and five children later he’s still my guy. My mom and dad both worked at the elementary school in our small town. And among the many things I owe them is one simple lesson: that this is America, and every woman can walk through every door of opportunity. My parents are here tonight, and I am so proud

to be the daughter of Chuck and Sally Heath. Long ago, a young farmer and haberdasher from Missouri followed an unlikely path to the vice presidency.

If no family looks typical *from the inside*, the intimation is that, from the outside, they look resoundingly, reassuringly typical. By offering a guideline to her audience for favorably comparing their own families to hers, Palin explains, and for supporters, sanctions, the uniqueness of her family by, again, the tautologically collapse of ordinary and extraordinary, making familial uniqueness itself common. Most women's husbands are not part-Yup'ik world champion snow machine racers, but every married woman's husband is bound to possess quirks that make him her "guy." In this way, Palin attempts to convert her personal experiences into political ones, as with her experience with a special-needs child morphs easily into a promise that other families with a similar experience will have a "friend and advocate in the White House." Indeed, Palin's very presence on the RNC stage in 2008 is exhibited as a public manifestation of a personal lesson taught her by her parents, "that this is America, and every woman can walk through every door of opportunity."

Palin did not write herself the above slice of Spoon River pedigree, even if she did live it. According to *Time* magazine from the same week as the speech, conservative speechwriter Matthew Scully began writing the speech one week before the announcement of Palin as McCain's vice presidential running mate, interjecting the familial dimensions *after* Palin was selected. The implication is that whoever ended up being McCain's vice presidential nominee (and media scuttlebutt suggested that Palin was not McCain's first choice) would offer the same political prescriptions, but, since it

was ultimately Palin who was selected, what she brought to the ticket was her personal narrative. As commenter, “Chick,” writes on the female-focused conservative fansite *Sister Toldjah* just one day after Palin’s 2008 Republican National Convention speech:

Gov. Palin’s appeal is actually that she is one of ‘us.’ She’s the neighbor next door. She’s the parent at the PTA meeting. She’s the girl we sat next to in homeroom. She’s the woman we see at the grocery store. That can not be said about Obama. It can not be said about Biden. It can not even be said about McCain...gender be damned. IMHO, this is what the Dems fear more than anything else. She is one of ‘us’. ‘Bout damned time.”¹⁷

Chick’s reaction to Palin’s speech echoes Noonan’s reaction to the Bush aide’s note, and symbolizes this chapter’s argument that authenticity cues do not necessarily need to be authentic to be accepted. It is clear that Chick is aware of the manufactured nature of Palin’s RNC speech: “What politician these days doesn’t have a speechwriter on staff” she says (not asks). For Chick, who represents an actual moment of rhetor and audience meeting, “The truly great speakers, however, add their own touches — they’re not just robots reading a script. And this speech obviously had a lot of Palin’s personal touch in it.” “*Whoever* wrote the speech,” Chick concludes, “Palin *knew* it. And spoke it without skipping a beat. She rocked!” (original emphases). In the next chapter we will explore, using Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign as our focus, how candidates use consubstantiality, as Kenneth Burke conceived of it, to “rock” voters like Chick, and we will explore the potential limits of that Burkeian strategy.

¹⁷ All blog posts and other online entries are reprinted here [sic].

Chapter III:
The “We” in “Yes We Can”:
*Obama’s Audience, the Audience’s Obama, and Consubstantiality*¹⁸

In May 2007, during one of the candidate’s first Sunday-morning interviews, George Stephanopoulos asked Barack Obama what “special qualities” he thought he possessed. “I think that I have the capacity to get people to recognize themselves in each other,” Obama responded, echoing statements from his 2006 campaign-priming autobiography. “Not so far beneath the surface,” Obama wrote in *The Audacity of Hope*, “we are becoming more, not less, alike.” He continued that, “across America, a constant cross-pollination is occurring, a not entirely orderly but generally peaceful collision among people and cultures” (51). This “peaceful collision” is presented in his autobiography as a congenital characteristic of the American mind, but his response to Stephanopoulos suggests that what is characteristic is not necessarily habitually acted upon.

Someone with a “special” capacity, however, can help Americans accomplish these “cross-pollinations,” allowing them “to recognize themselves in each other.” An incongruity underlies Obama’s two claims: why does someone, specifically a presidential candidate (and, then, a president), need to provoke Americans to be “more, not less, alike” if they are already predisposed to do so? And even if we can provide adequate answer for the why, how does a presidential candidate like Obama promote shared

¹⁸ A version of this chapter with the same title is under contract as part of the forthcoming volume *The Rhetoric of Heroic Expectations: Establishing the Obama Presidency* from Texas A&M University Press, edited by Jennifer Mercieca, Texas A&M University, and Justin Vaughn, Boise State University. I am indebted to them for the language of the “institutional burden of the presidency.”

identity when the contentious trend of contemporary public discourse suggests that Americans, despite any innate shared character they may possess, are disinclined to “recognize themselves in each other?” Both questions revolve around what seems like another incongruity, namely the relationship between internal, or intrinsic, senses of identity actually (or assumed to be) held by Americans, and external, or extrinsic, idealized identities urged by American leaders.¹⁹

Changing those dual strands of identity, i.e., persuading Americans either to revise or replace their internal identities with those externally offered and nationally shared, is one of many expectations encumbering the modern presidency. More than simply convincing Americans of any particular policy’s efficacy, presidents are charged with showing them how to hold an American identity and what identity to hold.²⁰ This chapter argues that Americans do rely on their presidents to show them how to be American, even if, ultimately, the lion’s share of the rhetorical power rests not with the president’s ability to persuade, but with the audience’s, i.e., the electorate’s, assenting to be persuaded. As we will see, such modeling is generally done rhetorically, but it is no less

¹⁹ It must be admitted that this incongruous relationship might typify the nature of representative democracy, as suggested on pages 70-71 above.

²⁰ To be clear, presidents have always had the power to use rhetoric to define what is American, so I do not mean to overemphasize this power as a purely modern phenomenon. For historical examples of presidential rhetoric in action, a good starting point are many of the volumes from Texas A&M UP’s “Presidential Rhetoric Series,” several of which have already been footnoted in Chapter I. For examples of presidential rhetoric in inaction, see Martin Medhurst’s *Before the Rhetorical Presidency* (2008). That said, I do contend that the modern presidency is particularly attentive to identity, its effects on political discourse and policy, and vice versa, the presidency’s effects on identity. Obama’s 2008 campaign and inaugural year in office may be the apex of the nation’s attentiveness.

an element of the institution of the presidency because it does not deal with overt, constitutionally enumerated economic, diplomatic, legislative, and military powers. And, despite the burden of using rhetoric to model American identity for Americans, the modern presidency is also emboldened by this reliance. As Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson remind us at the beginning of their book on presidential “deeds done in words,” “The U.S. Constitution nowhere refers to ‘the presidency,’” concluding that, “what we now understand as the presidency has come into being as a result of the actions of all our presidents, a process in which rhetorical practices have been of particular importance” (1-2).²¹

In retrospect, the well-covered popularity of Obama’s campaign and the decisiveness of his victory offer compelling evidence that he was able, at least throughout the heady days of his campaign and inauguration, to find adequate answers to the two questions that begin this chapter, and this chapter suggests a way of reading how Team Obama was able to reconcile the incongruity between internal and external identities through his use of rhetoric. I argue that this reconciliation is largely due to avoiding discussions about identity in favor of those either about or enacting identification. Despite the difference between these claims—intrinsic versus extrinsic experiences with identities—both exhibit, even intuitively, a comprehension of the rhetorical and political force found in what Kenneth Burke, himself often full of political forcefulness, calls

²¹ They go on to say that, “The Constitution permits varying levels of discretionary power in rhetorical action and provides for varying degrees of rhetorical effect” (5). What they have in mind is more concerned with exercise of rhetoric as direct action (e.g., the appropriateness of a pardon, the effectiveness of a veto, etc.) and less concerned with the way presidents use the presidency to shape something as protean as American identity.

“identification.”

Identity suggests fixed selfhood, influenced by, among other things, demographics and psychology, but slow to change on its own and potentially impervious to rhetoric. By contrast, identification, eminently according to Burke, is wholly rhetorical, the persuading of a person “only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his” (*Rhetoric* 55). Or, as Obama explains it in his autobiography, “Identities are scrambling, and then cohering in new ways” (51). Such scrambling and re-cohering of identities would reinforce for Burke the fact that “The so-called ‘I’ is merely a unique combination of partially conflicting ‘corporate we’s’” (*Attitudes* 264).²² Identification, by Burke’s definition, requires actors purposefully employing rhetorical acts to move identities closer together and further apart, most often for political reasons. Identification involves identity, of course, but identity is not its primary focus. More precisely understood, the aim of identification is an act of explicitly unfixing what is taken as stable identity and making it pervious to rhetoric.

Unfixing identity, as it played out in Obama’s 2008 campaign, meant assuring

²² For some additional commentaries about Burke’s identification and consubstantiality, see Bryan Crable, “Distance as the Ultimate Motive: A Dialectical Interpretation of *A Rhetoric of Motives*,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (2009): 213-239; Robert L. Ivie, “Democratic Dissent and the Trick of Rhetorical Critique,” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 5, no. 3 (2005): 276-293; Jeffrey W. Murray, “Kenneth Burke: A Dialogue of Motives,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 35, no.1 (2002): 22-49; Laurinda W. Porter, “Identification and Consubstantiation in the 1988 California Primary Campaign Rhetoric of Jesse Jackson: A Burkeian Approach.” (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Society Association, Atlanta, GA, 2 November 1991); and Theodore F. Sheckels, “The Rhetorical Success of Thabo Mbeki’s 1996 ‘I Am an African’ Address,” *Communication Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2009): 319-333.

Americans that their selves were important to fulfilling the nation's democratic promise. But it meant convincing Americans that that fulfillment also depended on those selves "cross-pollinating" with other American selves, including with Obama himself. Obama's metaphor of pollination seems at first a curious literary flourish, but the choice, viewed through the frame of the institutional burden of the presidency to get Americans to identify with one another, is actually felicitous. Pollination, denoting propagation and growth, is an apt trope for the expectations Americans have of a president's ability, and responsibility, to continually rejuvenate their view of themselves (essentially every four years), just as it intimates that these powers of rejuvenation have developed into an almost organic, and definitely enduring, aspect of the presidency.

Obama's re-"cohering" of identities matches Burke's description of the "corporate we's," where for Burke, corporate connotes not just a reciprocally social, though not always sociable, relationship between citizens and institutions, but also the demonstrable materializations of that relationship as they function in, and perhaps function as, society. That is to say that both citizens and institutions, and the associations between them, are corporate in the basic etymological sense that they are bodily substantive: a simple-enough notion providing Burke with the clinical capacity to, borrowing a helpful concept from literature professor Brian Bremen's study of Burke, thoroughly "diagnose," before offering a prescription, American society as if it were a patient etherised upon a table (90-91, 101). For the body politic, Burke's diagnosis is that "a similar synecdochic form is present in all theories of political representation, where some part of the social body...is held to be 'representative' of the society as a whole" (*Grammar* 508). In other words, the

social body is full of divided parts, but a healthy functioning body's "great emphasis upon division," Burke explains, "really serves to sharpen our understanding of identification" (*Rhetoric* 150).

Citizens and their institutions may be external to and discrete from each other, but it is the associations between these two that define how a society functions. It is the defining and promoting of these associations that freight the expectations of presidential uses of identification. It has become part of the president's job not simply to garner allegiance and appreciation from the citizens towards national institutions like the presidency, but to find ways for citizens to accept that those institutions are actual extensions of themselves. All presidents, but perhaps particularly Obama during his 2008 campaign, can best achieve this acceptance by syllogistically positioning themselves as bridges between the citizens and institutions, the "synecdochic form" that Burke describes as "sharpening" a society's "understanding of identification." Of course, identification is Burke's prescription for a representationally anemic body politic. "For 'represent,'" he adds actionably, "we could substitute 'be identified with'" (508). This prescription, not incidentally, is the one he most frequently offers, since, grandly, identification is "hardly other than a name for the function of sociality" (*Attitudes* 266). Syllogistically bridging the discrete corporate substances between citizens and the institutions, in other words, requires presidents to employ identification, whereby citizens are identified with the president, who is identified with the institution of the presidency.

Given Burke's expansive view of identification's function in society, that which is "bodily substantive" about citizens and institutions needs to be correspondingly

expanded, or, at least refined so that we understand substantive to connote, again thinking root etymology, “a standing for.”²³ Though my argument here is rooted in the rhetorical-political world of Burke, the phrase standing-for will echo in the ears of anyone familiar with the seminal work on political representation by Hanna Pitkin. Of the four genres of representation Pitkin advances, the two that most profitably overlap with Burke’s consubstantiality are “symbolic” and “descriptive” representations, particularly the symbolic. We can give added significance to the role of symbolic representation in the political sphere if we enhance Pitkin’s standing-for, which already shelters a rhetorical dimension, with Burke’s definition of rhetoric, the essence of which is “the use of language as symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols” (*Rhetoric* 43). Such a blending reinforces the notion that consubstantiation is more than a politician acting as representational apotheosis of who we are, like the flag, the anthem, and the national park, but a persistent, flexible, and mutual symbolic transaction requiring the politician perpetually to seek acceptance from the citizen-audience, and to assess the degree of that acceptance. And, of course, they also have to maintain, and be judged on, the formalistic, descriptive, and substantive aspects of representation as well, as Pitkin defines them.

The range of representational opportunities available to citizens and institutions—

²³ See especially chapters four through six of Pitkin’s *The Concept of Representation* (1972), which was subsequently expanded by, among others, Samuel L. Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns* (1994); Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (2002); Jane Mansbridge, “Rethinking Representation,” *The American Political Science Review* 97, no. 4 (November 2003): 515-528; and Andrew Rehfeld, *The Concept of Constituency: Political Representation, Democratic Legitimacy, and Institutional Design* (2005).

that is, the variety of things that each can usefully and successfully stand-for—traces the furthest appropriate margins of their embodiment, defining both their essential substance and their synecdochic substance within the social body. The fact that citizens and institutions possess both an essential and synecdochic substance, and are asked, at least by Burke, and, as we will see, by Obama, perpetually to stabilize the two in order to participate in society with vim and vigor, makes obvious the mutability of substance. Mutable substance explains the power of identification: divided parts of the social body are incorporated during moments of what Burke calls “alchemic opportunity,” with political campaigns as notable examples (*Grammar* xix). Incorporation consists of divided parts being made to stand-for other parts with variable intensities of attachment for variable periods of time, and the omnipresent “synecdochic form” guarantees that each part retains its essential substance while simultaneously doing representational work.

Identification, as scholar Gary Woodward usefully summarizes it, “is both a process and an outcome,” a summary that makes even more sense if we understand the process of identification and its resulting acts of identification as rhetorical accomplishments concerning substance (5). “Substance evolves from and is absorbed by the agonistic struggle among discourses,” Burke scholar Robert Wess asserts, pointedly adding that for Burke, “no rhetoric is more powerful than the rhetoric of substance” (154-155). When trying to produce identification amongst various citizen and institutional substances, the rhetorical power comes from the mutability of those substances. Since substance is always, according to Burke, “existing both in itself and as part of its

background” there is an “ambiguity of substance [that] affords,” he confirms, “a major source of rhetoric” (*Grammar* 29, 51).

Which leads us back, I think, to the peculiar difference between Obama’s autobiographical statement on how peaceful collisions are intrinsic to the American mind and his response to Stephanopoulos that he has a special capacity for getting people to recognize themselves in each other, a difference I said was ultimately reconcilable. If Burke’s claim that “identification is compensatory to division” holds true in the sphere of American politics, Obama’s 2008 campaign is fairly described as a representational balancing act between the unincorporated substances of the electorate and his own ethos with that “consubstantial” strand of rhetoric that Burke calls “acting-together,” a synecdochic transference resulting from the process of, as well as resulting in acts of, identification (*Rhetoric* 20-22). “[I]n acting-together,” Burke notes, “men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them consubstantial,” a “doctrine,” he decides, that “may be necessary to any way of life” (21). Woodward’s view of identification, as “a rhetorical form of superconductivity that permits a total transfer of emotional energy from one being to another,” helpfully overlaps with Burke’s definition of acting-together. Taken as a pair they help us resolve that the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic experiences, essential and synecdochic substances, has less to do with questioning what exists naturally versus representationally, and more to do with the intensity and directionality of the “superconductivity,” amongst citizens, amongst institutions, and between the two in any given rhetorical situation (x).

The implication of Burke’s theory is a helpful way to discuss the institutional

burdens of the presidency: all presidents are expected not only to maintain explicit and functional social order, but also to direct, if not dictate, the character of that order. So, a difficult task for presidents is finding ways to combine the unique individual “I’s” that are the internal identities of Americans into “corporate we’s” that function as a shared and ordered national identity. But even more difficult is that, while facilitating the combination of “I’s” into “we’s,” presidents must persistently acknowledge that the result of that combination, the “corporate we,” is always “partially conflicting.” Counterintuitively, it is this conflict that gives identification its value in rhetorical and political spheres. Conflict can be thought of as the moments before and between acts of identification, when citizens are not ‘talking’ each other’s “language,” not trying to “identify” with each other’s “ways.” Conflict divides citizens from each other, as each holds understandably and tenaciously to their fixed identities at the expense of unfixing those identities in the rhetorical sphere in order to be identified with fellow citizens. Here again we see why Burke insists that a healthy functioning social body, which is a body full of divided parts, must emphasize those divisions in order “to sharpen our understanding of identification.” Without division, identification becomes unnecessary.

The “compensatory” aspect of identification allows it to elide division, however, because its whole mission is to define and then shorten the gap between divided rhetorical entities. As such, identification may help lighten the institutional burden of the presidency by providing a practical rhetorical tool for bridging citizens and institutions. But identification’s unavoidable emphasis on “confronting the implications of division” in order ultimately to promote acting-together quickly reestablishes the weight of the

burden, especially when one inevitable division is the exceptional nature of the presidency itself, separating the person in office from the common citizen (*Rhetoric* 22). The modern presidency requires the burdensome balancing act of simultaneously maintaining the gap between the ethos of the presidency and the citizens, and shrinking it in ways that help Americans identify with, not just the person in the office, but with the institution of the office itself.

Determining if any particular identification is categorically either natural or representational gives way, then, to the more functional task of developing “a kind of attitudinizing,” as Burke puts it, “that may eventuate in the step from an attitude of sympathy with someone to the overt, practical doing of an appropriate kind deed” (*Dramatism* 23). Candidate Obama and his campaign showed an exceptional facility at “eventuating” in the electorate the step from sympathetic attitude to appropriate deed, as exhibited by the record number of discrete personal donor contributions, listserv email addresses, and popular votes collected during the 2008 election.²⁴ Despite the Obama

²⁴ A *Washington Post* post-election (20 November 2008) breakdown, based on interviews with the online operation arm of Obama’s campaign, claims that “3 million donors made a total of 6.5 million donations online adding up to more than \$500 million. Of those 6.5 million donations, 6 million were in increments of \$100 or less. The average online donation was \$80, and the average Obama donor gave more than once.” Jose Antonio Vargas, “Obama Raised Half a Billion Online,” *The Washington Post*, <http://tinyurl.com/274rxmc> (accessed 1 September 2013). According to the U.S. Federal Election Commission (FEC), Obama raised \$246,110,054 from contributors donating “\$200 and under.” The same FEC page lists Obama’s total individual contribution receipts for 2008 at just under \$659 million; by comparison, Bush and Kerry’s combined total receipts for the 2004 presidential election were approximately \$722 million. “Presidential Campaign Finance: Contributions to Obama, Barack by State Through 09/30/2009,” FEC, <http://tinyurl.com/67ceun> (accessed 1 September 2013). The same *Post* article claims that “Obama’s e-mail list contains upwards of 13 million addresses,” and that “Over the course of the campaign, aides sent more than 7,000 different

campaign's overachievements, these types of campaign requests, with their consequent audience involvements, are customary modes of campaign identification, where candidates get out the vote, and voters dutifully oblige the campaign's efforts by donating and voting. Any of Woodward's "superconductivity" here is coursing unidirectionally from candidate to electorate, energizing conventional political tactics and strategies that do not necessarily translate into substantive, consubstantial "acting-together."

Energizing, that is to say, a conventional rhetorical hierarchy rooted in Aristotelian ethos, making it more difficult for identification to compensate for divisions between the electorate and the elected. There is simply the making of, by candidates, and either the accepting or rejecting of, by voters, pledges and promises. Saying, for instance, that you are not the other guy (always a divisive tactic), is often sufficient for garnering the financial and ballot support of voters. So Obama did not necessarily need to initiate his "special quality" of getting people to see themselves in each other in order to convince supporters to give his campaign cash and to cast votes, which is what made his simultaneous use of consubstantiality conspicuous. Getting Americans to define their involvement in his campaign as *rhetorical* acts with synecdochic dimensions—or cross-pollinations, as Obama puts it—was a much more difficult task than convincing voters

messages," noting, by comparison, that previous Democratic presidential nominee Senator John Kerry had three million emails in 2004, while Governor Howard Dean had just six hundred thousand during his presidential primary campaign in 2000. And, according to the U.S. Electoral College portion of the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) website, Obama gained 69,297,997 popular votes (52.9% of the total cast in 2008), topping George W. Bush's previous record from 2004 by over seven million votes. "2008 Presidential Election: Popular Vote Totals," U.S. Electoral College, NARA, <http://tinyurl.com/2ctbdep> (accessed 1 September 2013); "2004 Presidential Election: Popular Vote Totals," U.S. Electoral College, NARA, <http://tinyurl.com/2owfva> (accessed 1 September 2013).

that he had the right policy for any particular problem. Obama's unique use of rhetoric as identification during his campaign, however, suggested how he viewed the institutional burden of the presidency to lead through words.

A local example will suffice to underscore the concern over rhetorical unidirectionality: when Obama spoke at a February 2007 campaign rally in Austin, Texas, twenty thousand people waited in a cold drizzle for nearly three hours to hear the newly minted presidential candidate.²⁵ Even Obama was surprised by the turnout: "Unbelievable," he repeated absently into the microphone as he mounted the stage, adding, "I have not seen a crowd like this. I am overwhelmed." He then admitted to feeling similarly overwhelmed during the official announcement—twelve months before the party primaries, and eighteen long months before the general election, and already being dubbed a presumptive frontrunner for the 2008 Democratic nomination for president—of his candidacy two weeks earlier "in front of the old state capitol in Springfield, Illinois," as he put it, "a place where Abraham Lincoln has served and where he delivered his famous speech in which he said that a nation divided against itself could not stand." "[F]or me to be there and see seventeen thousand people in seven-degree weather was truly an inspiration, and it told me," he continued, "not that people were simply supporting my campaign, but...that people were ready for a change. That it wasn't just about me." The "just" in Obama's "wasn't just about me" is a not insignificant admission of Obama's ethotic involvement. But despite his best efforts to

²⁵ A video of the speech, divided into five parts, is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WUqU5bCh_W0>.

unyoke the campaign from the candidate, as when he entreats those thousands of cold and soggy supporters that their readiness for change “wasn’t just about me,” Obama ends up embedding himself in a central position apart from the audience, in rarified historic company, when he speaks of standing in the same spot “where Abraham Lincoln has served.”

A similar centralizing occurs later in the speech as Obama describes hearing his then-pastor Jeremiah Wright preach about the “audacity of hope.” He immediately extends his insight beyond the individual: “But I was also inspired because I realized that [Wright’s] idea described the very essence of America; that America at every stage always had the audacity to hope.” Here is the perspicuity of an individual citizen enlarged to the level of totalized national history and political ideology: an appropriately prodigious and positive worldview for a presidential candidate, considering all presidential candidates must have a worldview. This is not acting-together, but rather Obama pushing his audience to act out his ideology of hope, ending his introduction of the term on the succinct imperative, “You think about it.” “I was inspired by that sermon,” Obama related, “not only because I thought that it applied to my life, because it told *me* that *you* don’t have to ignore the problems in the world to be hopeful. You simply have to be committed to bringing about change and doing everything you can to imagine a better world,” concluding, “*You* think about it” (emphasis added). One way to interpret the shift from the first person singular narrative to the second person plural imperative is as a grammatical emblemizing of the unshakeable probability that candidates, even those who circumspectly avoid trying to do so, often utilize ethos unidirectionally, as a

standing-in for the electorate instead of, as Burke would have it, a standing-for them via transdirectional acts of consubstantiation. And we can accept that this conventional utilization of ethos is understandable and unavoidable without encouraging candidates and their campaigns to over-represent the electorate, obscuring their contributions to acting-together. The reality is that, for Obama, the most practical, appropriate, and kind deed any member of the electorate can do is, unsurprisingly, to vote for him. On this point Burke is blunt: “We may think of voting as an act, and of the voter as an agent,” he writes, evoking his language of dramatism, “yet votes and voters both are hardly other than a politician’s medium or agency; or from another point of view, they are part of his scene” (*Grammar* xx).

The primacy of the politician’s agency is exhibited in Obama’s response to Stephanopoulos, an agency characterized by an appreciation of how skillfully aware candidates can harness the power of their ethos as an attitudinizing force to shape the substance of the electorate. Viewed in this ethos-driven vein, the Obama campaign’s famous “Yes We Can” slogan can be read as a highly truncated enthymematic for unidirectional ethotic conductivity with Obama’s invented national narrative manifested in his campaign slogan, which in its syllogistic fullness might assert its premises thus: getting Obama elected president is crucial, to achieve his election the electorate must turn their personal attitudinizing into social action in ways dictated by his campaign, since action is a consubstantial endeavor, the electorate must be consubstantial with Obama when they follow the dictates of his campaign, and if Obama and his voters are consubstantial, there must be a we acting-together.

But ethos-driven appeals for consubstantiality tilt closer to an acting-for than an acting-together, I think. Frank Lentricchia highlights in Burke a similar “ambiguity” when he draws a distinction between “identification of” versus “identification with” a substance, the former being less rhetorical and less “mediating,” though no less influential, than the latter (148-150). Admittedly, both acting-for and acting-together are possible results of consubstantiality. While the former limits the operative actions of the electorate to the comparatively straightforward and passive acceptance or rejection of the candidate’s substance, the latter demands an enduring reciprocal superconductivity of substance. Put broadly, candidates can always grant that their skillful use of ethos does not mean automatic acquiescence by the electorate to either the character of the candidate or any requests for political action. Candidates should also grant that it is audiences who, whether or not they realize it, make the final decision whether or not to act-together with the candidate. In Obama’s case, this meant recognizing and promoting the alchemic opportunity for his voters, synecdochically, to make he stand-for we, which is was certainly harder to do than telling his voters how his inspirations translate into their imperatives.

So, while Obama’s response to Stephanopoulos about his own “capacity” does not seem to acknowledge the capacity of the electorate to decide for themselves whether or not, and why or why not, to acquiesce to Obama’s appeals for consubstantiality, his autobiography offers an amendment, especially if we assume he includes himself when he writes that “we are becoming more, not less, alike.” “[I]n the faces of all the men and women I’d met,” he recalls, “I had recognized pieces of myself.” “In them,” he continues,

“all of it felt familiar” (51). It is only after describing this emergent “sense of familiarity” that Obama proposes his theory of “peaceful collisions” and “cross-pollinations.” Another way, then, to interpret the grammatical shift from the narrative “I” to the imperative “you” in the portion of Obama’s Austin speech treating Wright’s sermon is to view it as an attempt to do for the electorate a Burkean “kind deed,” specifically, an opening up of his candidacy where the electorate and the candidate can be identified with each other in a constructive and coequal consubstantial manner.

Obama’s message, “you don’t have to ignore the problems in the world to be hopeful. You simply have to be committed to bringing about change and doing everything you can to imagine a better world,” is a potential source of genuine acting-together, even for those members of the electorate who disagree with his politics and policies. When, in the wake of comments by Wright taken by some as insensitive and instigative, Obama was pressured in March 2008 to revisit his relationship with his now-former pastor, that speech crescendoed with the same “sense of familiarity” introduced two years earlier in his autobiography: “I can no more disown [Wright] than I can disown the black community.”²⁶ Obama announced: “I can no more disown him than I can disown my white grandmother, a woman who helped raise me...but a woman...who on more than one occasion has uttered racial or ethnic stereotypes that made me cringe.” He ends, “These people are part of me. And they are part of America.” Obama’s impulse to

²⁶ Obama’s February 2007 speech in Austin occurs a year before the media controversy surrounding Jeremiah Wright’s “black liberation theology,” and Obama’s relationship to his former pastor. For more about this important speech, particularly its engagement with race and identity, please see T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting’s edited volume *The Speech: Race and Barack Obama’s ‘A More Perfect Union’* (2009).

determine the extent to which each individual is a part of the whole is the same prescription offered by Burke, emphasizing “division” in order “to sharpen our understanding of identification.”

What Obama’s campaign offered is an acting-together where consubstantiality itself was the ambition. In short, the overt, practical, and appropriate kind deed that the Obama campaign attempted to eventuate in the electorate was the holding of an “attitude of sympathy,” regardless of partisanship, as antecedent hope for more sophisticated and inclusive acts of identification. Viewed in this familiarity-driven vein, the Obama campaign’s “Yes We Can” can be read as a quite different kind of enthymematic slogan where the unstated premise still acknowledges that getting Obama elected is important, but pushes the campaign’s purpose beyond getting out the vote towards creating in the electorate a comprehension of the ways citizens and institutions interact in rhetorical situations. If we agree that developing such comprehension is civically worthwhile, we accentuate the need for a genuine acting-together, and since acting-together can be genuine only if there exists a consubstantial “we,” we are charged with creating that consubstantiality. And though now it feels like ancient history, America’s fixation on Barack Obama’s candidacy and its concomitant messages of “hope” and “change” is still the most contemporaneous and richly representative example of the complicated and isochronous rhetorical transactions between political rhetors and audiences. By mapping what the transactional relationship between rhetors and their audiences, I argue that we can expand our understanding and usage of ethos, of the Boothian sort described in Chapter I, in the political sphere where stakes are highest, and, by extrapolating and

reapplying what we learn there, to the pedagogical, and, to a lesser extent, literary and popular spheres as well.

Throughout the 2008 campaign, Obama's rhetoric attempted to carve out space in standard campaign rhetoric where he could offer his presence as ecumenically representative of the American's identities. During his pre-inauguration speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial, for example, he confided to his fellow citizens that the "hope" propelling his campaign was "a belief that if we could just recognize ourselves in one another and bring everyone together...then not only would we restore hope and opportunity in places that yearned for both, but maybe, just maybe, we might perfect our union in the process." The "we" in that sentence quickly enlarges, incorporating not just the campaign's mission of bringing everyone together, but also the distinct echo of our foundational national ambition of all citizens singularly working to perfect our union, and Obama suggests that achieving the former means accomplishing the latter "in the process." Obama's (at that time future) success as president would depend on his aptitude and inclination towards using our divisions to sharpen our understanding of our identifications. Substantively embodying Americans as he takes the office, "yours are the voices I will take with me every day when I walk into that Oval Office," he affirmed, "The voices of men and women who have different stories but hold common hopes."²⁷

²⁷ Small manifestations of these "voices in the Oval Office" are the ten letters from citizens that Obama is reported to read every day. For more, please see Eli Saslowi's *Ten Letters: The Stories Americans Tell Their President* (2011) and *Inside the White House: Letters to the President*. YouTube. 1 September 2013 <tinyurl.com/k3pjceb> .

Still, despite what we can call his good consubstantial intentions, the risk of over-representing Americans exists. Over-representing would mean obscuring the contributions of Americans to act-together, focusing solely on the candidate's (or president's) ability to stand-for. Obama "knows how to comfort voters with a national narrative of his own invention" writes rhetoric professor Jack Shafer, and journalist George Packer adds that he "had figured out how to leave an audience at the peak of its emotion, craving more." Both quotations evince the conventional, and conventionally broad, goal of campaigns to conglomerate as many individuals and their appraisals of the candidate as possible filtered through the singular rhetorical talent and charisma of Obama.²⁸ Admittedly, even the purposefully interpretative elasticity, particularly with the pronoun "we" and verb "can," of the above enthymeme underlines what scholar Laurinda Porter calls, riffing on Burke, "the desire to transform one's listeners or a situation from a present state or condition to a different (and better) state or condition" (3).²⁹ After hearing Obama speak, Packer relates, illustratively, "Within minutes, I couldn't recall a single

²⁸ Charisma was clearly a significant part of Obama's rhetorical and political successes (and failures, perhaps), clearly related to ethos, and potentially a threat to consubstantiation. Please see, as a starting point, Max Weber's *On Charisma and Institution Building*, S.N. Eisenstadt, ed. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1968), particularly chapters one and two. For a more specific review of charisma in political leadership, see Ann Ruth Willner's *The Spellbinders* (1984).

²⁹ Jeffrey Walker, who deepens the common view of Aristotelian enthymematic *techné* by reaffixing to it antecedent sophistic understandings, claims that it is, "the rhetorical move *par excellence* for guiding an audience's inference-making and attitude-formation in a particular direction" (53). "The Body of Persuasion: A Theory of the Enthymeme," *College English* 56, no. 1 (January 1994): 46-65.

thing that he had said, and the speech dissolved into pure feeling, which stayed with me for days.”

But it is important to admit that this is a charge; as ambitious and admirable as it may be, it is not a guarantee. For reasons intricate yet obvious, genuine, durable national acting-together could prove an improbable, though we should not assume impossible, achievement. At the heart of its improbability is the fact that, Jennifer Mercieca suggests, “America’s democratic style is primarily ironic,” since it “figuratively negates its literal political theory,” allowing “politicians to occupy the realm of democratic appearances by eliding the fact that the American government is a republic” (441-449).³⁰ Political scientist Robert Dahl is similarly skeptical of balancing republican representation and democratic ideals, though he does offer some comfort: “As a means for helping to democratize the governments of national states, representation can be understood both as a historical phenomenon and as an application of the logic of equality to a large-scale political system” (215).³¹ In the end, even if we do increase the centrality of the symbolic representation of politicians by emphasizing the symbolic nature of the rhetorical transactions required to obtain citizen-audience acceptance, the question remains: what then? Theoretically, what sorts of substantive actions are consequent of a particular set of accepted symbolic representations, and how can we be certain that a fundamental irony is not constantly eroding our ability to judge the appropriate political action required from a symbolic action? Practically, and more pressing perhaps, what sort of administrative

³⁰ See also Jennifer R. Mercieca, *Founding Fictions* (2010), especially chapter one.

³¹ Also see Dahl’s *Democracy and Its Critics*, chapter two.

modus operandi are required to maintain acceptance gained during the election? These are the questions that seem to haunt the Obama administration as they transitioned from campaigning to governing.

Obama's 2008 campaign, with its "Yes We Can" slogan insinuating identification, used familiar campaign tactics and strategies to advance a type of consubstantial political conversation that fully and fairly incorporated voters, a commendable goal that, given his election, must have, to some genuine extent, resonated with voters. Since his inauguration, what is less clear is whether or not "Yes We Can" would continue to resonate, particularly in the wake of hyper-partisan intractability, vocalized mistrust of government, historic economic and environmental obstacles, and White House victories resulting not from acting-together, but from the throwing of sharp political elbows. In short, while it was clear that Obama could satisfy the institutional burdens of identification enough to get elected, it was unclear whether his presidency would be thwarted by the contextual burdens of the office. Journalist and media critic Eric Alterman, citing Mario Cuomo's saying that "candidates campaign in poetry but govern in prose," explains that, since the election, "Obama supporters have been asked to swallow some painfully 'prosaic' compromises," not least of which is the creeping notion that, despite grassroots rhetoric of the campaign, the Obama Administration is "clearly happier with a top-down approach." There is also the nagging suspicion, succinctly expressed by well-known social activist Naomi Klein, that Obama's consubstantial ambition was little more than a well-intentioned feint to revitalize the American image, with Klein arguing that Obama, who she labels "the first U.S. president who is also a

superbrand,” was “the most successful rebranding campaign of all time” (xxiii). Obama, Klein charges, “favors the grand symbolic gesture over deep structural change every time” (xix, xxvi).

What becomes clear is Obama’s institutional burden, the overarching task of his presidency: not only did he need to create opportunities for discrete identities to consubstantially act-together—simultaneously emphasizing the significance and functionality of both division and identification—he needed to do so in a way that his citizen-audience accepts as more than empty symbolism. Journalist Sasha Abramsky, announcing that his “can be no ordinary presidency,” offered this reading of the Obama presidency: “He has changed America and created expectations for more change,” Abramsky writes, shifting “how America understands itself,” and in the process heightened the rhetoric of presidential expectations (7).³² Obama’s presidency was not ordinary, in part, because he championed consubstantiality, an ambition that, admittedly, may be as philosophically dense as it is practically difficult, though some, like Alterman, are willing to accept that the compromises the Obama campaign has made with the Obama administration is merely a pragmatic “playing for time.” “Obama is taking the best deal on the table today,” Alterman speculated, “but hopes and expects that once he is re-elected in 2012—a pretty strong bet, I’d say—he will build on the foundations laid

³² Abramsky’s position, that Obama’s campaign was so transformative and disruptive its effects must necessarily spill over into his presidency, is typical. For variations on the same approbative theme, please see Alter, Jonathan, *The Promise: President Obama, Year One* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010); Balz, Dan and Haynes Johnson, *The Battle for America 2008: The Story of an Extraordinary Election* (New York: Viking, 2009); Plouffe, David, *The Audacity to Win: The Inside Story of the Lessons of Barack Obama’s Victory* (New York: Viking, 2009); Remnick, David, *The Bridge: The Life and Rise of Barack Obama* (New York: Knopf, 2010).

during his first term to bring on the fundamental ‘change’ that is not possible in today’s environment.” In the meantime, meeting the institutional challenges Obama has set for himself may mean that Americans will gain new understandings of themselves, understandings that may permanently change their attitudes and actions in rhetorical situations.

Chapter IV:
Transactional Ethos Outside of Politics: Three Studies

The final chapter of my dissertation turns from political public discourse to spheres popular and pedagogic in order to stress what I take to be the ubiquity of my argument about the complicated and sometimes contradictory manner with which we use the concept of ethos in those discourses, especially in regards to our craving for stable authenticity, our unstable capacity to define the authentic, and what I have tried to posit as a workaround for that odd if understandable and unavoidable mix of strong craving and weak capacity: the transactional relationship between rhetors and audiences in rhetorical acts, which is essentially, I would argue, an analytic habit of mind. That this issue is pervasive speaks to its importance as a topic of study, but it makes it a challenging study because of the wide range of instances clamoring for our attention. These three studies—one popular in focus, the other two pedagogical—do not pretend to be encyclopedic, but rather intensely spotlight a pattern previously examined in politics. The goal here, as elsewhere in my dissertation, is to advocate for how a conscientious and situationally aware examination of ethos (and what I will later call ethotic thinking) can free us from the sticky wicket of resolving really real authenticity of rhetors based on what we have seen are usually knotty and unreliable authenticity cues.

We must admit, however, that ethos itself can prove troublesome as an analytic tool. Confusion over the quiddity of ethos has been a perpetual conversation in rhetorical scholarship from its earliest classical origins. George Yoos, writing almost forty years ago, describes a diremption of the term ethos that still troubles scholars and teachers today. Yoos traces a potential “mix-up” to a bifurcated etymology, describing an

“assimilation” of two classical understandings of the term *ethos*: $\epsilon\theta\omicron\varsigma$, meaning “only,” according to Yoos (echoing definitions quoted in Chapter I by Michael Halloran) “custom or habit,” and $\eta\theta\omicron\varsigma$, “meaning custom, disposition, character, delineation of character, or bearing” (41). The latter ($\eta\theta\omicron\varsigma$), Yoos reminds, is the term that “Aristotle and subsequent writers used to designate artistic appeals as part of the triad that includes *pathos* and *logos*,” even as the “morally neutral” former ($\epsilon\theta\omicron\varsigma$) “seems to interest rhetorical scholars and theorists most today” (41). For Yoos this emphasis on the morally neutral strand of *ethos* is unfortunate. Moreover, even Aristotle’s conception of *ethos* “invited pretense and dissembling,” which, as Yoos sees it, undermines “the propriety of calling appeals ethical when referring to the non-moral attributes of appeals” (42). The conclusion for Yoos is an unfortunate and “bizarre shift in nomenclature” where rhetoric that is “basically unethical and dishonest” is labeled “ethical” (57).

I am not insensitive to Yoos’s concern about the linguistic slippage in this term that has become a cornerstone of the rhetorical studies discipline, both in the classroom and in scholarship, and later in this chapter I defend an alternative nomenclature, i.e., “ethotic,” to help temper Yoos’s criticism.³³ But I think it is more important first to evaluate the implication of Yoos’s argument that we should redefine “ethical appeal to those qualities of speech acts that relate to moral positions directly perceivable by audiences even though not directly *claimed* by a speaker” (50, original emphasis). I do not have problems, per se, with the redefinitions that Yoos offers (footnoted below),

³³ For an extended discussion of, and some advice for, the complicated practice of using classical appeals in modern argumentation classes, see M. Jimmie Killingsworth’s *Appeals in Modern Rhetoric: An Ordinary Language Approach* (2005).

which are all commendably generous to the presence and power of audiences as coequal entities in rhetorical interactions, but I do question the wisdom and efficacy of charging audiences with the obligation to perceive rhetors' "moral positions," especially those "not directly claimed."³⁴ This obligation is precisely the sort of labored determining of essential and constituent elements of rhetors by audiences that my dissertation argues is inherently ambiguous, deeply unsatisfying, and potentially extra-rhetorical. This obligation is why Wayne Booth warns, to return to our conversation from Chapter I, that thinking of ethos as exclusively concerned with the ethical "may mistakenly suggest a project concentrating on quite limited moral standards" (*Company* 8). Boothian ethos, as outlined in Chapter I, has an inescapable ethical dimension because it involves judgment prior to assent, but Booth is not really interested in the "moral positions" of rhetors, especially those positions that are unclaimed. Not only is this sort of essentialist judging limiting to audiences, it limits rhetors, too, because it limits the ability for rhetors and audiences to study "the entire range of effects on the 'character' or 'person' or 'self'": it limits, in short, the ability for both entities to inquire together about the values on which their rhetorical interactions will center (8).

³⁴ Yoos offers four "redefinitions" for the ethical appeals: 1) the "A Factor," "The quality displaying the speaker seeking mutual agreement with his audience," 2) the "R Factor," "The quality displaying the speaker as recognizing the rational autonomy of his audience," 3) the "E Factor," "The quality displaying the speaker recognizing the equality of the listener with himself," and 4) the "V Factor," "The quality displaying the speaker recognizing that the ends of the audience have an intrinsic value for him."

Booth seems to agree with Yoos that “there are of course great dangers for anyone who relies very heavily on ethical proof in plotting his³⁵ course through today’s rhetoric,” because, as Booth warns, “sincerity is more difficult to check and easier to fake than logicality or consistency.” But most important, I think, is the notion that the presence of sincerity “does not, after all, guarantee very much about the speaker’s case” (*Dogma* 157). As audiences, we can readily grant that rhetors usually either know or feel that they are being sincere without setting ourselves up for a hoodwinking, since, as Booth reminds us, rhetors being unequivocally sincere matters less to us than rhetors being unmistakably sincere about the same things that we, as the audience, are sincere about, which is why limiting our conception of ethos to the manifestly ethical is disingenuous and unnecessary (see *Dogma* 155-158). And we can admit this selfish rhetorical trait in ourselves without being unkind to rhetors who may be authentically sincere, remembering that a primary task as an audience is to neither prove nor disprove the authenticity of a rhetor evinced in their use of sincerity, but to define the utility of sincerity presented to us in any particular rhetorical situation. The three studies that follow explore various ways we can fruitfully negotiate this task of gauging utility by reviewing moments when we did not (and do not) do it so well.

Neither Booth nor I want audiences and rhetors to feel that, because of the potentially destabilizing repercussions of disinteresting ourselves from essentialist authenticity, they are playing a guessing game when they meet in rhetorical situations. As Booth succinctly phrases it, the “art” of gauging the utility of sincerity “lies in assessing

³⁵ Please assume that all masculine-specific pronouns used in quotations are presented [sic].

the degrees of reliability” of a rhetor’s ethos (157). This gauging involves for Booth a “systematic” process of determining the extent to which audience’s can assent to a rhetor’s arguments (see *Dogma* 106-111). Or, more accurately, assent is a mutual inquiry by rhetors and audiences for anything in a rhetorical act that the two entities can equally “believe together with sureness” (106). If some aspect of the rhetorical act that both sides can believe together is satisfactorily located, then an opportunity opens for “the benefit of the doubt.” For Booth, “benefit of the doubt” is defined as “the doubts I entertain must offer reasons for themselves at least as good as I have for the initial belief.” If this sureness cannot be found as another indication of audience authority in these rhetorical acts, it is entirely appropriate to “have no impulse to assent at all” (107). But the studies below suggest that the extent to which audiences can assent is probably broader than conventionally taught and practiced, and that the pathway to assent—to giving rhetors the widest possible benefit of the doubt while retaining the authority to remain unconvinced—is generally through an investigation of the form and function of ethos in each instance. When I say that transactional relationship between rhetors and audiences in rhetorical acts is an analytic habit, it is this investigation that I have in mind. Analysis of ethos must surely include a critique, of the sort prevalent in current college rhetoric courses, of the rhetor’s character as it has been constructed and presented in the act (along, of course, with the motivations underwriting that construction and presentation). But analysis as illustrated in the three studies below must also include a self-reflective inquiry of the sort Booth advises to determine the extent to which one can assent to the rhetor’s expressed ethos (manifested perhaps as sincerity): not in order to overrun the

rhetor presence in rhetorical acts, but, rather, to do the rhetor a gentleness by exhibiting the maximum benefit of the doubt.

Study 1:

A Million Little Peaces: The Authority of Authenticity and Its Pragmatic Antidote

Anyone with a moderate interest in popular culture, either snarky, academic, or guilty, will know the basic contours of Oprah Winfrey's fracas with the quote-unquote false memoir: in late 2005 Winfrey selected James Frey's autobiographical sketch of drug addiction, treatment center life, and recovery, *A Million Little Pieces*, for her trendsetting Book Club. Frey's memoir was the nightcap selection of the Book Club's tenth anniversary, coming after a trifecta of William Faulkner's most famous novels, and, really, the first piece of non-canonical literature selected since Winfrey's earlier fracas over intellectual elitism and the function of the literary with novelist Jonathan Franzen, whose book, *The Corrections*, she picked in 2001. By early 2006, muckraking exposé website *The Smoking Gun* reported that Frey's *A Million Little Pieces* was actually "a million little lies," alleging that the author had embellished facts and fabricated events in his memoir, revealing, in other words, that his memoir was partly novelistic, and suggesting that he had tried to "con" Oprah.

Anyone who knows the basic contours of the *Million Little Pieces* controversy, with its eventual very-public upbraiding of Frey by Winfrey, will also know that this false memoir cozily resides in a long lineage of such books, ranging from Frey's relatively unknown contemporaries, like J.T. LeRoy and Margaret Jones, to their more famous predecessors, like Nietzsche's *My Sister and I* and Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast*. An unfortunate but thriving business even exists for fake Holocaust memoirs, most

notably by Misha Defonseca (a.k.a. Monique de Wael), but most recently by Herman Rosenblat, an actual survivor who nevertheless concocted many details of his imprisonment, particularly concerning the deeply romantic encounters with the woman who would become his wife. Rosenblat, incidentally, appeared twice on Winfrey's show to tell his story, in 1996, and again in 2007, after the Frey controversy, when, during the episode, Winfrey exclaimed that Rosenblat's is "the single greatest love story, in 22 years of doing this show, we've ever told on the air." By 2008, Rosenblat's fabrications were publically uncovered, and his profitable book contract, a result, in part, from his appearances on Winfrey's show, was canceled.

Several reports on the Rosenblat controversy pointedly asked how Winfrey could be so gullible: had not Frey already fooled her once? Winfrey herself admitted to feeling confused and deceived when she brought Frey onto her show in late January 2006 to discuss *A Million Little Pieces*, a book she now considered lies told by a liar. "I have to say," she asserted, "it is difficult for me to talk to you because I feel really duped." "But more importantly," she continued, "I feel that you betrayed millions of readers. I think it's such a gift to have millions of people read your work." "So now," she concluded, "as I sit here today I don't know what is true and I don't know what isn't." What follows is several minutes of Winfrey attempting a hardnosed catalogue of the true from the untrue bits: did Frey indeed spend eighty-seven days in jail; did he really have dental surgery, twice, without Novocain; did he even have a girlfriend named Lilly, and did she really hang herself? Frey's brief responses, often monosyllabic, thread a needle between weak defense and weak contrition, and any dramatic tension comes from whether or not Oprah

is going to make him cry. But at the tail end of the interview an interesting exchange occurs: Frey admitted that, since the public revelations of his fabrications, he has “struggled with the idea of it.” Winfrey cut him off, tersely commenting, “No, the lie of it. That’s a lie. It’s not an idea, James. That’s a lie.”

When Larry King asked Winfrey to comment on the “idea” of Frey’s book during an episode of his show, two weeks before Frey appeared on her show to pay public penitence, she responded by claiming that, “of course, I am disappointed by this controversy surrounding *A Million Little Pieces*, because I rely on the publishers to define the category that a book falls within and also the authenticity of the work.” But she proceeded to explain that, “although some of the facts have been questioned...the underlying message of redemption in James Frey’s memoir still resonates with me. And I know that it resonates with millions of other people who have read this book and will continue to read this book,” concluding, “whether he hit the police officer or didn’t hit the police officer is irrelevant to me. What is relevant is that he was a drug addict who spent years in turmoil, from the time he was ten years old, drinking and tormenting himself and his parents.” Winfrey’s claim is syllogistic: though he may have mixed up, left out, and “compressed” some of the particulars, Frey’s message—“hold on,” as she distills it—is helpful and honest, and such candid usefulness gives his book an essential correctness, which in turn gives him the authority to speak, even if he and his publisher miscategorized the book.

Sometime between 14 January 2006, when Winfrey told King that, even if the details were inaccurate, she did not “doubt” the “essence” of *A Million Little Pieces*, and

26 January 2006, when she publically scolded Frey that a lie is not an idea, her attitude towards authenticity and its significance seems to have changed. Were millions of readers given a supportive idea? Or were those same millions betrayed by a lie? It is this oppositional juxtaposition between an “idea” and a “lie” that I want to diagnose here, in hopes of offering a practical antidote to a potentially delicate rhetorical condition. Winfrey, after initially accentuating the book’s therapeutic usefulness over its truthfulness, recanted her defense, excoriating Frey for “duping” her and betraying millions of readers. But why, if they felt so collectively betrayed, had only seventeen hundred readers demanded, as of late 2007, a refund from publisher Random House (Maul)? And more important, why did Frey’s book suddenly become less germane to, and less authoritative on, conversations about victimization, personal autarchy, and literary merit because it turned out that he had fibbed?

One answer is that we become easily perturbed when forced to confront what Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca calls the “dissociation” of the “appearance-reality pair.” For Perelman the yoking of appearance and reality is the “prototype” pairing for most every philosophical and rhetorical argument (*New Rhetoric* 415-416, 420). “Appearance,” Perelman offers as a review in his *Realm of Rhetoric*, “is nothing but a manifestation of reality: it is reality as it appears, as it presents itself to immediate experience” (126). But “Whereas appearance is given, immediate, [and] the beginning of knowledge, reality” he continues, “when it is known, is normally known only through appearances” (127). Appearance has what Perelman calls “an equivocal status,” sometimes “the expression of reality,” though just as often the “source of error and

illusion.” Either way, it is reality that, as Perelman puts it, “becomes the criterion that allows us to judge” appearances, with the number of possible verdicts available for our judgment really boiled down to a significant two: either to accept or not the correspondence between an appearance and its attendant reality (127).

When Winfrey interrupts Frey to draw a distinction between his notion of an idea and her notion of a lie, she is, in effect, drawing attention to and re-instantiating Perelman’s prototypical pairing, judging as inharmonious the correspondence between them. What appears true in *A Million Little Pieces* turns out not to be reality as actually experienced: Frey did not spend many days in jail, though he did spend a few hours; Lilly did not hang herself, but she did slit her wrists. Perelman might plausibly summarize Winfrey’s lesson for that 26 January episode of Oprah thus: “The whole of the great metaphysical tradition, from Parmenides to our own day, displays a succession of dissociation where, in each case, reality is opposed to appearance” (Humanities 24).

Dissociation, however, is not merely the successive and inescapable opposition of appearance and reality, the false memoir always separated from the memoir. It is also, as Perelman describes it, a process of “reasoning” “characterized” by that opposition (Realm 134), resulting in, as he would have it, “the effort to render [a rhetor’s] discourse coherent and meaningful” (Humanities 19). Dissociation as a process of reasoning “involves,” Perelman tells us, “a more profound change that is always prompted by the desire to remove incompatibility arising out of the confrontation of one proposition with others” (New Rhetoric 413, see 453). Perelman’s analysis on how dissociation works as a quasi-logical argument is a familiar one for rhetorical studies; for Perelman, dissociation’s goal

is to “remodel our conception of reality” in order to “prevent the reappearance of the same incompatibility” (413).³⁶

Winfrey, during her call-in to Larry King’s 14 January show, attempts a remodel of *A Million Little Pieces* that retains its authority in the face of its exposed inauthenticity: “If you’re an addict whose life has been moved by this story and you feel that what James went through was able to help you hold on a little bit longer, and you connected to that,” she explained, “that is real...And it’s irrelevant discussing what happened or did not happen to the police.” By accepting that a writer can fabricate an experience for public presentation but still have that presentation remain authentically useful for audiences, Winfrey removes the seeming incompatibility between the function of a memoir versus that of a false memoir, rendering Frey’s book coherent and meaningful, and thus possessed of a therapeutic authority, despite any fabrications and embellishments it may contain. It also, as we will see, collapses any distinction Oprah’s Book Club makes between works of fiction and nonfiction. Her remodel intimates that Frey’s lived experiences, his reality, do not need necessarily to correspond to the experiences that appear in his book’s narrative in order for it, and him, to possess appropriate authority to speak on issues of drug addiction and overcoming suffering.

We can, I think, understand and appreciate Winfrey’s antinomic position: her original remodel of *A Million Little Pieces* to make it still-helpful for readers, though it turned out to be an inauthentic memoir, and her subsequent feelings that the inauthenticity duped her, presumably, since she does not say, undermining the memoir’s

³⁶ See, in particular, chapter four of *The New Rhetoric*, chapter eleven of *The Realm of Rhetoric*, and chapter one of *The New Rhetoric and the Humanities*.

therapeutic authority. (We cannot ignore that initially Winfrey probably also felt financial and reputational incentives to help keep Frey's ship afloat as long as possible, and may have subsequently felt equal if opposite pressure to defend the integrity of her brand, that is, her own ethos, by letting him sink.) Still, even if we can understand and appreciate what is clearly an incompatibility in Oprah Winfrey's thinking about this controversy, the task of figuring out how she changed her mind remains: a task that this chapter cannot profitably accomplish without waggishly psychologizing Ms. Winfrey. But I think this chapter can propose a rhetorical conjecture that hopefully offers some constructive thoughts for coherently remodeling this situation and similar situations concerned with the relationship between authenticity and authority.

Authenticity is authoritative not because we accept that appearance and reality are always synonymous—we, like Perelman, usually presume that they are not—but because we are mostly confident in our ability to tell one from the other. As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca explains in *The New Rhetoric*, the “breaking” of “improperly associated” links is less rhetorically traumatic than the dissociation of pairs whose “original unity” is assumed (411). But clean breaks of clearly incompatible terms are a less-accurate portrayal of how our rhetorical materiality is usually shaped than those dissociations that “bring about,” Perelman claims, “a profound change in the conceptual data” (412). Less aseptically, dissociation “expresses a vision of the world,” for which, as previously suggested, “it endeavors to provide the criteria” (420). These criteria-providing expressions of the world, Perelman continues, “may be regarded as a definition...that will enable us to determine it” (445).

As she admitted while talking with King, Winfrey thought she knew where she stood in relation to the authenticity of *A Million Little Pieces*, in part because of where in the bookstore she first picked up the book, with the other memoirs rather than the novels. When it was revealed that he had fabricated portions, Winfrey, and many others, were compelled to revise Frey's memoir with the adjective false, a reappraisal containing within it the presumably unavoidable critical perception that the authority of the writer and his book has faded because they are no longer considered truthful. Though ostensibly the form and function of the text has not changed, when the thing that appeared as remembrance is, in reality, falsely remembered (and/or falsely reported), the association existing between the book's authenticity and the writer's authority is pulled asunder.

But even as Perelman's emphasis on the persistent opposition between appearance and reality forces apart the authority of a memoir with inauthentic provenance, his parallel emphasis on revisable definitions as benchmarks for practical rhetorical conduct helps explain, and in the future avoid, consternation like Winfrey's over Frey's false memoir. "I made a mistake," Winfrey said to the audience during the opening of her interview with Frey, "I left the impression that the truth does not matter. And I am deeply sorry about that, because," she concludes, "that is not is what I believe." I do not think it is gossip to suggest that Winfrey here seems to equate truth with accuracy, though, as we previously saw, she seemed also to equate truth with relevancy. In *A Million Little Pieces*, Frey also presents the truth as a similarly, simultaneously variable term. Near the middle of the book, after listening to a nameless rockstar speak to Frey's treatment group about his prodigious party habits, including "five thousand dollars of cocaine and heroine

a day,” Frey acerbically ruminates on the life of an addict: claiming that “An Addict is an Addict,” and concluding, “To make light of it, brag about it, or revel in the mock glory of it is not in any way, shape or form related to its truth. And that is all that matters, the truth” (159). A handful of pages later Frey rearticulates that line, “That is all that matters. The truth,” this time insolently adding, “Does it ring true it does. I can feel it” (179). In the first instance we see truth equated with accuracy, solid facts unclouded by neither mock nor mocking emotions, but then also equated with relevancy, “does it ring true,” in the latter instance.

It is hard to tell whether or not Winfrey and Frey realize that they are creating multiple, conflicting definitional criteria for judging truth-value, though it is pretty clear that they characterize their prized term, truth, as an either/or, antinomic proposition. It is also hard to discern whether or not the distress of dissociating accuracy from relevancy has painted them into a corner when it comes to judging the use and usefulness, and, indeed, the truth, of Frey’s memoir, though this explanation strikes me as plausible. I do not think, however, it would overly bother Perelman to employ both accuracy and relevancy as equally sufficient criteria for judging the authoritative value of Frey’s memoir, with neither term negating the other in a particular usage. The rub, of course, is avoiding, by explicitly identifying what value each criterion is intended to judge, the sort of unarticulated incompatibilities that smash the two terms together in conflict. “A definition,” Perelman writes, “is always a matter of choice,” and “Anyone making such a choice,” he acknowledges, “will generally claim to have isolated the single, true meaning

of the correspondence, or at least the only reasonable meaning or the only meaning corresponding to current usage” (*New Rhetoric* 448).

It is this last clause noting definitions that establish the “only meaning corresponding to current usage” that helps us navigate around Winfrey’s antinomic position. Winfrey’s relationship with Frey and his memoir is troubled, I argue, because, though both her positions are discretely logical, there is no attempt on her part to make compatible the dissociations between what is authoritative in its accuracy and what is authoritative in its relevancy, even when this rhetorical move seems readily available to her, and is, as we will shortly see, a move she often makes with her Book Club selections. When Perelman explains that in any “construction of a conception of reality” “Whatever is conformable to it is given value, whereas whatever is opposed is denied value,” there is a best-practices implication for pragmatically assessing authority, even in—especially in—rhetorical situations where our confidence in determining the difference between the authentic and the inauthentic, along with our confidence in determining the consequence of that difference, is shaken (*Humanities* 24). In other words, when a term is “conformable” to a particular conception of reality, its value cannot be denied if the consequence of the term’s conforming is a better appreciation of the relationship between the appearance-reality pairing. Its value is evidenced by its conformability, which, depending on the manner of its association, both accuracy and relevancy are able successfully to do with truth.

In conclusion, it is this confusion over conformability that makes Winfrey’s interview with Frey on 26 January 2006 so uncanny and interesting. In Winfrey’s case,

her initial instinct to promote the apparent therapeutic authority of *A Million Little Pieces* over the authenticity of the experiences contained within its narrative aligned much more firmly and fully with how she tended to read and discuss earlier Book Club texts, fiction and nonfiction alike. As literary scholar Jeremy Green points out, Winfrey has “stated clearly and repeatedly what she [thinks] the purpose of reading to be;” “Her show framed the appeal of reading,” Green continues, “as a thoroughly individual experience, at its most intense,” he insists, “an experience of conversion” (83). By moving away from this frame sometime between 14 and 26 January, by working herself into a tizzy over being “duped” by Frey, Winfrey invites an unnecessary dissociation of the appearance-reality pairing that fuels her antinomic positions, as well as her feelings of confusion by and disappointment at Frey, and, ultimately, the disintegration of any therapeutic authority she initially felt Frey and his memoir possessed.

“[S]tress on [its] individualistic, life-changing nature,” Green suggests, speaking about the Oprah Book Club’s approach to reading, participates in “the therapeutic and testimonial character of Winfrey’s shows on other subjects” (84). What Green rather dismissively calls the “therapeutic and testimonial character” of Winfrey’s show is, I argue, the core definitional expressions that gave her Book Club coherence and meaning for her audience. Frey and Rosenblat aside, Winfrey does not usually seem vexed by some slippage between what is accurate and what is relevant, since ultimately the value of both are judged by the available self-improving actions opened up for audiences by the works of the authors she chooses to promote. Green’s concern is with the way Winfrey uses fiction in her Book Club, but his description of her perpetual emphasis on the

remedial value of the “authorial presence” strikes a familiar chord when compared to her support of James Frey on Larry King Live: “Situating the chosen texts within therapeutic publics encourages reading as a process of identification,” Green contends, “prompting readers to solicit fiction for meanings that might be publicly referred back to private concerns” (89). Less depreciatively, scholar Jaime Harker endorses a potential appeal of Oprah’s Book Club, the asking of authors and audiences, “how is emotional authenticity performed?” (322). Taken in this spirit, the Book Club’s *modus operandi*, actionable personal healing as a consequence of public identification, sounds, to me, fairly pragmatic, even with its potentially uncomfortable overtones of self-help and impressionistic reading.

As William James eminently puts it, “Grant an idea or belief to be true,” and “what concrete difference will its being true make in one’s actual life?” (88). This consequence-oriented testing of an idea taken as apparently true in order to determine whether or not it is, in reality, actually true is the core tenet of pragmatism that permeates, I argue, much of Perelman’s own work: “The pragmatic argument,” he tells us, “is not limited to transfer of a given quality from the consequence to the cause. It makes it possible,” he extols, “to pass from one kind of value to another...to infer the superiority of a particular behavior from the usefulness of its consequences” (*New Rhetoric* 268).

This core pragmatic tenet permeates Oprah’s Book Club, too. Regardless of what we think about the scholarly and critical utility of this type of reader-responsive, feeling-intensive reading, I argue that, filtered through a Perelman-inflected pragmatism,

Winfrey offers her audiences a “coherent and meaningful” rhetorical experience because she provides them a guideline for making their public experiences conformable to their private experiences, and vice versa. Which makes her fracas with Frey all the more curious, because it deviates from the pragmatic dimension implicitly established in her Book Club: instead of perpetuating a looser, consequential relationship between the authenticity and accuracy / authority and relevance pairings, she insists during her interview of Frey on a strict correspondence between appearance and reality. But this correspondence does not suit her, cannot suit her, and her discomfort is, I think, palpable in the interview. At that moment Oprah seems to have forgotten her William James: “What we say about reality,” James writes, “depends on the perspective into which we throw it. The that of it is its own; but the what depends on the which; and the which depends on us” (108). This study of Winfrey’s response to Frey’s false memoir argues that embracing our control of that dependence of perspective on reality can productively resist the authority of authenticity: resulting not in unified accord perhaps, but maybe at least in a million little peaces.

Study 2:

End Quoting: Extant Ethos and the Dialogic Echo

Recalling an axiomatic morsel of Ecclesiastes from my younger days in vacation bible school, I might, upfront, effectively orient this section’s attitude on the central issue yoking together these this study with the next: to whether or not punctilious institutional and pedagogic *modus operandi* ensuring academic honesty remain a constructive endeavor in response to the digital sphere’s crowd-sourced assemblages, I quoth: “what has been done is what will be done / there is nothing new under the sun” (NRSV,

Ecclesiastes 1.9). Contemplating the inescapable provenance of our ideas is equal parts comforting and claustrophobic—this contemplation forming the rough center of this section—but in either case it gives us an opening to look backward for counsel, as we often profitably do, before we leap forward into action. Emerson, in 1868’s *Quotation and Originality*, describes what he calls “our debt to tradition through reading and conversation,” suggesting our debt is “so massive, our protest and private addition so rare and insignificant...that, in large sense, one would say there is no pure originality” (1028). More succinctly, he writes that, “extreme economy argues a very small capital of invention” (1029), ending on the deflating punchline that “Quotation confesses inferiority” (1034).

Still, Emerson, ever the pragmatist, advocates that, “in proportion to the spontaneous power should be the assimilating power” (1028), acknowledging that a smart rhetor “will not,” as he puts it, “draw on his invention when his memory serves him with a word as good” (1031). “By necessity, by proclivity, and by delight,” he says to buck us up, “we all quote” (1028-29). In fact, Emerson pronounces, “We are as much informed of a writer’s genius by what he selects as by what he originates,” continuing with the poetic assertion that, “We read the quotation with his eyes, and find,” he concludes, “a new and fervent sense” (1037). There is more than lyricism in this last statement. The value of reading with other eyes underwrites the best intentions of both the Internet and modern education, and offers a guideline for examining the fundamental questions of this section: what happens to quotation as a critical and academically honest classroom skill in the wake of the creative commons, digital remixing, and increasingly nuanced definitions of

plagiarism? Is quotation still viable, especially in a rhetorical world requiring prowess in not just dialogic responsiveness, but in crafting and transmitting a constant dialogic echo? More significantly, what does a non-affirmative response to quotation's continued viability tell us about the vitality of contemporary adaptations of Aristotelian ethos?

Quotation and ethos are usually taught as an almost intuitive relationship between rhetors' uses of sources, their broadcasted credibility, and their essential identities. Teachers routinely provide students a conventional set of dicta rehearsing how and why quotations are an indispensable component of academic writing: not only does quoting exhibit that you have read and thought about an issue, it proves you are not an intellectual embezzler, that you are actively and conspicuously involved in communal discourse. In short, quotation establishes the rhetors' credibility by brandishing a willingness and ability to treat other people's words and ideas with transparent and attentive care while using them to invent and present the rhetors' own arguments. All of which is good advice, though it is already evident, even standing as we are on the relative outskirts, how complicated it can all become as we advance deeper into our brave digital world. While this section does not seek to fully map the ineluctable linguistic, pedagogic, social, and technological shifts compelling those complexities it will plot the current orbit of quotation and ethos around that digital world.

In her expansive inquiry into the culture and history of quotation, scholar Ruth Finnegan traces the act of quoting from its etymological Latinate root meaning "how many," to the fifteenth century's perfunctory numbering of simple "marginal references" of one passage on the pages of another, to the seventeenth century's more fastidious, and

more familiar “reproduction,” to use Finnegan’s phrase, “of words from elsewhere” (95-96). This “reproduction of words from elsewhere” is the cardinal characteristic of contemporary composition pedagogy, with dual obligations to faithfully adhere to source material and to fully explain how and why that material came to be “elsewhere” than its original source, specifically in student papers. Well-known English professor Gerald Graff offers a useful précis of the conventional wisdom behind teaching quotation: “Quotation,” he writes, “becomes a bridge that lets students imitate academic language while infusing their own voices and inflections into it at the same time” (237). While crossing this bridge, students learn that quotations always require “unpacking”: that is, their presence in and importance to the students’ arguments cannot be assumed; students should never “parachute,” in common compositional argot, quotations into their arguments. But parachuting, or its online equivalents (e.g., hypertexting, retweeting, and Wikipedia editing) is the coin of the realm in the digital world that buys contextual correlation more readily than textual exposition. “[T]he act of writing,” says poet Kenneth Goldsmith, summarizing this trend, “is literally moving language from one place to another, boldly proclaiming that context is the new content” (3).

So, the orthodox advice we give students about circumspectly quoting from elsewhere before explicating, without fail, the quote’s argumentative helpfulness faces a challenge from the pervasive systems of digital communication permeating current public discourse. If the chief obligation to quote content accurately gives way to an obligation to situate quotations in evocative contexts, we have shifted the critical skills of quotation away from dialogic responsiveness, that is, from when we tell our students to engage “in

conversation” with their sources, to what I call dialogic echoing, the iterative reticulation of repurposing sources. This passing of the baton is permissible, I think, because, as Finnegan concludes, “there is no uniform way that quoting and quotation are demarcated, practised [sic] and conceptualised” other than to acknowledge that, regardless of revision to the systems, “the use of others’ words and voices,” she rightfully asserts, “is unmistakably [sic] a highly significant—and sensitive—dimension of human communication” (257). To be clear, reasonably and appropriately quoting, the techne of thinking about what is rhetorically fitting given specific intentions and audiences, remains a crucial feature whether students are echoing sources or responding to them. Using quotations to create a dialogic echo in the digital world still demands that students understand and can articulate why they incorporate other people’s words and ideas in their own arguments. Admittedly, they cannot leave their rhetorical luggage forever unpacked, and for this reason I would never suggest that the digital world forces teachers into some archly poststructuralist pedagogic contortion of instructing the acceptance of dialectical meaning-making as an irrevocably dissociated and fragmented enterprise.

What the dialogic echo dissipates, I argue, is neither the influence nor credibility of a quotation on an argument, but the emphasis on any final certitude of a quotation and the insistence on its fixed probity. In other words, teaching quotation as a dialogic echo, teaching it for use in the digital world, is to emphasize what writer Gary Saul Morson labels “the process of becoming a quotation,” a process where students are always actively, as Morson puts it, “polishing towards quotability,” always thinking about their rhetorical actions within a network of subsequent rhetorical actions, always thinking

about their current words as someone else's future quotation, and what responsibilities to their own quoting are consequent of that potential repurposing (117). Teaching "the process of becoming a quotation" instead of just teaching quoting can give us pause without causing too much disquiet. The concern that students will take "unfixed probity" as a signal to relentlessly plagiarize is understandable, and clearly we do not want to teach students that communication, even online, is merely a stitching together of other people's antecedent rhetoric into a Frankenstein's monster of unoriginal and unexamined thought. On the other hand, we have to acknowledge that, as Emerson coaches, "Our knowledge is the amassed thought and experience of innumerable minds" that we "inherited," he tells us, "ready-made," again affirming that, "we but quote them" (1040). An often cited example of using exclusively ready-made knowledge to create a dialogic echo is essayist and novelist Jonathan Lethem's 2007 *Harper's* article, "The Ecstasy of Influence: A Plagiarism," where every sentence is, by Lethem's own admission, "stole[n], warped, and cobbled together" from source materials: it is an unabashed feat of intellectual theft, and it is hard not to commend its rhetorical dexterity and ingenuity.

It is unfair to expect our students to write like professionals while they are professionalizing, but the lesson we learn from Lethem (or, on the other end of the cultural spectrum, from something like Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*) is that, even in extreme instances of repurposing, even, perhaps, in obvious instances of malfeasant plagiarism, "the suppression of self-expression," Goldsmith writes, "is impossible." "Even when we do something as seemingly 'uncreative' as retyping a few pages," Goldsmith continues, "we express ourselves in a variety of ways. The act of choosing and

reframing tells us...about ourselves.” But the rub, he contends, is “that we’ve never been taught to value such choices” (9). We cannot deny that valuing appropriation equal with invention undermines fidelity to source and exactness in the act of quoting, but the upshot is that teaching quotation as a dialogic echo, as a deliberate, responsive refraction of other words and ideas with the recognition and encouragement of subsequent refractions, provides students, perhaps counterintuitively, with more space and more resources to generate something to say than insisting they hover frustrated over the *inventio* stage of the writing process until inspiration strikes. Teaching the dialogic echo opens up for students “vast memory,” as Emerson phrases it, that serves as “raw material” for repurposing. Put differently, the dialogic echo concentrates on the primacy of the shifting immediate as the currency of the digital world while acknowledging the constituent network influencing any particular *au courant* rhetorical moment. “We cannot overstate our debt to the Past,” ends Emerson’s essay, “but the moment has supreme claim.” “The Past is for us,” he continues, “but the sole terms on which it can become ours are its subordination to the Present.” Using the “vast memory” of the past as the “raw material” for the present yields “ever the instant life,” Emerson portends, “which receives and uses and creates, and can well bury the old in the omnipotency with which Nature decomposes all her harvest for recomposition” (1042).

Our classroom goals need not be so ambitiously prophetic. If we replace “Nature” with Internet, we have a metaphor as apt as any for the incessant flux of the digital world’s information: the Internet “decomposes all her harvest for recomposition,” and, as composition instructors at the cockcrow of the colloquially named Web 2.0, it is perhaps

our job to help students develop skills for tracking the evolution and devolution of ideas, including their own, across digital landscapes. It is worth explicitly stating that emphasizing re-composition equal with composition retains as a *sine qua non* of academic success the duty to let other people know when, how, and why you are repurposing their sources as quotations in your own arguments. We should avoid either devaluing citation strategies because we are revaluing appropriation strategies, or seeing those as discrete sets of strategies: “By indulging in conscious echo,” composition scholar Kevin Dettmar affably reminds, “one runs less risk of being accused of unconscious echo” (102). Even Lethem, at the end of his panegyric enactment of rampant, unapologetic plagiarism thoroughly notes all the people from whom he cobbled his essay. The takeaway of defining quotation as an instantiation of dialogic echoing advantageous in the digital world is not that it is an insurrectionist dissent from the conventional aims of quoting, but that it is actually a return to the simple referential acknowledgements, of the sort Finnegan describes, characterizing a proto-quotation less bothered by anxieties over rigidly scrupulous probity.

One consequence of defining quotation as dialogic echo is that it provides theoretic support to what is by now a well-established recoil from the prudish attitudes and punitive approaches to academic dishonesty that continue to guide the technological detection enhancements and institutional mediation policies of many schools, despite the persistence and volubility of those who recoil. The grande dame of this backlash is probably Rebecca Moore-Howard, but the backlash’s mindset is adequately summarized in a recent *College Composition and Communication* article by Sean Zwagerman, who

evinces “the ill effects,” as he calls it, “of vigilance in curbing academic dishonesty,” claiming that “the discourse of academic integrity” is “complicit in the problem” (677). Howard concurs: “We must revise universities’ plagiarism policies,” she entreats, “because at present they describe only one notion of authorship, the unified, autonomous subject whose textual manifestation derives from his or her moral turpitude” (*Plagiarism* 802). As contemporary scholars and teachers of rhetoric and composition, even if we resist the pressure mentioned earlier to assume that all rhetorical meanings inevitably crumble and melt into air, we may find notions of the unified self troubling, especially when students are facing failure and expulsion because we decided that their writing does not, as we will discuss more fully below, “sound like them.” That educators often presume to know something essential about student identity because they grade student work is by now well discussed (see, for instance, Susan Miller’s *Textual Carnivals* from 1993), but my intentions here are not to chagrin further on that point. Neither do I here intend to politick for the endemic inadequacy and imperative doctoring of current administrative academic dishonesty practices: it suffices to say that the distinction, aptly articulated by Howard, then echoed by Zwagerman and most everyone else, between the tangled conceit of plagiarism and more straightforwardly harmful intellectual fraud is convincing to me. But I will argue that teaching the dialogic echo as a purposeful, or, re-purposeful, rhetorical skill helps foster a constructive attitude toward both of these admittedly important issues because the dialogic echo mollifies, as I suggested it did at the level of the quotation, our avidity for fixed probity across the broadest level of our

professional mission, and does so by rooting itself in classical conceptions of ethos (ἔθος, that is, not ἦθος).

Respected rhetoric scholar Jan Swearingen warns that, “We have almost entirely lost the subtlety of ethical and epistemological discrimination that classical thinkers brought to their discussion of...ethos” (134). She explains that today, “We look at questions of identity, voice, self, and authenticity as intrinsic to ethos,” but notes that “classical thinkers...did not” (115). Modern rhetors run the risk of developing anachronistic understandings of ethos when they characterize it, as our classes, textbooks, and honesty policies often do, as wholly concerned with resolute exhibition of congenial trustworthiness. For Swearingen making ethos entirely about identity “assumes,” she writes, “notions of authenticity and self that rely on a self-reflexive epistemology...whose psychologism...is quite foreign to classical conceptions of ethos” (116). It is clear how psychologizing the antipodal acts of quotation and plagiarism, psychologizing, indeed, the entire assignment of “finding your voice,” opens up a can of worms: focusing on interiority and authenticity effectively blockades the ethical appeal’s value in a digital world where context is the new content, since remixing is fundamentally an exercise in exteriority and inauthenticity, or, at least, in the elastic nature of what counts as authentic. Alice Roy, another established plagiarism scholar, summarizes the dilemma: “The ethical appeal establishes the speaker/writer as a person of good conscience,” she says, “a responsible, even admirable citizen—someone to be believed. But when that writer is a thief,” she balefully continues, “ethos is unsatisfied,

undermined.” The result of this “collapse of ethos,” she claims, is that “the reader cannot tell who is speaking and, moreover, did not know that it was necessary to ask” (59).

What I have tried to suggest is that the value of quotation in the digital world, the critical skill consequent of the dialogic echo, is the intellectual habit of continuously asking who is speaking, or, more precisely, who is speaking through whom? Asking this question helps alleviate the sense of betrayal and deception Roy describes, and, more profoundly, asking this question becomes a central skill of civic literacy as information and communication continues its migration online, where the borders between a person’s original idea and another person’s assimilation of that idea are not clearly marked. The classical view of ethos can help provide answers. “Though classical thinkers did not develop conceptions of empowering individuals or the self through rhetoric,” Swearingen explains, “their conceptualizations of the powers of rhetorical imitation...resemble modern understandings of self and voice in their emphasis on ethos as surface” (119). It is in this “power of rhetorical imitation,” an intensification of the Emersonian “reading with other eyes,” that I think we find our best practice for creating and evaluating productive and transparent dialogic echoes in the digital world. Aristotle (*Rhetoric*, Book 2), and, later, Quintilian (*Oratoria*, Book 9) describe the act of *prosopopoieia*, of, trading on the etymological root of ethos, inhabiting temporarily either someone or something else. The act of becoming someone else is an unavoidably inauthentic endeavor, which concerned neither Aristotle nor Quintilian, but demands no less due diligence to get it right because it is not real. Like the construction of ethos itself, *prosopopoieia* “produces,” Swearingen claims, “likenesses, copies, or fictive representations of reality,”

the value of which is deeply contingent on the common rhetorical elements we already teach our students to consider and incorporate in their work, including audience, intention, and *kairos* (117).

We should append, I think, these “representations of reality,” the extent to which they are consciously constructed and adeptly controlled, and the extent to which they actively permit repurposing, as another contingent compositional element we teach our students to consider. Teaching ethos as a strategy emphasizing the situationally appropriate arrangement of rhetorical surfaces to present a credible but contingent you in your writing is actually a return to classical conceptions, of the sort Swearingen describes, less bothered by anxieties over rigidly psychologized authenticity. Adding *prosopopoieia*, the presentation of a credible and necessarily contingent other in your writing, as a subset of strategic, situational ethos provides a framework, even in the ceaseless wake of remixing, for thinking about the value of becoming a quotation in the digital world, just as it provides proof that, even in the online labyrinth, a credible ethos remains extant. These representations of either a situationally appropriate self or someone else become the substance of the dialogic echo, the shout thrown into the cavernous rhetorical world, increasingly a digital world, and the shout, full of “new and fervent senses,” we hear thrown back.

Study 3:
*The Hidden Bigotry of Authenticity:
Student-Athletes and Professors Playing the Identity Game*

To return to the matter of student voice, and because I do not wish coyly to bury the lead, this section argues that we should not assume that student-athletes who sound

and act one way on the field, another way in class, and a different way on the page are cheating, a principle to which I assume most teachers will readily subscribe. This clearly is not a particularly revelatory conclusion for most of us. Still, I am reminded of an instance when, during a plagiarism conference I mediated for my department, a colleague unflaggingly insisted that the African-American basketball player in her class could not have written the essay she turned in because it “didn’t sound the way she talks.”

Such common knowledge and anecdotal experience, sustained by glances through media sources both professional and popular, suggest that the stigmatizing of student-athletes persists: they are often considered, at best, academically underprepared, and, at worst, intellectually incompetent; they are often presumed to carry deep senses of entitlement drowning shallow interest in their schooling; as a result, their work is often viewed warily, the product of small doses of forced but lackluster effort aided by large doses of heavy-handed, scare-quoted tutoring. Like commercial airplane crashes, systemic academic malfeasance in big-league athletic departments, though infrequent, is reported with such wide reproach that scandal is perceived as their standard operating procedure. These suspicious attitudes envelop like a clinging fog the teaching and assessment of student-athletes with a judicial rather than a judicious air. Running contra to these negative constructions of student-athletes is what we might call an equally common stigmatizing of stigmatization: teachers telling their colleagues that, regarding their student-athletes, if they can’t convict, they must acquit.

I find the parallel but paradoxical presence of these attitudes towards student-athletes fascinating, especially because their complex and concurrent existences

underscore what I have tried to point to as another, more basal paradox in many public spheres, popular, political, and pedagogic: we love authenticity, even as we know, though regularly pretend not to, that authentic is a highly molten concept, liquid and often too hot to grasp. Authenticity in education can be understood as the demand by teachers of their students for a stable projection of a stable self. We very much want the one bit of good advice Polonius gives Laertes, “to thine own self be true” (Act 1.3) to be true. In our composition classes as in the world beyond, however, we generally and often genially allow self to “dissolve,” quoting from John Trimbur, “into the semiosis of intertextuality” (283). Or, as Sharon Crowley explains at the beginning of her *Methodical Memory*, “the sovereign authoring subject” is “no longer useful as [a] theoretical resource for the teaching of composition” (xiv).

But evidence still remains of our deep fixation on the authentic, our compulsion to seek out and reward authenticity, our drive to actually be authentic, and our desire for an unwavering authentic self. Authenticity is a concept we have moved beyond but cannot get past. The result is a sort of cognitive dissonance promoting discouraging and potentially damaging public decisions, especially those educational, but political and cultural ones as well. Exhibit A may be the continued presence of the stigmatization of student-athletes, along with the reaction against such stigmatization.

Stigmatize is an appropriate term to apply to unexamined negative attitudes towards student-athletes in composition classes since its etymology denotes a physical marking and branding. In high education, teachers and other students often brand student-athletes as dumb and duplicitous because of their physicality. During one of the

introductory rhetoric and writing courses I taught to an all-varsity-athlete class, a student and basketball player recounted to us his inability to convince his non-student-athlete peers that he did not receive answers to exams before the test dates. Instead, these peers demanded that he share with them his ill-gotten inside information. His student-athlete peers in our class all emphatically related to his tale, many recounting their own similar experiences of being negatively branded, despite never offering explicit confirmation of their student-athlete status. People could, they would say, “just tell,” a phenomenon they gamely laughed off. Sociologist Julie Cheville exposes the anxieties behind this uncomfortable laughter in *Minding the Body*, her book-length study of a female college basketball team. She writes, “what student athletes most fear [is] that their athleticism will be appropriated and used against them by those who have the power to deny or devalue their presence” (4). So, while there is a longstanding connection in rhetorical studies between body and mind, the bond between the two has been all but broken in contemporary universities.

In *Bodily Arts*, her study of rhetoric and athletics in ancient Greece, rhetorician Debra Hawhee describes what she calls the “curious syncretism” (195) between athletic training, resulting “good bodily disposition” (*euexia*), and philosophic training, resulting in virtuosity (*arête*).³⁷ Isocrates, in *Antidosis*, remarks that “These two disciplines are complementary, interconnected, and consistent with each other.” He continues, “They do not separate these two kinds of education but use similar methods of instruction, exercise, and other kinds of practices” (239). For Isocrates and the Greeks, the gymnasium was an

³⁷ For a thoughtful exploration of rhetoric and physical bodies in the work of Kenneth Burke, see Hawhee’s *Moving Bodies: Kenneth Burke at the Edges of Language* (2009).

entirely appropriate place to practice one's *progymnasmata*. But, for a variety of reasons, varsity athletics and collegiate scholastics are separated in most schools today, often to the detriment of students. Cheville claims that, for many student-athletes, "the conceptual orientation central to knowledge acquisition in sport [is] relatively useless in college classrooms that disassociate[s] cognition from concrete activity and interaction" (8). And, as pointed out in a psychological study focusing on the motivational processes of student-athletes by Althea Woodruff and Diane Schallert, most student-athletes "intertwine" (35) their academic and athletic "senses of self" (42, and *passim*) in complicated and not necessarily beneficial ways, in part because they are not always sure, and rarely asked to articulate, how their minds and bodies connect.

Many scholars have suggested, however, that there is a space in rhetoric and composition classes where body and mind—the corporeal and compositional selves—do intersect, for students and student-athletes alike. Unlike the historical virtuous associations between mind and body traced by scholars like Hawhee, this current intersection is largely considered oversimplified and overweening, especially in the wake of rigorous debates over author, author-function, and agency. As Susan Miller points out in *Textual Carnivals*, "Writing makes an object of a student's language." She continues, "Consequently, the practice of attending to mechanical errors allow[s] written texts to become instruments for examining the 'body' of a student...This attention allows a teacher...to examine the student's language with the same attitude that controls a clinical medical examination." Miller concludes, "In the continuing view that a student's written

language reveals personal flaws as readily as his speech, the quality of the student can be identified with the correct or incorrect quality of the student's texts" (57).

Student work, in other words, is taken as student identity. This identity is taken as the student's actual and only identity, though it is refracted through the class' particular rhetorical situations, compositional processes, and assignment expectations, and then unavoidably swayed by teacher assessment. A persona is taken to be the person. The reverse is also possible, particularly with minority and male student-athletes, when the person reflected in the student's work fails to reflect the expected persona in the eyes of the teacher. Herein lies the bigotry of authenticity: a sort of asymmetric insight whereby many teachers believe they have the power and privilege over their students to discern, even define, their students' irreducible selves. Instead of telling students what they are doing, and how they are doing it, teachers attempt to tell students who they are. But, as Lionel Trilling once wrote, "criticism is not gossip."

Indeed, Rebecca Moore Howard reminds us that, "In rhetorical studies, 'the systems of which one is part' include subject formation." "Reflexivity in rhetorical studies has," she continues, "called attention to subject formation as fundamental precept and project of the discipline." Moore concludes that, "subject formation might even be seen as a metanarrative for rhetorical and pedagogical studies" (*Review* 349). I agree with Howard about the considerable significance of subject formation in composition classes, but I think the word "reflexive" is potentially distressing.

If reflexive connotes the extent to which a student-athlete is expected to reflect a teacher's *a priori* expectations, as in the instance with my disbelieving colleague and her

basketball-playing writer, we risk allowing the molten substance that is student identity to harden into something not just inauthentic but counterproductive, precisely the opposite of what this sort of logic hoped to accomplish. If, however, reflexive connotes a student-athlete's ability to assimilate then activate the missions of the class, trying out with reflection the various rhetorical and compositional strategies taught to them, we are getting close to the core of why we teach rhetoric and writing to our students. Composition and rhetoric classes axiomatically ask students to try on new selves in order to expand what constitutes the self. Teachers, at their best, intend to improve their students, i.e., as writers, as citizens, as individuals, by improving their abilities to write and argue. But at their worst, teachers sometimes fail to see how such programs for improvement obligate them to give students space to flex and stretch their identities.

What I am asserting is that, as discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, we worry too much about identity, when what we really mean is "identification" in Burke's sense of the concept. In his *Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke tells us that fundamentally rhetoric is the student's ability to "persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea," ultimately, "identifying your ways with his" (55). We worry too much about who a student-athlete is, or who we think he or she is, instead of concentrating on more pragmatically useful evaluations, like the student's success in practicing identification while navigating the rhetorical contingencies of audience and situation.

The tragedy of the bigotry of authenticity is twofold. First, in our emphasis on the authentic, we may limit the opportunities for student-athletes (and frankly, perhaps, all

students), many of whom are already having a difficult time intertwining their various selves, to fully exercise their agency. By agency I mean the microphysical capacity for students to, again quoting from Trimbur, “negotiate their ways of life” using “practical logic” (285). Second, we may fail to recognize that the student-athlete whose essay does not “sound the way she talks” is, in fact, trying in her work to sound and act like us, since that is what most composition and rhetoric classes ask students to do.

Instead of trying to carry such a hefty concept as identity into our classrooms, I offer that a slower, diagnostic discussion of ethos works as a productive replacement. Aristotle, in Book 2 of *On Rhetoric*, calls ethos “almost ... the most authoritative form of persuasion” (1356a.2-4), and conventionally understood components of Aristotelian ethos are useful concrete strategies for composition students. But since my contention is that most civic discourses, including many in the sphere of compositional pedagogy, emphasize rhetor authenticity over more constructive, though contingent, pragmatic characteristics, and since I think this overemphasis stems in part from a highly diluted, highly psychologized take on Aristotle’s conception of ethos, I am interested in reading Aristotelian ethos as drawing a distinction between being ethical, and what I will call being ethotic. This distinction can be productively dissected in rhetoric and composition classes.

Ethical, as we discovered in Yoos’s articles, carries a moral valence insisting that the students’ identity reflected in their writing be authentic, and made authentically available to audiences. On the other hand, ethotic asks only that students present a situationally clear and appropriate identity with which their audience can identify for

purposes of building transparent and transactional rhetorical relationships. The ethotic is unconcerned whether or not students' identities match their authentic selves. Besides, to avoid coyness again, I am skeptical that an essential self even exists, particularly in compositional pedagogy, despite beliefs in a stable self by classical philosophers, including Aristotle, though, as admitted in Chapter I, proving the existence of a stable self is beyond the scope of my dissertation. The ethotic sidesteps this skepticism anyway because it is transparent about the constructed nature of a rhetor's ethos. The ethical, conversely, demands of the rhetor a more constitutive identity. The ethotic is method; the ethical is category.

The ethotic is highly pragmatic, and thus, in my opinion, pedagogically useful, if we understand pragmatic to mean what William James calls an "attitude of looking away from first things, principles, 'categories,' [and] supposed necessities," and "looking towards last things, fruits, consequences, [and] facts" (27). It is too pat to suggest that Aristotle replaces classical conceptions of the sincerely good man with an opposed postmodern conception of the contingent self. But it is clear in Book 2 that identity within civic discourse is not necessarily authentic, by which I hope to suggest both not required and not inevitable. Rather, it mostly depends on the situation. As Lester Faigley explains it in *Fragments of Rationality*, his useful book on subjectivity and composition, "The subject, like judgments of value and validations, has no grounding outside contingent discourses" (227).

So ethos, in the setting of our classes, is best understood as any form of what rhetorician Marshall Alcorn calls "self-structuring" by the student (16). Because he

specifically highlights control of identity as a component of rhetoric, Alcorn's usage opens space for students to practice composition contingently. It also addresses Trimbur's "semiotic dissolution," since self-structuring forces rhetors to acknowledge and engage with the specter haunting ethos in the poststructuralist world: "It seems we cannot have at the same time," Alcorn warns, "both a theory that explains the rhetor's presence in a text and a theory that fully describes the plural disseminations of textual codes" (17).

Alcorn sounds about right, yet despite the seismic effects Foucault's "author-function" (in 1969's "What is an Author?") and Barthes's "death of the author" (in 1974's *S/Z*) have had on literary theory, the strictness with which composition and rhetoric classes believe in and operate under these poststructural paradigms is perhaps overstated. While poststructuralism still seeps into the cracks, there is a thick wall of productive disagreement in composition studies over the extant author's presence and consequence. Again, we accept that the concept of a stable, authentic author is troubled, even as we still want to know who wrote what and why. By engaging these troubling issues in class, the goal is not to draw conclusions, which is probably a fool's errand. But I believe there is critical value in explicitly discussing with our students the *raison d'être* of contingency, along with its subsequent underwriting of identification over identity. These discussions are especially commodious for students who conspicuously feel the instability of identity in their day-to-day lives, including most student-athletes, even as they attempt to intertwine their various selves.

In the end, Howard's claim that subject formation serves as the "metanarrative" for compositional and rhetorical studies provides a practical suggestion for teaching

student-athletes. My experience is that student-athletes require and respond to meta-discussions about the obligations, attitudes, and actions towards schooling. Similarly, because of the inherent performative aspects of athletics, student-athletes possess an almost intuitive appreciation for rhetoric as classical rhetoricians like Aristotle and Isocrates originally described it: as *techne*, an art, rather than as *episteme*, knowledge.³⁸ Hawhee succinctly characterizes this intuition as “chiasmatic,” the “immediate relationship between training practices and performance” (7).

There are convincing arguments against engaging in this sort of self-conscious meta-discussion with our students: as Amy Robillard points out, unlike compositional studies, “Students of other disciplines do not reflect the nature of the field itself. The discipline of astronomy, for example, studies the heavens; it does not study the students of astronomy” (42). While I appreciate Robillard’s concern, I argue that, even if composition classes are not really, or at least not most productively about identity, they are essentially and inevitably about people doing work. If astronomy students created stars in class instead of observing them, perhaps then we would find it more acceptable to engage in disciplinary conversations about the reflexive relationships between person and pulsar. Undeniably, however, the students writing in our classes are creating constellations of identifications and cosmologies of selves. For me, teaching this conflicted conversation about conflicted self does more than offer to students critical

³⁸ For a deeper discussion of composition as a *techne*, see Kelly Pender’s *Techne, From Neoclassicism to Postmodernism: Understanding Writing as a Useful, Teachable Art* (2011).

knowledge; it offers to teachers a gentle corrective against the hazard of assuming that, at least when it comes to knowing who our students are, we know best.

Conclusion:
What We Talk about When We Talk about Ethos

“Suppose you came back as a serf. The serfs didn’t have it so good in those days,” Terri said. “The serfs never had it good,” Mel said. “But I guess even the knights were vessels to someone. Isn’t that the way it worked? But then everyone is always a vessel to someone else. Isn’t that right?”...“Vassals,” Terri said. “What?” Mel said. “Vassals,” Terri said. “They were called vassals, not vessels.” “Vassals, vessels,” Mel said, “what the fuck’s the difference?”

— Raymond Carver, “What We Talk about When We Talk about Love” (148-149)

I will end where I began, by making the claim that Americans’ craving for authenticity gets them in hot water. The four chapters of this dissertation are attempts to illustrate various ways in which we keep dipping our toe in the tub and getting burned. Comedian and sometime sage Stephen Colbert’s punchline pithily summarizes the predicament these chapters describe: “Does authenticity really matter that much? I mean, if appearance is so important in politics, if a person appears authentic, isn’t that enough?” “But then,” he continues, “I’m the kind of guy who also enjoys artificial crab. It kinda tastes like crab.”³⁹ The word that gives away the joke is “kinda.” We may accept artificial crab, but if given the choice, we prefer the real thing. So it is with authenticity in our public discourse. We continue to crave authenticity of the Isocratean, Smokey Robinson “really real” variety even though we recognize, and seem to live and thrive with an understanding, that many modern social structures in America pressure us into decidedly

³⁹ *The Colbert Report*, 23 April 2007.

and obviously inauthentic actions and behaviors. We deal admirably with the “kinda” authentic. Our collective attitude is like the commentator “Chick” who really felt she could see the real Sarah in Palin’s 2008 Republican National Convention, even after conceding with a shrug that of course all politicians worth their salt today have and need ghostwriters. For the anonymous Chick, as for most of us, we hold out hope that a rhetor’s essential character, what Isocrates called their habit (*hexis*),⁴⁰ will still find a way to shine through even the most manufactured of rhetorical situations, from political rallies to composition class writing assignments, and we hold out hope that we are adroit and savvy enough to recognize this essential character when we encounter it. But even if intrinsic character does not shine through, even if we are not adequately equipped to see it for what it is, we still seem able to persevere as rhetorical and political entities. Our policies and ideas may progress in fits and starts, and our public discourses are often grating and querulous, but eventually we usually end up making some decisions about

⁴⁰ Ethos for Isocrates is *hexis* teased out by education (*paideia*). Anyone “who wishes to persuade others will not neglect virtue but will devote even more attention to ensuring that he achieves a most honorable reputation among his fellow citizens. Who could fail to know that speeches seem truer when spoken by those of good name than by the disreputable, and that arguments acquire more authority when they come from one’s life than from mere words. The more ardently someone wants to persuade his audience, the more he will strive to be a gentleman and to have a good reputation among the citizens” (*Antidosis* 278). I read “good name” categorically here: moral character exists within a person prior to any sophisticated training intent on cultivating its use for public purposes. Isocrates’ insistence on “innate” justice and virtue, (see section 21 of *Against the Sophists*) aids my reading, as does his acknowledgement that some people are just inherently “depraved.” That moral character is difficult to harness without training does not, it seems to me, undermine what Isocrates sees as the intrinsic dimension of ethos. The result of a good name is seemingly “truer,” that is, more trustworthy, speeches, and a rhetor who already seems more trustworthy before speaking can count on adding that internal ethos to the rhetorical act’s external ethos. Isocrates is discussing conclusions: if a rhetor is a good person *a priori*, her speeches will seem, also *a priori*, truer to her audiences.

how to proceed.⁴¹ It seems, then, that we continue to crave intrinsic character despite the realization that we may not necessarily expect it.

But more important, I have tried to argue that even if we do not expect authenticity, we persist in attempting to gauge the impacts and outcomes of our public rhetorical life as if we could, and this is how we end up scalding ourselves. It is this pattern of persistence in spheres popular, political, and pedagogic that gives my dissertation's title its paronomastic dimension and argumentative force. On one hand, ethos as an unambiguous and trustworthy external manifestation of a rhetor's internal, intrinsic character is something to be endured in public rhetorical discourse. Endured because the craving for intrinsic character will always be with us no matter how sophisticated our understandings of rhetors' intentions and their purposeful employment of rhetorical strategies for specific desired effects. And endured because we cannot, as discussed in the introduction, ever really settle the question of whether or not there is even an intrinsic character to crave. My dissertation takes this craving as a sort of rhetorical concupiscence, enthusiastic and ineluctable, perhaps, but ultimately unsatisfying as a method for assessing the value of rhetorical acts and actors in public discourse, especially those conversations treating controversial issues with serious consequences. (I am thinking, as examples, about current legislative debates over immigration reform and the status of undocumented workers in the United States, or

⁴¹ Questioning either the rightness or wrongness of those decisions is an unfair responsibility for this dissertation. But we may need to admit that we just are not proceeding very rationally in any case, as suggested by, among others, Bryan Caplan in his *The Myth of the Rational Voter* (2008). For similar struggles from the perspective of the campaigns, see Samuel Popkin's *The Candidate: What it Takes to Win—and Hold—The White House* (2012).

about potential revisions to NCAA policies dictating the financial autonomy of collegiate varsity athletes. Etc. Both of these debates are rooted in what we think we know about some essentialist aspects of the primary stakeholders involved. Basing policy decisions on only the perceived character of illegal immigrants and student-athletes is about as helpful as talking about the cost of social programs without also discussing the benefits.)

The desire for intrinsic character—for what we can call the authentic—in public discourse, I have tried to suggest, is understandable and really not to be chastised. It makes sense that audiences want to believe that their perceptions of rhetors are reliable transcriptions of who those rhetors really are, because they need to believe that rhetors have dealt with them honestly, transparently, and in good faith. It makes sense that the sincerity of rhetors is of high importance to audiences, even though, as my dissertation argues, the construction and presentation of rhetors' ethos is a much more complicated process of creation and reception than rhetors merely being themselves in conspicuous ways. Plus, when audiences pass judgments on the intrinsic character of rhetors in public discourse, it must be considered that they may do so not because they necessarily either care about or need it to articulate their own needs and wants, but because it is a readily available narrative: tantalizing low-hanging fruit that many of our structures for public rhetoric (e.g., the media, the Internet) are organized to allow us to pick it with ease. We arrive at the conclusion that while we think we are passed such cognitive dissonances, we are not. And while my dissertation did not try to answer why this dissonance exists and persists, it attempted to catalogue propitious ways to explain its effects.

On the other hand, ethos as a situationally appropriate, audience-sensitive, and transparent rhetorical practice of negotiating understanding in given acts is something that is enduring, by which I mean to say that it is an analytic praxis that can be encouraged, developed, taught, uniformly implemented, and productively practiced in a variety of public discourses. As a non-prescriptive project, my goal in this dissertation was not to proselytize for better conversational content. Instead, my goal was to propose an analytic process for better understanding how the conversations we have, regardless of their content, are constructed around dual, and occasionally dueling, strands of ethos taken as either rhetorical or intrinsic (or, more likely, as some combination of both at the same time). (If such analyses of contemporary conversations help us proceed more cautiously and transparently in future conversations, that is icing on the cake.) The process described here is what I have called the transactional relationship between rhetors and audiences, but what we might now, in conclusion, label the ethotic moment. The ethotic moment is when rhetors and audiences meet to negotiate the range of acceptable meanings in a given rhetorical act, particularly those meanings concerning the character of the entities involved. We can presuppose that this range of acceptable meaning includes presented ethos, intrinsic character, and any amalgam of one being taken for the other. Before turning to some final thoughts on the implication of this ethotic moment on our public discourse specifically and democratic life generally, I will take a few moments to review the work of each chapter and their relationships with one another.

Chapter I establishes the value and viability of what Wayne Booth calls “faith in ethos,” the notion that rhetors and audiences can “remake” each other through intensive

reciprocal listening (see chapter one of *Rhetoric of Rhetoric*). Remaking is both a process and a product of communally determined inquiry that accepts the experiences and emotions of interlocutors as a form of logical argumentation worthy of serious investigation, and, when warranted, of unaffected assent.⁴² Part of the process of remaking comprises a mutual obligation for rhetors and audiences to take the time necessary to understand as reasons—as a form of reasoning—the presence of pathos and ethos appeals in other people’s arguments. It is important to remember, though, that assent is distinct from agreement: the former is a discrete step that may or may not result in the latter, but is nonetheless an important step for opening ourselves to the sort of social and rhetorical remakings that Booth has in mind. That is, we can extend our assent to our interlocutors without giving up our responsibilities to the integrity of our own positions. Being “remade” in the Boothian sense is not necessarily indicated, and, in fact, may be rarely indicated, by being persuaded. Remaking is to appreciate that expanding your understanding of the various attitudes that other people can and do take towards an issue will help you understand your own positions more completely and strongly. But remaking is also to appreciate that your positions, even if they do not change, will need correspondingly to expand to account for these newly encountered other attitudes.

It is this final expansion that requires a “faith” in ethos, and it requires an understanding of ethos to mean, moving beyond the version often taught in composition classrooms, more than just the credibility of a rhetor presented in an argument. Ethos, as

⁴² In fact, a large chunk of *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*’s mission is to provide helpful advice for determining when a belief is “warrantable.” For more, see chapter four of Booth’s book.

defined in Chapter I using Booth as a framework, is also a practice for “dwelling” in another people’s extra-logical (or, more precisely, their non-logos) reasoning long enough to make sound(er) evaluations on the extent to which we can assent to their arguments without losing loyalty to our own arguments and experiences. Within the evaluative aspect of Boothian ethos reside connotations of both the ethotic and the ethical: determining the extent to which we can usefully dwell in other people’s ethos compels judging the extent to which that ethos exhibits a decency and decorum allowing such in-dwelling. What is judged, in other words, is the maximum level of trust advisable in a particular rhetorical situation, and not any axiological ethics of rhetors themselves. Chapter I suggests that the connection between ethotic and ethical is influential, but Chapter IV emphasizes that we can appreciate and utilize this influence without accepting an unbreakable unity between the two. Booth’s definition of ethos, taken in Chapter I as a process and product of remakings, infuses the rest of my dissertation. This expanded definition of ethos helps us develop rhetorical habits with social and pedagogic advantages outlined in the three case studies that end Chapter IV. And it builds discursive scaffolding under which ethotic moments between audiences and rhetors can be constructed using Burkeian schema of consubstantiality and identification, setting the stage for Chapter III.

Before we get to the ways rhetors and audiences negotiate consubstantiality in rhetorical acts, we pause in Chapter II to examine more conventionally understood practices with the ethos appeal, and the ways those practices, in the hands of even moderately skillful rhetors, can disrupt the transactional impulse indispensable to the

ethotic moment. The power of rhetors to dictate to audiences is on full display in Chapter II, where we see how rhetors, especially those in the political sphere, use epideictic rhetoric to create instructional opportunities for their audiences to learn how these rhetors wish their ethos (or, in the case of campaign surrogates, their bosses' ethos) to be viewed. The epideictic becomes an authoritative mode of rhetoric because it contains what Chaïm Perelman calls its educative dimension, and also because this element of predominance in epideictic is subtly exercised since it is frequently eclipsed by its more obvious functions of praising and blaming that appear divested of the tutoring of any particular understanding of ethos.

The method by which this tutoring often occurs is through the use of sincerity by rhetors, but as illustrated in Chapter II, sincerity as a marker of intrinsic character in modern public discourse is something that cannot prudently and responsibly be taken *prima facie*. Contemporary scholars largely acknowledge that sincerity as practiced in public spheres, particularly the political, is most appropriately understood as a performance of virtue rather than its manifestation. Critics contend that such an understanding countenances bad actors, giving free range to their indecorum, discourtesy, and selfishness.⁴³ But Chapter II argues that recognizing the theatrical nature of displays of sincerity in public discourse does not license irresponsible and manipulative rhetors so much as it licenses audiences to manage, using Boothian processes outlined in Chapter I, their own assent to those rhetors via a triangulation of the rhetor's presented ethos, the audiences experiences of the rhetor in previous public displays, and the needs of the

⁴³ For an insightful discussion of the way liberal society handles bad behavior in public, see Judith Shklar's *Ordinary Vices* (1984).

community to which both rhetor and audience belong. Whenever the ethos of a rhetor present in a particular rhetorical act seems to fit within a pattern of previous experiences with that rhetor noticed by the audience, and assuming that the rhetor is offering something of value (e.g., policy, promises, etc.) to the audience, audiences can more readily assent to the rhetor's ethos. So even in situations in which the risk of rhetorical manipulation runs high, audiences retain an obligation to make rhetors' arguments make sense as best as they can. Primarily this obligation consists of taking rhetor's language seriously: what may appear as a tautology, for instance, can usually be made to make sense by decoding the singular definitions at play in rhetors' arguments and tracking the consequences of their usage in particular rhetorical situations.

If there is a pattern of language use spread over several rhetorical situations indicating that Sarah Palin means something specific about the political undervaluing of leadership skills inherent in "ordinariness," audiences should assent to her meaning. And they can do so without doing themselves any significant rhetorical and political harm, since, as Chapter I stresses, assent is not agreement: assent means only (though it is plenty, to be sure) respecting the uniqueness of her definitions enough to incorporate her assertions into our own positions seriously enough to see if they productively expand our understanding of the issue, and, as a corollary, strengthen our understanding of our own arguments. In other words, what does it say about political power and who can wield it if we accept that skills of executive leadership are as legitimately developed by motherhood as they are by an MBA? This is an interesting and fair question to ask in a country that operates on a representative democracy. Asking that question in order to interrogate my

own positions on who I believe is qualified to lead is the sort of remaking for which Booth advocates. What would it mean to my position to adopt Palin's definitions? Even if I ultimately decide that her definition of leadership is simplistic and her logic circular, that I just cannot satisfactorily equate in my mind the similarities between chairing a legislative committee and a family meeting, it neither means that I cannot appreciate how she could have arrived at that conclusion, nor that I am devaluing her experiences (or the unquestionably transformative experiences of any mother). It exhibits, in fact, that I have taken the time to integrate her definitions into my own understandings, but in the end, I simply did not find enough evidence to warrant agreement, even as I readily assented to her underlying argument. Remaking is a matter of degrees. If the consequences of adopting her definitions meant that I experienced a categorical change of mind, the remaking would, of course, be much more intense.

Similarly, if Barack Obama creates a campaign with the focus of convincing voters to see him as a "synecdochic form" of ourselves, we can assent to his importuning by asking ourselves questions like, what would this mean for our sense of being democratically represented if this were possible? Asking this question remakes us, even if we ultimately find it unconvincing. Feeling that our answer to this question (as opposed to any other, non-related rationale we might employ) specifically compels us to vote either for or against Obama remakes us even more deeply. By the end of Chapter III, however, we come to appreciate that remaking is a continuous process: the assent candidate Obama requested of voters during his first campaign had to be renewed as he took office as President Obama, and then renewed again as he returned to the campaign

trail to run for his second term. Chapter III ends on a cautious note, but it is not intended as pessimistic. If Chapter II is about the ways rhetors consciously control ethotic moments in rhetorical acts in order tip in their favor the scales of the transactional relationship, Chapter III emphasizes that rhetors can also make conscious attempts to equalize that relationship. Kenneth Burke's consubstantiality through identification describes both a philosophy and strategy for this sort of public engagement through rhetoric.⁴⁴

For Burke identification and consubstantiality are the meat and potatoes of political life. The role of rhetors is to develop in their audiences "a sort of attitudinizing" about the likeness of substance—be it cultural, political, social, linguistic, etc.—between the rhetor and the audience: to point out, in other words, ways that the two discrete rhetorical entities can be made consubstantial with one another. The role of audiences is to judge the extent to which the identificatory⁴⁵ elements promoted by their rhetors permits consubstantiation. What differentiates this process of negotiating consubstantiality from the more traditional applications of ethos appeals outlined in Chapter II is that, in the latter, moments of identification are presented by rhetors as the self-evident consequence of who they say they are to audiences, while in the former, the

⁴⁴ Burke's concepts also had definite pedagogic dimensions for him, a belief shared by this dissertation. See especially his "Linguistic Approaches to Problems of Education." *Modern Philosophies and Education: The Fifty-Fourth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, Part 1. Nelson B. Henry, ed. Chicago: U of Chicago P. 1955: 259-303. For expert analysis of this little-cited but important piece of Burke's work, see Jessica Enoch's "Becoming Symbol-Wise: Kenneth Burke's Pedagogy of Critical Reflection." *College Composition and Communication*. December 2004. (56.2): 272-296.

⁴⁵ It is understood that this is an ugly but useful adjectival neologism.

ability of audiences to make that judgment for themselves is made explicit. The latter is a requisition; the former is a request. Consubstantiality, in short, is the philosophic and strategic fuel that powers the engine of the ethotic moment at its most effectively transactional.

Chapter IV, first, seeks to expand our range of discourses beyond the political to suggest the ubiquity and value of the ethotic moment. But, second, this chapter seeks to study various reasons for the breakdown of the ethotic moment. In situations where we do not necessarily expect to see the ethotic moment breakdown—where the motivations of the interlocutors seem understandable, perhaps even well-intentioned, and where engaged rhetorical entities appear committed to identification through consubstantiation—we see concerns over authenticity interfering with rhetorical work of coming together to generate assent. Chapter IV is especially disturbed by this trend in rhetoric and composition classrooms where we might suppose our eyes would be most wide-opened and best equipped to avoid such breakdowns. In all cases, we can remain sensitive to authenticity's attraction while gently correcting our disinclination—more so, I think, than our inability—to incorporate these authenticity cues into an expanded range of potential discursive meanings and rhetorical effects.

That we frequently and discouragingly encounter hiccups in our current public discourse is undeniable to anyone who watches the news (or posts on Facebook). These hiccups are due, my dissertation argues, in part because of the awkward stances we take when we talk about authenticity of character in rhetorical situations. Scholar John S. Nelson, speaking specifically of *phronesis* but applicable, I think, to the other elements of

Aristotelian ethos (*arête* and *eunoia*), writes that “prudence by definition is about what people cannot control or predict with confidence” (229). He continues: “prudential character is not exclusively individual or rigidly fixed. Instead, it is relational and situational, as intimated by the ancient notion of ethos” (239). At its core, my dissertation seeks an updating of this ancient notion to help account for, and perhaps allay, a paradoxical attitude prevalent in contemporary civic and social American life: that we want, to steal Colbert’s joke, authentic crab, but can live with the artificial variety. Nelson (and Booth, and Perelman, and Burke, and Moore Howard, perhaps even Aristotle, and a hundred other rhetorical scholars) may insist that character is not “rigidly fixed” in rhetorical acts, but we still, to use a tautology of my own, want there to be a there, there.

This craving, I have argued, is understandable, because the alternative is something like that promoted by former Republican political consultant Matthew Dowd in his book *Applebee’s America* (see Sosnick, et al.), where, early on, he tells the story of a consultant colleague on the Democratic side of the aisle who worked for President Bill Clinton: “He said President Clinton had been a success,” Dowd relates, “because he had done ‘all of the small things he promised and half of the big.’” The moral for Dowd is that Clinton gave “voters a sense of authenticity” because “the Democrats promised real, concrete changes that would affect a voter’s everyday life and could easily be implemented” (24). Authenticity here seems simply to mean a promise that can be delivered, and the trick is to establish promises that are “easily” delivered to best ensure that you are taken as being authentic. The implication is that delivering promises will

reflect positively on your character, but it does not seem to really be about character, either intrinsic or constructed, in any significant sense. This sort of authenticity is archly (I might even say cynically) practical, and decidedly different from the consequence-focused pragmatic approach encouraged by my dissertation.

We do not need to bankrupt the concept of authenticity of all meaning and influence in order to recognize that it functions in ways much more complexly and perplexingly than we often take the time to realize while in the heat of the rhetorical moment. But we should remember (contra, perhaps, Caplan, see footnote #3 above), David Zarefsky's assurance that "people use reasonable and efficient heuristics to simplify complex problems" (126).⁴⁶ My dissertation's main point is not that people cannot effectively navigate complicated matters presented in complicated rhetorical manners, but that authenticity as a "heuristic" for appraising character in rhetorical acts is a not very "reasonable and efficient" one. While it seems like a simple and straightforward heuristic, it is actually a really tangled web. So, we do not need to assume that individuals are incapable of navigating this complexity in order to reduce their perplexity, but it may be that we need to do more, as is usually the case in these matters, to focus our pedagogy on recognizing this complexity and developing best practices for

⁴⁶ Zarefsky's argument is with Thomas Frank's *What's the Matter With Kansas?* (2006), in which Frank claims that contemporary conservative leaders have convinced voters in America's heartland to vote against their own self-interests in favor of perceived crises of ideology. I am sympathetic with Frank's concerns over potential demagoguery in current public debate, but tend to side with Zarefsky that people can figure it all out and usually end up voting "in a way that is consistent with their own interests and values" (126). For an even more scathing takedown of Frank's book, see Ellen Willis's "Escape from Freedom: What's The Matter with Tom Frank (and The Lefties Who Love Him)?" *Situations: Project of the Radical Imagination*. 2006 (1.2). Web.

navigating through it. (Navigating around authenticity seems unlikely, given what my dissertation characterizes as its obduracy in our collective attentions.) In the rhetoric and composition courses this might not necessarily look much different than current pedagogic practices in regards to lessons, assignments, and outcomes. What would change is the framing of the rhet-comp classroom's use of ethos. Instead of teaching it as just an appeal to credibility, we would teach it as a reiterative process of engaging with other ideas using other voices.⁴⁷ We would teach it as a habit of determining how, to borrow language from Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, audiences are both "addressed" and "invoked" in rhetorical situations, and how both entities, rhetors and audiences, share some of the obligation to make that determination. We would teach it as a habit of insisting that students' own voices are as fully and fairly present as possible in public discourse.

We can ask students not just to find a variety of voices and viewpoints in their research, but also to describe how the ethotic dimensions of each source helps explain its positions. We can ask them to write persuasive essays from the perspective of someone different from who they take themselves to be. We can ask them to use other people's words in acts of productive plagiarism to make their own arguments. Whatever specific assignments we use, I think it is crucial to emphasize the larger civic transferability of these classroom skills. Nelson laments that there is "little in the way of specifically

⁴⁷ As a profession we already seem comfortable expanding, even problematizing, the appeals for our students. We stress that *logos* is much more than simply the appropriate and timely use of statistics and facts, but rather the entire chain of reasoning that rhetors use to create argument, including their theses, claims, and evidences. Similarly, we stress that *pathos* is much more than simply feeling, but rather the entire range of value responses that communities have to their commonplace ideological beliefs.

republican education or example” (240). Zarefsky concurs: “while leaders can benefit from education that stresses the link between rhetoric and democracy, even more so can the citizenry at large.” For Zarefsky, this education is powerful because it creates in citizens “The habits and attitudes that constitute the ‘public philosophy,’” giving us “an exalted conception of rhetorical education” as “far more important than skills-training in composition and public speaking” (134). Cornel West portrays this “public philosophy” rooted in rhetorical education as a sort of nationwide Socratic seminar, the “aim” of which is a “democratic *paideia*—the cultivation of an active, informed citizenry—in order to preserve and deepen our democratic experience” (41).

Plenty of scholars and teachers are guiding students through the “democratic *paideia*” that West advocates. Exemplars includes Donald Lazere’s textbook *Reading and Writing for Civic Literacy: The Critical Citizen’s Guide to Argumentative Rhetoric* and Patricia Roberts-Miller’s monograph *Deliberate Conflict: Argument, Political Theory, and Composition Classes* (2004). My contribution here is to include teaching the ethotic moment, the transactional relationship between rhetors and audiences when the mutually negotiated characters of both are determined to be worthy of assent. Teaching ethos as ethotic, as transactional can help students recognize and navigate the difference between being a vessel for and a vassal of someone else’s rhetoric. The audience as vassal is in thrall to the rhetor, subservient to the rhetor’s demands for particular understandings of character, regardless of the audience’s needs and expectations in a particular situation. The audience as vessel, on the other hand, can be receptive to the requests of the rhetor while retaining its original shape and boundaries. The reverse is

true as well: audiences can force rhetors into the role of the vassal when they cede to little assent, or into the role of vessel if they are willing to assent to the rhetor's exhibited character to the extent that they find it profitable in terms of both comprehension and argumentation to do so. My dissertation argues that, between being a vassal and a vessel, there's a big difference. Since Wayne Booth's good will and good sense animate my dissertation, we will conclude with more of his sound council:

If man is essentially a rhetorical animal, his essential human act is that of making himself into a self, in symbolic communication with his fellows; that is, each of us makes himself or herself by assenting to and incorporating whoever and whatever represents life at its most immediate and persuasive. Our negatives are learned as we discover violations of our affirming. (*Modern Dogma* 194)

Offering, almost as a default habit of public conversation, our affirmations to those with whom we rhetorically engage who are clearly not out to do us harm may be more than a good idea. Our attentiveness to the violations of our affirming, and our willing to revise our positions in the world in the wake of these negating violations may be a central practice of the rhetorical project. So the difference between being a vassal a being a vessel is this: if being a vessel can't really hurt us, then why not?

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Vita

Eric Dieter is a bicentennial baby (1976), born and raised in Indiana. He is a 1999 graduate of Wabash College, where he had stints as both a varsity wrestler and a radio DJ, earning a B.A. in English. He moved to Austin in 2001, primarily for graduate school, but the live music and BBQ were definite bonuses. He received his M.A. in English from The University of Texas at Austin in 2004. From 2004 to 2007 he served as Assistant Director for UT's Department of Rhetoric and Writing. He also taught courses on introductory rhetoric, rhetoric and presidential campaigns, rhetoric and political films, rhetoric and narrative adaptation, introductory literary theory, and literary and reading theory for undergraduates professionalizing to be high school teachers. Since 2009 he has worked as a fulltime staff member for UT's Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (DDCE) as the Curriculum Coordinator for the Students Partnering for Undergraduate Rhetoric Success (SPURS), UT's dual credit rhetoric and writing program. As coordinator of SPURS he is responsible for developing curriculum, training teachers, assessing and reporting performance data, making site visits to work with students, maintaining the program's digital infrastructure, and facilitating daily operations between high school teachers and college instructors. In late 2013 he was promoted to Director for all of the DDCE's Pre-College Academic Readiness Programs (PCARP), which offers dual credit opportunities in chemistry, math, and rhetoric. He has been happily married to a professional gardener for twelve years and counting. He has two cats, who, though they did not make the *Acknowledgements*, deserve as much credit as anyone for his happiness and success. This is his first (and last) dissertation.

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