

University of Denver

## Digital Commons @ DU

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Graduate Studies

---

6-1-2012

### Posthumanist Rhetorical Agency

Matt Dunn

*University of Denver*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd>



Part of the [Communication Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Dunn, Matt, "Posthumanist Rhetorical Agency" (2012). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 174.  
<https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/174>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact [jennifer.cox@du.edu](mailto:jennifer.cox@du.edu), [dig-commons@du.edu](mailto:dig-commons@du.edu).

POSTHUMANIST RHETORICAL AGENCY

---

Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of Denver

---

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

---

by

Matt Dunn

June 2012

Advisor: Dr. Dan Lair

©Copyright by Matt Dunn 2012

All Rights Reserved

Author: Matt C. Dunn  
Title: POSTHUMANIST RHETORICAL AGENCY  
Advisor: Dr. Dan Lair  
Degree Date: June 2012

### **Abstract**

The postmodern criticism of humanist agency initiated by Dilip Gaonkar nearly twenty years ago set in motion a discipline wide discussion concerning the conceptualization rhetorical agency. Rhetorical agency is difficult but vital to conceptualize because the term bears directly on the discipline's theorizing about the speaker or rhetor, the effect of the speaker or rhetor's rhetoric on an audience, and the extent to which the speaker or rhetor's agency is constrained by ideology and discourse. What emerged from this discussion about agency did distance the discipline from the humanist conceptualization of rhetorical agency that persisted at the time Gaonkar published his argument, but conceptualizing rhetorical agency remains an evolving endeavor. The postmodern critique created two interrelated problems for the conceptualization of rhetorical agency in the discipline. The first concerns the role of discourse in the formation of rhetorical agency; the second concerns the impact ideology has on the formation of rhetorical agency. The response to the critique often assumes postmodern philosophy maintains the subject or agent is determined by discourse, and second, that the philosophy suggests ideology is virtually totalizing for subjectivity. I believe no postmodern author actually maintains either of these positions. The conceptualization of rhetorical agency which emerges in the recuperative effort predicated upon these two phantom criticisms results in the rehabilitation of the humanist paradigm Gaonkar's criticism suggests we reject. I argue we need not rehabilitate those

aspects of agency postmodernism calls into question, but rather should direct our attention to the conceptualization of rhetorical agencies that Gaonkar presumes exist in discourse practices. Lacan's theory of discourse corrects for these errors because it assumes there are four discrete manifestations of rhetorical agency in discourse. The psychoanalytic terminology Lacan provides compliments the study of rhetoric not only because rhetoric was central to Lacan's thinking, but also because his theory provides a model for isolating and explaining rhetorical agency in discourse practices.

## **Acknowledgements**

This project would not have been possible without input from Dr. Dan Lair, and I want to thank him for his contributions. Lindsey Madison's patience and support made the project possible, and words cannot capture how deeply appreciative I am to her for everything she sacrificed and contributed.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Rhetorical agency.....	4
Humanist Rhetorical Agency and the Neo-Aristotelian Interpretive Turn.....	4
The Postmodern Critique of Humanist Rhetorical Agency and Neo-Aristotelian Criticism.....	6
The Postmodern Alternative to Humanist Neo-Aristotelian Rhetorical Agency.....	8
The Criticism of Rhetorical Agency and the Postmodern Turn: Discourse and Ideology.....	10
The Influence of Jacques Lacan on the Speech Communication Discipline.....	23
Lacanian Psychoanalysis and Barbara Biesecker.....	25
Lacanian Psychoanalysis and Joshua Gunn.....	26
The Real, Imaginary and Symbolic Orders.....	30
Lundberg’s Response to Gunn.....	32
The Future of Lacan in the Discipline.....	34
Posthumanist Rhetorical Agency.....	35
The Unconscious as a Factor in Rhetorical Agency.....	46
Rhetorical Agency as a Function of Discourse.....	50
Posthumanist Rhetorical Agency: Discourse and Ideology.....	51
Chapter Two: Methodology: Posthumanist Rhetorical Agency and the Four Discourses.....	60
Desire.....	61
Desire is the Desire of the Other.....	62
Desire is the Desire of the Audience.....	64
Objet a.....	65
<i>Jouissance</i> .....	66
Rhetorical Agency as Desire, as Object and as <i>Jouissance</i> .....	69
The Divided Subject (\$)......	71
Discourse.....	74
The Master Signifier.....	75
Knowledge.....	77
Fantasy.....	80
Unconscious as a Function of the Other/other.....	82
Agency.....	83
Four Rhetorical Agencies in Discourse.....	86
Summary of the Four Discourses: Methodology.....	99
Chapter Three: GID and Rhetorical Agency.....	103
Rhetorical Agency, Heterosexuality and Desire.....	103
Posthumanist Lacanian Agency, Sex, and Gender.....	115
Historical-Cultural Context of the GID “Debate”.....	118
Analysis of Rhetorical Agency and GID.....	120

Implications of Rhetorical Agency in the GID Debate.....	143
Chapter Four: Tea Party Rhetoric .....	150
Historical Context of Tea Party Rhetoric.....	150
Santelli’s Rant.....	159
Take It Back!.....	170
Glenn Beck.....	180
Conclusions: Rhetorical Agency and Tea Party Rhetoric.....	195
Chapter Five: Conclusion .....	199
Posthumanist Rhetorical Agency, Discourse and Ideology .....	199
Posthumanist Rhetorical Agency: The Unconscious, Language and Capital.....	203
The Posthumanist Conceptualization of Rhetorical Agency .....	207
Posthumanist Rhetorical Agency and Tea Party Rhetoric .....	207
Posthumanist Rhetorical Agency and GID .....	212
Bibliography .....	224



## **INTRODUCTION**

To provide a context for conceptualizing rhetorical agency via recourse to Lacanian discourse theory, I divided the dissertation into five chapters. In the first chapter, I revisit the arguments made by some speech communication theorists about rhetorical agency to show how the conclusions about rhetorical agency reached encourage a rehabilitation of rhetorical agency according to the humanist paradigm, instead of revising the concept wholesale in light of the postmodern critique. In addition, chapter one assesses the impact Lacan's thinking on rhetorical agency has had on the discipline. Rather than recuperate the humanist paradigm, it is my argument rhetorical agency should be conceptualized according to a posthumanist paradigm. The posthumanist paradigm, as I explain, accounts for agency in discourse practices in keeping with the postmodern critique, but makes allowances for the objections to postmodern rhetorical agency some theorists in the discipline make. To ground a posthumanist conceptualization of rhetorical agency in a theory and method for conducting analysis, the second chapter identifies and defines the terms Jacques Lacan incorporated to describe his theory of the four discourses. Also in chapter two, I use the terminology to describe the methodology Lacan proposes for analyzing rhetorical agency

in a discourse. The purpose of the second chapter is to recuperate the concept of rhetorical agency according to Lacanian discourse theory. In chapters three and four, I describe how the posthumanist conceptualization of agency that emerges from Lacan's theory guides the analysis of rhetorical agency in what I am calling "Tea Party" and "Gender Identity Disorder" rhetoric. The fifth and final chapter contains a summary of dissertation findings and proposes limitations to the conceptualization of rhetorical agency I am advocating.

Tea Party and GID rhetoric constitute a discourse premised upon practices in the culture that function to regulate the distribution of desire in either a sexual or a political-economic context. Both case studies function to advance the recuperation of rhetorical agency according to the posthumanist conceptualization Lacan's theory provides because they reflect the four different types of rhetorical agency at work in discourse as a consequence of the unconscious logic of desire. The purpose of analyzing the rhetoric collected in these case studies is to demonstrate how rhetorical agency is best conceptualized as a function of desire in discourse, the practice of which arrests or produces a transformation in the economy of enjoyment at work in the culture.

The conceptualization of rhetorical agency that emerges in the first case study shows how "Tea Party rhetoric" is contingent upon four distinctive kinds of rhetorical agency, the interaction of which helps us explain how the rhetoric is structured to transform or arrest change to the political-economy of the United States. The second case study, the rhetoric surrounding the inclusion of "Gender Identity Disorder" (GID) in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-V), examines how the

various discourse practices that constitute the debate reveal the workings of four different rhetorical agencies, the interaction of which helps us explain how the rhetoric either transforms the heteronormative order that drives the economy of desire in North American culture, or arrests changes to those heterosexual norms. In locating the transformative or arrested potential of rhetorical agency in these contexts, it is my purpose to expand the conceptualization of rhetorical agency, thereby advancing our conceptualization of rhetorical agency to fit the postmodern emphasis on discourse. It is my belief the postmodern turn in many ways sidelined rhetoric, but a Lacanian theory of discourse helps us recover and redefine the relationship between rhetoric and discourse in a way that clarifies what we mean as a discipline when we are referring to rhetoric and discourse in our interpretive practices.

The case studies chosen represent different types of rhetorical agencies at work in the discourse designed to create different kinds of relationships or social links predicated upon the circulation of desire. By conceptualizing rhetorical agency as a function of discourse, and by articulating how the structure of discourse shapes a specific kind of agency, it is my hope to better articulate how our conceptualization of rhetorical agency can be adapted to account for the various ways subjects or agents manifest rhetorical agency in their discourse practices.

## **CHAPTER ONE: RHETORICAL AGENCY**

### **Humanist Rhetorical Agency and the Neo-Aristotelian Interpretive Turn**

Rhetorical agency is a central concept in the speech communication discipline because it bears directly on oratory and public address. Since oration and public address entail a speaker, a message, and an audience, some scholars in the discipline use the term in a traditional sense to refer to the speaker or rhetor's capacity or ability to use rhetoric to change the beliefs and behaviors of the audience. However, the postmodern philosophical turn has enveloped this traditional view of rhetorical agency in a cloud of questions. Up until the late eighties and into the early nineties, the study of oratory and public address in the discipline subscribed to a liberal humanist conceptualization of rhetorical agency; one influenced chiefly by Aristotle, but decidedly classical in its orientation. Liberal humanist agency and the Neo-Aristotelian critical practices assumed that rhetorical agency was a function of the speaker, and that the speaker consciously and intentionally invented rhetoric by choosing arguments capable of persuading an audience (principally through appeals to reason), so that the speaker's agency was measured in part by the extent to which the message changed audience beliefs and behaviors. As Philip Nel describes it, where Aristotle serves as the point of theoretical departure, "the study of

rhetoric is the study of how people argue to get an adjudicating audience to assent to a controversial claim.”<sup>1</sup> However, since the capacity or ability to use rhetoric to change beliefs and behaviors is symbolically and materially constrained by ideology and discourse, most contemporary conceptualizations of rhetorical agency to which theorists subscribe acknowledge the theoretical limitations inherent in conceiving of rhetorical agency as relatively autonomous, that is, free of constraints and consciously derived through the process of invention by a speaker. The liberal humanist view of agency and the Neo-Aristotelian paradigm underlying it came under increasing scrutiny as the discipline began to question the merits of conceptualizing rhetorical agency as a relatively autonomous function of the speaker—a disciplinary trend that accelerated in the nineties. Dilip Gaonkar’s foundational essay *The Idea of Rhetoric in the Rhetoric of Science* is a key reference for this reason.

Gaonkar’s essay is a critical appraisal of the Neo-Aristotelian conceptualization of rhetorical agency that prevailed in the speech communication discipline when it was published nearly twenty years ago. Gaonkar’s criticism of the Neo-Aristotelian interpretive turn and his indictment of the humanist paradigm of agency generated a sustained and productive dialogue about the discipline’s conceptualization of rhetorical agency. The 1997 book *Rhetorical Hermeneutics*, and the conference organized to address the question “How Ought We to Understand Rhetorical Agency?”, sponsored by the Alliance of Rhetorical Societies in 2003, both feature Gaonkar’s essay as a key point of departure for conceptualizing rhetorical agency. It is useful then, to retrace the

historical development of rhetorical agency as a concept in the discipline by first revisiting the 1993 essay.

### **The Postmodern Critique of Humanist Rhetorical Agency and Neo-Aristotelian Criticism**

In the original essay, Gaonkar pointed out “by and large, our critical studies are sustained by the vocabulary of classical rhetoric.”<sup>2</sup> While Gaonkar includes Cicero and Quintilian as key sources of the vocabulary sustaining critical studies at the time, it is Aristotle’s influence that seemed most influential and enduring. The “interpretive turn in contemporary rhetorical studies,” he claims, despite the effort to “break free from a ‘restrained’ vision of Aristotle,” remained “fatally bound to the Aristotelian vocabulary.”<sup>3</sup> He contended the classical vocabulary is too “thin” to serve the purposes of critical studies and, more importantly, argued classical rhetorician’s like Cicero, Quintilian and Aristotle, viewed rhetoric as a practice and were therefore conceptualizing rhetoric along performative and not theoretical lines.<sup>4</sup> As he pointed out, the terms *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*, despite their widespread use in critical studies of the time, are particularly good examples of classical vocabulary that refer to specific rhetorical practices in broad categories that offer too little in the way of clarity to meet the conceptual demands encountered when formulating a view of rhetorical agency—much less as a foundation for articulating criticism. For him, “The abstract quality of the traditional vocabulary, as illustrated...in the tripartite scheme of proofs...enables one to find its presence in virtually any discourse practice.”<sup>5</sup> As a consequence, key concepts like rhetorical agency remain contingent upon the currency of the classical lexicon in a contemporary era, even

though “The question remains unanswered as to whether this vocabulary of performance can be adequately translated into a vocabulary of interpretation.”<sup>6</sup>

Translating the classical lexicon is especially troublesome when we consider the fact that the speech communication discipline no longer limits its conceptualization of rhetorical agency to speeches and public speaking as strongly as it did when the essay was published. In an essay published in 2002, Gaonkar remains convinced “the privileging of public address and political oratory (and the frequent collapsing of that distinction) has been under revision and challenge,” a trend he thinks is best reflected “in the determined effort to extend the object domain of rhetorical criticism beyond oratory.” However, he nonetheless maintains “it is possible to argue...the paradigmatic status of oratory” remains unchanged because scholars lean on the “conceptual resources and strategies originally fashioned to analyze oratory” without undertaking the “significant modifications” needed to fully adapt them to fit a contemporary context.<sup>7</sup> In sum, Gaonkar’s criticism concerning the conceptualization of rhetorical agency indicts the discipline for leaning too heavily on a lexicon poorly suited, both practically and theoretically, for a contemporary conceptualization of rhetorical agency, and second, for failing to account for the expansive definition of what the discipline considers an appropriate artifact or object of study. What was called for, in light of these challenges, was a “reflexive critical engagement,”<sup>8</sup> intended to conceptualize rhetorical agency in a way that did not belie the difficulties posed by the discipline’s classical leanings.

## The Postmodern Alternative to Humanist Neo-Aristotelian Rhetorical Agency

For Gaonkar, the “reflexive critical engagement” initially required a thoroughgoing examination of the “ideology of human agency” implied in the classical vocabulary.<sup>9</sup> As he described it, the ideology of human agency entails a

view of the speaker as the seat of origin rather than a point of articulation, a view of strategy as identifiable under an intentional description, a view of discourse as constitutive of character and community, a view of audience positioned simultaneously as “spectator” and “participant,” and finally, a view of “ends” that binds speaker, strategy, discourse and audience in a web of purposive action.<sup>10</sup>

The critical studies of the time, what went under the banner of “rhetorical criticism,” adhered to the “humanist paradigm of agency...based on a reading of classical texts, especially those of Aristotle and Cicero,” and assumed the speaker is

seen as (ideally) the conscious and deliberating agent who ‘chooses’ and in choosing discloses the capacity for ‘prudence’ and who ‘invents’ discourse that displays an *ingenium* and who all along observes the norms of timeliness (*kairos*), appropriateness (to prepon), and *decorum* that testify to a mastery of *sensus communis*.<sup>11</sup>

The defect of adhering to the humanist paradigm of agency in his view was its emphasis on the rhetor’s role in what he called the “intentional model of persuasion,” a model that reduces the “agency of rhetoric...to the conscious and strategic thinking of the rhetor.”<sup>12</sup>

The humanist paradigm of agency is theoretically deficient for Gaonkar because it assumes the “conscious and deliberating agent,” is a “seat of origin” for discourse rather than a “point of articulation” in a “discourse practice.”<sup>13</sup> Assuming that the speaker is a “seat of origin” for the discourse results in criticism that reads a “given discourse practice (or text) as a manifestation of the rhetor’s strategic consciousness,” thereby marginalizing as “so many items in the rhetor’s design”<sup>14</sup> those “structures that govern agency:



language, unconscious, and capital.”<sup>15</sup> Instead of factoring in these governing features as primary to our conceptualization of rhetorical agency, Neo-Aristotelian critical practices replace them in the order of conceptual importance with a theoretical focus on consciousness, will, and intent.

Ideologically, what is suspicious is the way in which agency in the theory is conceptually disconnected from the material and symbolic limitations that a speaker faces in any rhetorical situation. The criticism of the ostensibly autonomous speaker or rhetor who calls upon their skills with the language to convince others in the culture simply does too little to account for the role ideological and discursive constraints play in the communicative process. Since rhetorical criticism at the time remained wedded to the classical lexicon and its attendant conceptualization of humanist agency, but did little to adapt to the postmodern philosophical turn the discipline was undergoing at the time, Gaonkar concludes these conceptual defects about the purposive “conscious and deliberating agent,” with its strategies and designs, simply beg the question, “How should our translator deal with this particular ideology of agency,” if in fact such an undertaking is desired at all?<sup>16</sup>

While he does not provide a direct answer, Gaonkar does suggest “The choice one makes will depend upon one’s sense of the historical conjuncture—the postmodern condition—in which the translation is being attempted.”<sup>17</sup> Although Gaonkar’s writing poses the choice in simple and stark terms, it is the “sense of the historical conjuncture” about the “postmodern condition” that presently defines some of the scholarly discussion about rhetorical agency in such problematic terms.

## **The Criticism of Rhetorical Agency and the Postmodern Turn: Discourse and Ideology**

While it is accurate to conclude the discipline is no longer, on the whole, committed to the theoretical view of humanist agency Gaonkar critiqued as part of the Neo-Aristotelian interpretative turn, it is also accurate to conclude the discipline is still reconciling the implications a postmodern turn entails for conceiving of rhetorical agency. Cheryl Geisler's summary of the proceedings of the Alliance of Rhetoric Societies conference dedicated to addressing the question of agency notes "Most scholars at the ARS acknowledged, explicitly or implicitly, that recent concern with the question of agency arises from the post-modern critique of the autonomous agent."<sup>18</sup> In part, "the recent concern" Geisler is referring to is the perceived failure of the postmodern critique to account for action. In a humanist paradigm, the speaker or rhetor executes their capacity to consciously choose rhetoric in order to articulate a persuasive strategy bent on changing beliefs and behaviors in a process that is more or less autonomous, that is, free of ideological and discursive constraints. In a postmodern paradigm, the speaker or author is materially and symbolically constrained by the structures of language, capital and the unconscious, in an ideological system that situates a speaker or author in a subject position—thereby directly limiting agency. What remains puzzling for some in the discipline is how a subject or agent in a postmodern condition takes action despite the ideological constraints postmodern philosophy openly acknowledges and attempts to account for in a discourse practice. As Herndl and Licona put it, "The question of agency in contemporary social and rhetorical theory might best be seen as a response to the

failures of the philosophy of action and its humanist social actor.” As they see it, and put the issue so clearly,

In cultural studies the question of agency is an attempt to theorize the possibilities of radical counter hegemonic action, especially in the face of powerful cultural formations...In rhetorical theory, we might rephrase this as a question of how rhetors effect social change.<sup>19</sup>

What makes this question of how rhetors effect social change especially difficult to answer is the assumption that postmodern subjectivity does not allow for an actor capable of overcoming the constraints inherent in ideology and discourse to force changes to the status quo. To some, postmodernist conceptualizations of rhetorical agency presume agency is erased from the theory due to overwhelming effects of discourse and ideology. The belief is, if the speaker or rhetor is not a seat of origin for rhetorical agency that is capable of acting to resist the effects of language, then how does postmodern philosophy account for rhetoric’s capacity to act as an instrument for resisting ideological domination and discursive determination?

For this reason, the criticism of postmodern rhetorical agency that emerged since Gaonkar’s essay often reflects a certain discomfort with the role of the rhetor, speaker, or author in postmodern and post-structuralist theory. This discomfort is understandable, given that so much of our tradition and history as a discipline deals with oratory and public address, and we therefore assume agency in part refers to the capacity of a speaker or rhetor to use rhetoric to change the beliefs and behaviors of the audience so that the result reflects a more equitable distribution of power and resources in a culture. The natural impulse then is to conceptualize rhetorical agency so that the result preserves the power of speakers or rhetors in the theory to overcome the effects of discourse and

ideology, thereby protecting the traditional view of rhetoric as an instrument for meaningfully effecting the distribution of power and resources in a culture. Campbell speaks to the importance of preserving the capacity of a rhetor or speaker by way of a rhetorical question which hints at her suspicion that postmodern theory does not account for the speaker or rhetor as change agent in the way rhetoricians have traditionally understood the concept. She asks

What do current debates about agency and authorship tell us about problems in our theorizing, such that we struggle to produce rejoinders to claims about the ‘death of the author’ by Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault, among others, and to retain a sense of agency that makes sense in rhetorical terms?<sup>20</sup>

Campbell’s rhetorical question implies that postmodernism cannot account for rhetorical agency in a way that makes sense in rhetorical terms because she mistakenly presumes that postmodernism maintains the subject or agent has virtually no power to affect ideology or discourse. Yet postmodernism and post-structuralist theory, as Gaonkar demonstrated, forces us to reconcile the autonomous agent conceptualization of rhetorical agency and the ideology of consciously directed and intentional use of rhetoric it is founded upon *with* a conceptualization of rhetorical agency that assumes the rhetor, speaker or author is de-centered and fragmented—constrained by the impacts of discourse and ideology in ways Neo-Aristotelianism cannot explain. That does not imply postmodernism cancels out the subject or agent’s capacity to act in ways that makes sense in rhetorical terms. It simply suggests rhetorical agency cannot be premised upon a conceptualization that ignores the effects of discourse and ideology on the formation of subjectivity.

Campbell's rhetorical question locates the debate about agency within the broader discussions at work in the humanities generally about the theoretical implications of postmodernism and post-structuralist subjectivity and identity. The central objection here concerns the belief that postmodernism posits a subject or agent who is incapable of acting because of the way discourse determines their subjectivity and the way ideology snuffs out their ability to resist domination. However, her question also reveals the substance of what amounts to a phantom criticism of postmodernism philosophy articulated by some in the speech communication discipline. No postmodern theorist maintains discourse or ideology makes it futile or impossible for a subject or agent to resist ideological domination because discourse determines their subjectivity. However, this is precisely the criticism Dana Cloud makes in a way that echoes Campbell's reservations about postmodernity.

Cloud's discomfort with the role of the speaker or agent in the theory and their capacity to take action is manifest in her belief that postmodern philosophy assumes discourse determines the subject. For this reason, Cloud takes particular issue with the influence of Foucault in the discipline, as she contends, according to his writing

...in the world of ubiquitous discipline, discourse exists without agent, system without center, and interventions without intent. The subject does not speak but is spoken; resistance is necessarily another form of discipline constituted primarily in discourses. On this argument, power is productive of discourses regulating eventually self-disciplining bodies, emanating not from a discernible, repressive center (such as the state or the employer) but rather appearing as a set of shifting discursive formations that establish themselves what is real and true. Power on this view is productive of subjectivity and the organization of life without necessary reference to external interests or motivation. This argument has been profoundly influential across the humanities.<sup>21</sup>

The belief that Cloud makes evident here assumes postmodern philosophy presumes that discourse virtually determines the subject's ability to resist ideological domination because discourse determines the subject. However, taken as a whole, Cloud's appraisal of Foucault's impact on the discipline's thinking about rhetoric erases the efforts he made to link his scholarship to social and cultural change. Foucault plainly and repeatedly claimed his work changed the way sexuality was viewed, especially in France. He argued in an interview that "Reforms do not come about in empty space, independent of those who make them. One cannot avoid considering those who will have to administer this transformation."<sup>22</sup> Foucault did not think that individuals or people do not make changes or transform the social or cultural order with their discourse. Some subject or agent is necessary to "administer this transformation." In fact, Cloud might very well agree with Foucault, when he argued

A critique does not consist in saying that things aren't good the way they are. It consists in seeing on what type of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established, unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based. . . We need to free ourselves of the sacralization of the social as the only instance of the real and stop regarding that essential element in human life and human relations—I mean thought—as so much wind."<sup>23</sup>

Foucault does not assume people and individuals, as the generators of thoughts and ideas, are to be treated in the theory as if their speech was somehow inconsequential, or as he puts it, so much "wind." Rhetorical agency in his conceptualization does preserve the individual's ability or capacity to resist the effects of discourse. Cloud's reading of Foucault suggests he did not think individuals or people could meaningfully affect political or economic change because of the all-pervasive power of discourse—but this is not the case. Discourse or language in Foucault's theory is not totalizing. However,

the assumption that postmodernist or post-structuralist theory cancels out the capacity of the individual to resist discursive and ideological determination persists because, as is reflected elsewhere in the literature, her claim rests on the presumption that postmodern and post-structuralist theories of language and discourse maintain that language or discourse determines the subject. She is not alone in criticizing postmodern philosophy along these lines, and would find an enthusiastic sympathizer in Sharon Crowley, who maintains the theoretical defectiveness of postmodernism for conceptualizing rhetorical agency is clear.

Postmodernism is deeply implicated in the problem of discerning a space of operations for rhetorical agency, not only because it delineated the limitations of liberal humanist notions of agency, but because some versions of postmodernism forward a linguistic determinism that nearly eliminates individual or collective human agency altogether, subsuming it in the flow of discursive power.<sup>24</sup>

As a result, some efforts to recuperate rhetorical agency in a way, as Campbell put it, that makes sense in rhetorical terms, assume that it is necessary to conceptualize rhetorical agency so that the end product preserves the capacity of the speaker or rhetor to affect change because postmodernism does not. Again, the focus on this requirement is understandable given that our discipline emphasizes the important part rhetoric plays in resisting ideological domination, not to mention the sense of powerlessness we experience in our everyday life-world. As Jodi Dean rightly acknowledges,

Everything in the global capitalist consumer-entertainment economy moves quickly . . . but little changes; or, better, the idea of effecting change--making a difference--seems extraordinarily difficult, even naive. The truly committed appear as fanatics or fundamentalists, or, more mildly, as quaint throwbacks refusing to accept the fact that the sixties are over.<sup>25</sup>

It makes sense then that Campbell, like Cloud and likeminded thinkers in the discipline, would insist rhetorical agency must, at a minimum, entail the capacity of the rhetor to act

to resist ideological and discursive determination. This theoretical line in the sand is drawn to preserve the capacity of the speaker or rhetor to act by resisting ideological and discursive determination, thereby preserving invention, consciousness and choice as key to conceptualizing rhetorical agency. As Campbell maintains, “Whatever else it may be, rhetorical agency refers to the capacity to act, that is, to have the competence to speak or write in a way that will be recognized or heeded by others in one’s community.”<sup>26</sup> Cheryl Geisler’s summary of the Alliance of Rhetorical Societies conference makes a similar observation about the participant’s estimation of rhetorical agency. Geisler claims “At the core of our common understanding of rhetorical agency at the ARS was the capacity of the rhetor to act.”<sup>27</sup> She continues, arguing, “As rhetoricians, we generally take as a starting point that rhetoric involves action. This is perhaps the distinguishing characteristic of a rhetorical approach to discourse.”<sup>28</sup> As Campbell argues, being capable of action by inventing rhetoric “permits entry into ongoing cultural conversations and is the *sine quo non* of public participating, much less resistance as a counter-public.”<sup>29</sup> The cornerstone of this belief is lodged in the false idea that postmodernist conceptualizations of discourse washout or cancel the subject or agent’s ability to choose or meaningfully affect the distribution of power or resources in the culture, thereby eliminating any conceptualization of rhetorical agency that does not presume the speaker or rhetor maintains their capacity to exercise some control over the invention of rhetoric. The strength of this assumption about postmodern theory and its implications for theorizing about discourse is evident in a heuristic Crowley supplies to illustrate the importance of preserving choice in our conceptualizations of rhetorical agency. She says,



In a heuristic spirit... imagine (or if you have a pen and paper actually to draw) a line labeled “agency” whose ends are labeled “big” and “little.” “Big agency” is on the right and “little agency” is on the left. (Left and Right do not carry the usual political valence here). The criterion I use to distinguish big from little is the degree to which human volition is posited by a given theorist as an available source of invention within a rhetorical situation. Linguistic determinism represents the leftward end of the spectrum, while biological determinism marks its rightmost end.<sup>30</sup>

The error here is in assuming there is a postmodern theorist who presumes discourse determines the subject or agent because they are linguistically determined. However, Crowley cites no author, nor does she attribute this belief to anyone in particular because no postmodern theorist subscribes to this view. It is not clear that postmodernism incapacitates or fails to account for the subject or agent and their ability to change the status quo or resist ideological domination. As Joshua Gunn and Christian Lundberg point out, both implicating Crowley and directly responding to the work of Geisler cited above, “None of these critics [Foucault, Derrida and Lacan] of a common-sense doctrine of agency deny that the subject or representations of the subject exert significant effects, nor do they deny the subject a kind of social effectivity or agency.”<sup>31</sup> Yet, as Herndl and Licona read it, in a manner closely in keeping with Cloud, Geisler and Crowley’s assessment,

In framing the question of agency, theorists, typically struggle with the dilemma of the postmodern subject and her ability to take purposeful political or social action. This has been an important question across the humanities over the last decade.<sup>32</sup>

What none of these critics of postmodernism are able to prove however is that postmodern theory and its proponents do assume discourse determines the subject or agent. Thus, the efforts undertaken to recuperate a sense of rhetorical agency that makes sense in rhetorical terms results in a conceptualization that stresses the capacity of the

rhetor to invent and therefore resist the ideological conditions materially and symbolically constraining the status quo—even though this capacity was never really in question. Ronald Greene persuasively argues

Rhetorical studies has too often relied on a model of rhetorical agency that privileges a strategic model of political communication. Alternative models of communication have been suggested, but the replacement of one model for another leaves unexamined the presupposition that rhetorical agency as communication primarily mediates the dialectical relationship between structure and social change.<sup>33</sup>

It is my contention Greene's criticism applies to scholars like Campbell, Geisler, Cloud and Crowley because each in their own way do not get after the underlying assumption that agency is a function of the speaker whose rhetoric is significant because it is designed to transform or change the distribution of power and resources in the culture. The criticism that results too often divides the rhetorical landscape into a world in which there are only two rhetorical agencies. The first assumes rhetoric is invested with the capacity to preserve the status quo, and is in this sense hegemonic, or it reflects agency in its counter-hegemonic potential to destabilize the distribution of power and resources in a culture. To be fair, in Cloud's case, the criticism of postmodern philosophy stems chiefly from the fact that postmodernity is not avowedly Marxist and therefore counter-hegemonic; Cloud makes her critical orientation refreshingly clear in part to distance her work from postmodern confusions. Her indictment of postmodern philosophy largely hinges on her disagreement with the way in which interpellation guides the discipline's understanding of ideology as it is informed by the work of Louis Althusser. Nevertheless, none of these scholar's conceptualizations of rhetorical agency try to reconcile their view that agency is connected to the capacity of the speaker to create change in the status quo.

If agency is always connected to the capacity of the speaker or rhetor to use rhetoric to alter the status quo, that is to advocate for some transformation of the existing distribution of cultural power, then the conceptualization of rhetorical agency that results assumes there are only two kinds of rhetorical agency: discourse practices either support the status quo (because they are hegemonic discourse practices), or they are counter-hegemonic discourse practices, which means rhetorical agency is conceptualized as essentially counter-hegemonic. Ultimately, the result of this conceptualization of rhetorical agency crowds out the inclusion of discourse practices in which subjects or agents are clearly invested, despite the fact that their rhetorical agency is not avowedly hegemonic or counter-hegemonic.

Ronald Greene identifies the problem entailed in this insistence that rhetorical agency should above all else preserve the capacity of the rhetor or speaker to change the status quo. Rhetorical agency is both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic, but the fact that it is both should not imply our work as critics is only meaningful if it adopts some advocacy bent on undoing the status quo's distribution of power. We all agree our work in the discipline is important for other reasons in addition to our endeavors as social justice advocates. But if we assume our discourse practices are most important because they are counter-hegemonic, we ignore the various ways in which subjects or agents articulate agency in discourse practices that are neither hegemonic nor counter-hegemonic. Instead, what results, as Greene points out, is anxiety. It is his argument the belief that agency is either counter-hegemonic or hegemonic generates anxiety, which is

expressed in criticism by some in the literature as a sort of “moral entrepreneurship.”<sup>34</sup>

Specifically, Greene argues the

attachment of rhetorical agency to a vision of political change...pushes rhetorical critics and theorists into becoming moral entrepreneurs scolding, correcting, and encouraging the body politic to improve the quality and quantity of political participation.<sup>35</sup>

The theoretical contention driving the anxiety and the emphasis placed on a “vision of political change” is misplaced, as postmodernism does not maintain the speaker is somehow powerless or irrelevant unless our conceptualizations of rhetorical agency can preserve the connection between the speaker, their message, and the capacity of that message to cause changes in belief and behavior. More importantly, despite what these scholars may presume about postmodern philosophy, no postmodern thinkers maintain that discourse determines the agent. Greene rightly acknowledges that this emphasis on conceptualizing rhetorical agency so that it preserves the notion of speaker as change agent has created a sense of anxiety for scholars in the discipline—a conclusion I believe is especially persuasive given the phantom nature of the critique of postmodernity these scholars advance.

I will concede the belief that postmodernism is deterministic is not without any foundation. Much of the time, this view that postmodern theorists subscribe to a theory of ideology in which rhetorical agency is virtually sapped of its resistive capacities is credited to Louis Althusser and his work on interpellation. Indeed, Cloud is quick to recognize this tendency and provides a stout criticism meant to rebut Althusser’s conclusions. The belief is that Althusser’s explanation of how ideology interpellates the subject into a process of domination in which the subject is unwittingly complicit offers

proof of the pitfalls of discursive determinism the postmodern philosophy implies. Cloud argues “Sue Clegg and Ellen Wood have noted, Althusser’s obsession with the structures of language and consciousness both rejected economic struggle and negated any notion of the subject as political agent within a class.”<sup>36</sup> But Cloud’s evidence does not assume Althusser’s theoretical formation is incorrect. Instead, she assumes it is inadequate for grounding a conceptualization of rhetorical agency according to her Marxist prerogatives. Yet Terry Eagleton points out,

Althusser's imaginary subject really corresponds to the Lacanian *ego*, which for psychoanalytic theory is merely the tip of the iceberg of the self. It is the ego, for Lacan, which is constituted in the imaginary as a unified entity; the subject ‘as a whole’ is the split, lacking, desiring effect of the unconscious, which for Lacan belongs to the 'symbolic' as well as the imaginary order.<sup>37</sup>

Althusser confused Jacques Lacan’s view of the imaginary order with a psychoanalytic account of the ego. The ego is the part of the psychological make-up of the subject, but the identifications the ego assumes (or images it aligns with) are not imaginary in the sense that they are false or worse, some aspect of false-consciousness or not real (a fantasy, in the conventional sense the term is most often used). Althusser reads Lacan’s imaginary order as if Lacan were referring to ideological mystification, and not the assemblage of images the ego identifies with or against in order to represent itself to itself as coincident of the signifier. So, when someone is hailed, the ego drives the compulsion to either identify or dis-identify with the pronouncement, but the subject underlying this psychological process of ego identification is in no way made whole or completely determined by language—the subject remains undetermined, fragmented and de-centered—and therefore the capacity to consciously resist the hailing remains undisturbed because the identification or dis-identification the subject or agent undergoes is always a

temporary fix for a deeper and more enduring problem that afflicts the process of subjectivity generally.

Ideological interpellation according to Althusser then wrongly assumes Lacan thought the imaginary order was the same as what Marxists refer to as ideological mystification, and based on this error, interpellation has come to define the manner in which language and ideology interact to strip the subject or agent of their rhetorical agency. Where Campbell or Cloud cite Althusser as a proponent of a theory of discourse in which language determines the subject or agent, they are simply reproducing a fundamental error present in Althusser's reading of Lacan.

In sum, the belief some theorists have that postmodernism assumes discourse or language determines the subject is overstated. Additionally, where scholars are leaning on the work of Althusser to theorize about ideology and rhetoric, they recapitulate the error Althusser made in crafting his views about interpellation. The result of this misunderstanding produces a conceptualization of rhetorical agency that rehabilitates the liberal humanist version of agency Gaonkar criticized by simply amending the criticism to allow for a speaker to possess agency without dealing directly with the deeper theoretical implications that capital, the unconscious and language play in the fragmentation of the subject or agent and the articulation of agency. In addition, the ideology of humanism Gaonkar criticized goes untouched. Rehabilitating rhetorical agency to preserve the notion that the speaker possesses agency and maintains the capacity to change the status quo based on their ability to invent rhetoric suitable for resisting ideological domination, reinforces the view that there is only one genuine

conceptualization of rhetorical agency—the kind that is bent on changing the status quo, which of course assumes there are other subjects and agents that have unconscious, capitalistic and linguistic incentives for entrenching the status quo. In no way could this be exhaustive of rhetorical agency, which is why I suggest rather than rehabilitating rhetorical agency to preserve the capacity of the speaker to act, we should instead seek out those discourse practices in which rhetorical agency is manifest despite the fact that it is not necessarily counter-hegemonic or hegemonic.

### **The Influence of Jacques Lacan on the Speech Communication Discipline**

Lacan's thinking has gradually gained more attention in the discipline; and in particular its conceptualization of rhetorical agency, but, Lacan has never been as visible as Foucault. Perhaps Foucault's response to a question asked after one of his lectures explains why Lacan has remained, until recently, of peripheral importance in the discipline. Foucault, in the response I am referring to that followed one February 1982 lecture at the Collège de France, said

Let's say that there have not been many people who in the last years—I will say in the twentieth century—have posed this question of truth. Not that many people have posed the question: What is involved in the case of the subject and truth?<sup>38</sup>

Only to add, "As far as I am concerned, I see only two. I see only Heidegger and Lacan."<sup>39</sup> He then confessed, "Personally...I have tried to reflect on all this from the side of Heidegger...However, you cannot avoid Lacan when you pose these kinds of questions."<sup>40</sup> In light of these broader questions concerning truth and subjectivity, it is not possible to underestimate the impact Foucault's thinking has had on the speech communication discipline's development of rhetorical theory and its attendant

conceptualization of rhetorical agency, but Lacan's impact on both theory and agency remained, at least throughout the nineties, peripheral at best.

In our discipline, the first substantial mention made of Lacan in reference to rhetorical theory is Lyod Pettegrew's 1977 essay *Psychoanalytic Theory: A Neglected Rhetorical Dimension* in *Philosophy and Rhetoric*.<sup>41</sup> Although no one took up the challenge immediately, Pettegrew argued more than two decades ago that "psychoanalytic theory is a useful conceptual tool which can be of service in the study of rhetoric in its contemporary context."<sup>42</sup> Michael Hyde's book review of Alan Sheridan's 1977 translation of *Ecrits: A Collection* brought Lacan's thought back into the journals, but Hyde's work after 1980, as his well-regarded book *The Life Giving Gift of Acknowledgement*<sup>43</sup> clearly shows, turned toward the work of Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas and not Lacan, which suggests in the end he, like Foucault, followed Heidegger. Nonetheless, as did Pettegrew's essay three years prior, Hyde's essay *Jacques Lacan's Psychoanalytic Theory of Speech and Language*, in the February issue of the 1980 *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, did at least confirm a nascent interest in making Lacan's work relevant for the discipline.<sup>44</sup> Thomas Douglass, again treating Lacan as peripheral source of intrigue but little more, wrote a thorough going appraisal of Lacan in his essay *Burke, Nietzsche, Lacan: Three Perspectives on the Rhetoric of Order* in 1993,<sup>45</sup> but it seems neither Pettegrew, Hyde nor Douglass captured enough attention to raise Lacan's visibility for speech communication scholars. Despite the low profile Lacan's work operated under in the seventies and eighties, it is in the work of Barbara Biesecker throughout the nineties that Lacan's import for the discipline is best demonstrated.



## Lacanian Psychoanalysis and Barbara Biesecker

In a 1998 book review, Barbara Biesecker initially argues Lacan “will have already been the great theorist of rhetoric for the twenty-first century,” only to qualify her prognostication in the next breath by amending her claim to the

more modest proposal that the work of contemporary rhetorical theorists and critics will be considerably enriched by risking contact with the best and brightest of the ‘new’ psychoanalysts of culture and society whose primary aim is to move Lacanian psychoanalysis out of the rarefied space of the analytic situation and press its insights into the service of ideological critique.<sup>46</sup>

Biesecker remains Lacan’s most tireless proponent in the discipline, as she has for nearly two decades incorporated Lacan’s work into her writing in the overarching interest of securing a foothold for Lacanian psychoanalytic understandings of the subject and rhetoric. In a 1992 essay, Biesecker cites Lacan to explain her criticism of Campbell’s *Man Cannot Speak for Her*, and in keeping with what I am claiming in this dissertation, it is Biesecker’s argument Lacanian subjectivity demonstrates how agency cannot be conceptualized as solely a product of “individual consciousness and will.”<sup>47</sup> Campbell’s work, by Biesecker’s reading, assumes

social change is thought to be more or less a function of each individual woman’s capacity to throw off the mantle of her own self-perpetuated oppression, to recognize her real self-interests, [and also] to intervene on behalf of those interests.<sup>48</sup>

For Biesecker, Campbell is correct in insisting “women’s access to subjectivity is indispensable to a political program that seeks,” among other goals, “the empowerment of women,” but Biesecker remains suspicious of the ability to transcend individual identity markers like income, age, race, etc., in a politics premised upon the agency of “sisterhood” Campbell endorses.<sup>49</sup> Biesecker is convinced, “following the cues of both

Jacques Lacan (who has taught us to be more than a bit skeptical of ‘the talking cure’)” in addition to feminist scholars “working between the post-Freudian and materialist perspectives who have warned us of the perils of sifting women's problems” as she puts it, “through pathologizing filters,” that Campbell’s theoretical take on “female subjectivity” results in a “conceptualization wherein the ideology of individualism and the old patriarchal alignments are reinscribed.”<sup>50</sup> At this early juncture, Biesecker is already showing how Lacan’s conceptualization of subjectivity informs our theory of rhetoric, agency, and above all, any political strategy our discipline advocates to transform the status quo.

As Biesecker is illustrating in her criticism of Campbell’s view of rhetorical agency, the key issue, as it remains today, is the debate about how best to conceptualize rhetorical agency in light of the critique of humanist agency. As Biesecker argues, what is suspicious is the presupposition that

Effective rhetorical discourse, that is to say rhetoric worthy of inclusion in the canon, is the outcome of strategic choices made among available techniques of persuasion on the part of an autonomous individual.<sup>51</sup>

Lacan’s conceptualization of subjectivity was indispensable in advancing this discussion, as Biesecker’s work in responding to Campbell suggests. Encouragingly, the move to incorporate Lacanian psychoanalytic theory that Biesecker urged in 1998 was soon followed-up by Joshua Gunn and Christian Lundberg, who have since joined Biesecker as Lacan’s chief advocates in the literature.

### **Lacanian Psychoanalysis and Joshua Gunn**

For Lacanians in the discipline, Gunn’s 2003 essay *Refiguring Fantasy: Imagination and Its Decline in U.S. Rhetorical Studies*, marks a significant turn in the

literature, as it represents the most comprehensive and thorough inclusion of Lacan's teaching into the discussion about rhetorical theory, subjectivity and agency since Biesecker's initial work in the early nineties.<sup>52</sup> Gunn followed this essay up with a similarly titled work a year later, *Refitting Fantasy: Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity and Talking to the Dead*.<sup>53</sup> Gunn's purpose in both papers is to connect Lacanian psychoanalytic theory and its attendant understanding of rhetoric to the broader debates about rhetorical theory and agency already underway in the discipline. In keeping with what we must consider a theme for Lacanians in the discipline, rhetorical agency for Gunn is not reducible to the conscious direction of an autonomous individual's will or intention. As Gunn says in the rejoinder to Lundberg published a year after *Refitting Fantasy*, "Owing to the longstanding commitment to the autonomous, self-transparent subject, many roads have not been taken in rhetorical studies."<sup>54</sup> Again, it is Lacan's theory of subjectivity and the role of the unconscious in producing agency that proves indispensable in advancing the critique of the humanist subject, thereby suggesting an alternative theoretical path our discipline may choose to follow concerning rhetorical agency. Gunn's reading of psychoanalytic theory provides both the proof for his criticism of the concept of agency and a method for interpreting rhetoric. In brief, Gunn believes agency is a fantasy, driven by the misrecognition of desire underlying the Imaginary order of the unconscious. Gunn draws upon Lacan's theory to explain the distinction between what fantasy means in a psychoanalytic sense, and what fantasy means in a conventional sense. The distinction is necessary for Gunn's method, as he suggests the

process of interpreting rhetoric entails “fixing” the fantasy before interpreting it according to the unconscious desire at work in the Imaginary order of the human psyche.

To explain the distinction in *Refitting Fantasy*, and to locate the discussion within the debate about subjectivity and agency, Gunn revisits a familiar reference to every disciplinary initiate: fantasy theme analysis courtesy of Ernest Bormann. The move is intended to illustrate how fantasy for Bormann seems to suggest a way in which groups of people converge around a consistent set of symbols and thereby participate in some delusion, or in less derisive terms, an agenda that is common to the group. In a thoughtful move, Gunn revisits one of Bormann’s key sources about fantasy, Robert Freed Bales, in order to show how Bormann’s conventional understanding of the word fantasy obscures the more nuanced meaning Bales sought to describe—one that is decidedly psychoanalytic. With Bales as his resource, Gunn deftly works in Lacanian terminology and the psychoanalytic theory the terminology is meant to support in order to show the reader how Lacan’s theory of subjectivity accounts for agency in the formation of subjectivity via the fantasy. Gunn’s essay deserves much credit for linking rhetorical theory to Lacan’s thinking by showing how unconscious desire in the Imaginary order underwrites the “imaginary fantasy” Bormann’s method is meant to describe.

Putting this distinction in place is necessary for Gunn to put the Lacanian order of the Imaginary to theoretical use. In this way, Gunn uses his understanding of Lacan and the Freudian resources Bales provides to show how a fantasy in a psychoanalytic sense, the one Bormann ignores, is not some active misunderstanding, agenda, or even delusion that has no basis in reality or is even constitutive of reality for a group, but rather is an

active misrecognition of what cannot be expressed that underlies existence as such in reality. As I will explain in just a moment, for Gunn, reality is distinguishable from the Real order; and it is the interaction between the Imaginary and Real order that the fantasy is formulated. Back to the point here, the distinction between fantasy as a delusion or agenda and fantasy as a manifestation of the human psyche is essential, as Gunn's analysis of clairvoyants in the essay proves, a fantasy, no matter how fictional, persists as a specific articulation of desire and is therefore not simply some abstract comment on reality that is wrong or incorrect; instead it indicates the existence of an underlying structure that rhetoricians can and should interpret: the Imaginary.

Gunn maintains the Imaginary order operates by way of a misrecognition inherent in the act of fantasizing itself, and in this way, the specific fantasy made present in speech is a cover for the fundamental fantasy driving agency. Thus, for Gunn agency "is born at precisely at the moment one gives up autonomy," an experience which is simultaneously "traumatic and pleasurable," but an experience that remains, nonetheless, necessary in order for the subject to act.<sup>55</sup> While fantasies are, in the conventional sense the word typically confers, constituted in speech via a consistent set of symbols and construct an agenda or delusion for the subject, it is the very act of fantasizing itself that Gunn is determined to describe—which is why he draws upon Lacanian concepts like the Real, and in particular the Imaginary order to explain agency.

Out of necessity, as these terms in Lacan's thought are knotted together so that one cannot be understood without reference to the others, Gunn explains what he means in using the registers or orders Lacan labeled the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real to

account for agency. These three registers or orders underlie the Lacanian theory of subjectivity and ultimately help Gunn to define agency. A brief detour into the specific meaning of these three terms is needed before I redirect the reader's attention to the import of Lacanian psychoanalysis in the speech communication discipline.

### **The Real, Imaginary and Symbolic Orders**

The Real for Gunn suggests “something akin to an external absolute that cannot be imagined or symbolized,” but “is only understood in distinction from the symbolic and imaginary.”<sup>56</sup> To enrich Gunn's point, it is notable that in the seventies Lacan maintains the Real is defined as the lack of a lack for a subject,<sup>57</sup> which for Gunn, as its opposite rightly implies, means a whole or complete subjectivity. The Imaginary order is “imaginary” in the sense that wholeness or fully complete subjectivity is a fantasy, one that is symptomatic of the subject's desire to be Real in the sense they are whole or complete; lacking nothing, or a lack of a lack.<sup>58</sup> For Lacan, the Imaginary order confers this sense of completeness for the subject in the way the ego identifies with the image of the body as it appears in a reflecting surface; a notion which in Lacan's thought is referred to as the “mirror stage.” As Gunn argues in *Refitting Fantasy*,

For Lacan, the mirror stage of development marks the emergence of the imago or spectral self, akin to a self-concept, which we internalize as children at the moment when language and image come together in the psyche.<sup>59</sup>

At no point does Gunn suggest he believes such a wholeness of subjectivity is achievable in the Imaginary order—as that is precisely his point—undivided subjectivity or autonomy is *the* fantasy in its fundamental form that underwrites the Imaginary order and all fantasies as such.<sup>60</sup>

It is clear the Imaginary and the Real orders are of prime importance to Gunn's way of thinking about Lacan, but he does not neglect the Symbolic order completely. The Symbolic order in Gunn's thinking consists of "the use of speech," that is significant because it "marks an audible submission to an exteriority: the Law, initially linguistic rules, but later social codes, morality, contracts and the like."<sup>61</sup> For the Lacan of the late sixties and early seventies, the Symbolic order does refer to speech use, but Lacan increasingly emphasized the role of culture and language generally in defining the Symbolic order. For this reason Lundberg criticizes Gunn's underdevelopment of the Symbolic order in *Refitting Fantasy*. As Lundberg sees it, "Although Gunn should be commended for his use of the Imaginary as an interpretive category" it remains the case that "the category of the Symbolic remains underexplored."<sup>62</sup>

As Lacan stresses in these later years, the Symbolic order always entails the Other because desire is the desire of the Other, which means the subject's desire is produced in its initial form by the language which is the Other in the subject's culture. While desire clearly entails the desire of other people, or the "other," for the purposes of thinking through the importance of speech use for the subject, Lacan used the uppercase "Other" to designate how desire is produced by language in the culture generally. For Lundberg, who admits the distinction may amount to the splitting of hairs, the difference is important because it links our interpretive practices and use of psychoanalytic theory to rhetoric. The move to locate rhetorical interpretation in the Imaginary order weakens Lacan's import for the discipline because it reduces the importance Lacan placed on speech use in the formation of subjectivity and agency.

In the Symbolic order, speech that seems to confer the Real is often reflected in the ways people or individuals cannot come up with words to describe their pain, or vainly try to describe the sublime or awesome character of an experience (like a beautiful sunset, having a baby, or in speech bent on reconciling death or explaining the orgasm). What gets lost in the abstraction is the sense in which a subject's failure to articulate the essential experience is also a symptom of the way in which every subject is precluded from experiencing the wholeness of being that drives any attempt to articulate the sublime or the awesome in the first place. It is clear Gunn assumes the production of desire for a subject is unconscious, but these unconscious workings manifest themselves as consciously articulated fantasies about desire for a subject which, when interpreted psychoanalytically, reveal the workings of the Imaginary order. However, this important relationship between speech, subjectivity and the Symbolic order gets lost in Gunn's essay. Before elaborating further, and now that the definitions of the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic orders are in place, I would like to redirect the reader's attention to the impact of Lacan's thinking in the discipline by detailing the debate Gunn's essay sparked with Christian Lundberg.

### **Lundberg's Response to Gunn**

Even a charitable reading of Gunn's work leaves the impression that the Symbolic order is not as important as the Real or Imaginary orders, a curious fact given that the Symbolic order is the one in which Lacan's import for the study of rhetoric is most clearly established. Since the Symbolic order produces for the subject the desire of the Other, and desire of the Other is conveyed via tropes and schemes (principally metaphor),



Gunn's rendering of the Symbolic order washes out the rhetorical ingredient of Lacan's psychoanalytic theory. The irony of this move is that it results in the same oversight Gunn criticizes Lawrence Grossberg for committing in Grossberg's rejection of motives in favor of events and practices.<sup>63</sup> Thus, for Lundberg, while Gunn's command of this literature and the theory it conveys is impressive, what remains to be seen is how Lacan's Symbolic order also fits into the formation of subjectivity and agency.

The effect of Gunn's attempt to stabilize interpretation through the fantasy of agency comes at a certain cost... [By] Framing psychoanalysis as a middle position in debates regarding agency, 'Refitting Fantasy' misses the opportunity to traverse the Imaginary and confront the Symbolic on its own terms. By confronting the Symbolic and restoring its primacy in Lacanian interpretation, rhetoricians can draw on Lacan's suggestive use of specifically rhetorical thematics.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, in the rebuttal to Gunn's argument, it is Lundberg who seeks to engage that portion of Lacan's thinking that is of most use to rhetoricians. I am intrigued, as is Lundberg, by Lacan's extensive reliance upon rhetoric as a source for conducting psychoanalytic interpretation, as the overlap reflected in his clinical concerns fits exactly what rhetoricians are already equipped to do: read tropes and schemes and provide an interpretation of them. Lacan's thought certainly evolved over the many decades he hosted his seminars, however, one consistent resource for Lacan was rhetoric. As he says in Seminar XX,

The universe is a flower of rhetoric, this literary echo may perhaps help us to understand that the ego (*moi*), can also be a flower of rhetoric, which grows in the pot of the pleasure principle...<sup>65</sup>

As this quotation illustrates, Lacan believed the subject's rhetoric reflected their desires, and any careful analysis of the subject's rhetoric reveals the relationship between the subject's unconscious and the pathways through which their unique desires travel. As

rhetoricians, Lacan's Symbolic order illustrates precisely how rhetoric is connected to and reflects the subject's unique network of pleasures and pains which, in turn, aids our inquest into how agency is articulated.

### **The Future of Lacan in the Discipline**

While it is clear both Lundberg and Gunn, in conjunction with Biesecker, are doing their part to advance the import of Lacanian psychoanalysis for the discipline, these works also suffer from a defect not of their own making. Lacan's seminars are now receiving more attention from translators, but when these pivotal essays were published by Gunn and Lundberg, one of Lacan's vital seminars, Seminar XVII, remained available only in the original French. Since this work is now available, as Russell Grigg's translation of Seminar XVII was published in 2007,<sup>66</sup> we can see more clearly how Lacan's view of the Symbolic, discourse, and language had become in later part of his teaching. In this Seminar Lacan maintains for the first time, and it becomes a point he reiterates in the 1972 Seminar, that

discourse is... a necessary structure that goes well beyond speech, which is always more or less occasional. What I prefer... is discourse without speech... discourse can clearly subsist without words... in fundamental relations which would literally not be [maintainable] without language. Through the instrument of language a large number of stable relations are established, inside which something that is much larger and goes much further than actual utterances [*enonciations*] can, of course, be inscribed.<sup>67</sup>

This work is a good resource because it distinguishes between speech, discourse, and language in Lacan's theory, thereby clarifying what the Symbolic order entails when conducting psychoanalytic rhetorical analysis. This is a key point that advances what Lundberg advocates is one of the reasons Lacan should be considered a resource in his rebuttal to Gunn.

Seminar XVII is also important because it contains the best developed explanation of Lacan's theory of the four discourses. In part, the purpose of this dissertation is to revisit Seminar XVII in order to articulate how Lacan's teaching that year suggests there are four rhetorical agencies. These four different manifestations of rhetorical agency in discourse are not only elaborated upon in greater detail than in any previous seminar available in English, Lacan also spends time developing the analytical models he suggests analysts use to interpret the rhetoric comprising a subject or agent's speech. Thus, while my work in this dissertation shares many affinities at a theoretical level with the Lacanians working in the discipline, the dissertation means to be the first systematic effort in our discipline to develop and apply Lacan's theory of the four discourses as it is laid-out in Seminar XVII. As I will show in chapter two, Lacan's strengths as a resource for our discipline begins to show best when psychoanalysis is connected to the theory of the four discourses and the method it entails.

### **Posthumanist Rhetorical Agency**

The conceptualization of rhetorical agency which emerges from Lacan's philosophy clarifies the impasses created by the postmodernist debate about rhetorical agency at work in the literature. Rather than viewing rhetorical agency as determined by discourse or ideologically totalizing, which puts conceptualizations of rhetorical agency into a theoretical corner whereby agency is either complicit in or opposed to the political-economic status quo, Lacan's theory suggests there are at least four rhetorical agencies—none of which assume discourse is completely deterministic or ideologically totalizing. The argument is posthumanist psychoanalytic philosophy opens up the theoretical space

rhetoricians need to access the distinctively different ways in which subjects or agents (be they individuals or persons or otherwise) affect the structures of discourse with rhetoric while acknowledging the impact ideology and discourse play in the formation of subjectivity. I agree in part with Campbell and Cloud in particular, because both insist in their own way on the fundamental importance of a conceptualization of rhetorical agency that explains resistance to the political-economic status quo, a point I am not disputing. What is at issue, and I think Greene's work is especially important here, is the theoretical and methodological problems inherent in conceptualizing rhetorical agency as essentially comprised of resistance to the status quo on the part of a speaker or rhetor. Lacan's theory of discourse accounts for the way rhetoric is put to the service of changing the status quo, but it also accounts for the way rhetoric is bent on entrenching the status quo. Most importantly, Lacan's theory presumes agency is also reflected in discourse practices that are not necessarily counter-hegemonic or hegemonic.

The explanatory power Lacan's theory of discourse provides in this regard is in part why I think psychoanalytic philosophy has much to offer the discipline's conceptualization of rhetorical agency. As a corrective to the postmodern impasse Gaonkar's criticism provoked in the discipline, Lacan's theory of discourse includes hegemonic agency and counter-hegemonic rhetorical agency, but makes allowances for the articulation of agency that does not fit into either one of these categories. All four articulations of rhetorical agency help speech communication theorists explain the nuances of rhetorical agency. Where postmodern philosophy in the discipline often ends unproductively in a simple acknowledgment of the merits of the postmodern critique,

Lacan's work gives rhetoricians access to a theory that explains rhetorical agency in a way that goes beyond the belief that discourse practices are either counter-hegemonic or hegemonic. In this way we can sidestep the impacts of anxiety ridden conceptualizations of rhetorical agency Greene thoroughly criticized in 2006.

Lacan does say "the agent is not at all someone who does but someone who is caused to act."<sup>68</sup> But he is not using the word "cause" in the sense that a person or individual takes up some stance against some social injustice and lobbies others to correct it; he is trying to explain how the cause that drives an agent of a subject is unconscious and therefore not the result of adherence to a particular ideology or political-economic agenda or prerogative. The cause of action is not determined by the subject or agent's capacity to resist material or symbolic ideological constraints because it is foundationally caused by desire. This means, in contrast with the rehabilitated humanist version of rhetorical agency Campbell, Crowley, Cloud and Geisler's work suggests, an agent or a subject is produced in a discourse structure as a result of some stimulus that drives or compels the subject to speak regardless of their ideological suspicions and the imposition of constraints. Unlike conceptualizations of rhetorical agency that assume the rhetor or speaker possesses agency because they seek to change the status quo, which assumes *a priori* that a subject or agent exists before the status quo, the agent or subject in Lacanian theory is not pre-given, but always exists at the intersection between language and its effect on a subject in the process of subject formation in the status quo. Subjectivity is an effect of the signifier. The speaker or rhetor's agency is not derived from its capacity to

resist the status quo; it is an effect of the rhetoric in the particular articulation of a discourse practice.

So many discourse practices make up our everyday lives it seems futile to catalogue them, but it is clear all of these discourse practices make-up what we call rhetorical agency. What gets lost in the belief that agency is either counter-hegemonic or hegemonic is the fact that agency is always expressed in terms that do not fit either category. Lacan enriches our conceptualization of rhetorical agency by suggesting the relationships that constitute agency in an everyday sense are varied, and are not distinguishable on the basis of their resistance to the status quo or acquiescence to it.

Lacan asks, “What does 'agent' mean?” before adding

The verb *agir*, 'to act' has more than one resonance in our language, beginning with that of actor. *Actionnaire*, 'shareholder,' also -- why not, the word is made from *action*, and this shows you that *une action*, 'a share,' is perhaps not quite what one thinks it is. *Activiste* also -- doesn't the activist properly speaking define himself on the basis of the fact that he tends to consider himself to be rather the instrument of something...And finally, what one quite simply calls *mon agent*, 'my agent!' You can see what this means in general: 'I pay him for that.' Not even, 'I compensate him for having nothing else to do,' capable of doing something else.<sup>69</sup>

What Lacan's etymology of the word reveals is that an act is not reducible to capacities or invention, as the word refers to a much wider set of phenomena. Rhetorical agency is manifest in many different types of discourse practices. The nuance of the term is lost in many conceptualizations of rhetorical agency because some assume postmodern accounts of rhetorical agency crowd out the capacity for action since they do not entail a rhetor. This is not a defect of postmodern theory per se, so much as it is a misguided effort to recuperate the speaker centered theory from the humanist tradition.

In Campbell and Geisler's writing, the terms "speaker" or "author" and, in particular, the "rhetor," are terms used interchangeably with "agent" or "subject," and the concepts of "subjectivity" and "subject positions" in the discussion about rhetorical agency. There is considerable tension generated in the ambiguity of these terms. The confusion the terminology creates, in my view, is caused by the inability of the theory to distinguish between the individual and person, that is, the flesh and blood embodiment that is a human being, from the subject or the agent that is created when we consider language as a structure. The subject is a theoretical term meant to refer to the effect of the signifier on a flesh and blood embodiment of a human being. This means, the speaker, author or rhetor is a human being, but to be a subject or agent, it is not necessary that you be a human being—the signifier is the only necessary condition. The conceptualization of rhetorical agency Campbell, Geisler, Crowley and Cloud articulate assumes the individual or the person is a necessary condition for conceptualizing rhetorical agency. The result is a conceptualization that does not distinguish between the person or the individual and the subject or agent. Failing to distinguish between people or individuals and subjects or agents creates a conceptualization of agency that remains committed to a critical practice in which the critic seeks out and speculates about the rhetor's conscious intentions and seeks to locate those intentions within a political framework in which agency is defined by the capacity of the speaker or rhetor to resist ideological domination. But this view does not answer the theoretical predicament Gaonkar's criticism meant to remedy.

For example, since Campbell and Geisler remain committed to a conceptualization of rhetorical agency that does not adequately distinguish between people or individuals *and* rhetors, speakers or authors, but they are aware of Gaonkar's critique, they are forced to reconcile the criticism by contending that rhetors, speakers and authors use rhetoric to articulate a subject position or are pressed into a subject position as a result of the imposition of an ideology. For them, a subject's position in the culture is constituted through rhetoric, which means the subject or agent is constrained by the forces of the language at work in the culture but is not wholly determined by language. The solution they present then to the criticism Gaonkar made preserves the capacity of a person or individual to resist the constraints imposed upon rhetorical agency by the language and ideology, so the rhetor, speaker or author's agency is not wholly determined by the language, but, in the end, we are left with a conceptualization that is limited because it insists that rhetorical agency is a function of a speaker defined by the capacity of the speaker or rhetor to resist ideological domination.

The key argument here is that rhetorical agency is not necessarily produced by a speaker or a rhetor that is indistinguishable from a person or individual. What else are we to make of rhetorical agency and advertising jingles, or expletives uttered when no one other than the individual or person is there to hear them? It seems we would recognize that rhetoric exerts a force in both circumstances, even though both of these examples do not entail a speaker or a rhetor. The question concerning rhetorical agency then requires a conceptualization that does not see a speaker or rhetor as conditions necessary to account for rhetorical agency.



Gunn and Lundberg argue that the “usual suspects,” those scholars who insist rhetorical agency as a theoretical concept must presuppose that the “human subject [is] ‘given’ ...instead of *produced*,” commit an error in thinking that the human subject is not a product of discourse.<sup>70</sup> Their criticism identifies precisely the error at work in conceptualizations of rhetorical agency where agency is thought of as a function of the speaker or rhetor. While it is clear individual human beings exist independent of the language, agency in the literature means to refer to the flesh and blood persons, a discreet individual using language. However, subject and agent are entirely theoretical terms meant to refer to the alienating effect of language on the individual or person. Analytically speaking, the subject or agent as theoretical concepts accounts for the extent to which the individual or person is a product of language or, more closely, an effect of speech. Inclusion in the culture depends upon language, and in this respect all persons or individuals are subject to the culture because they are subjected to speech. This means human beings produce speech, but they are also produced by speech. Theoretically speaking, as Lacan suggests, “the subject that concerns us here, the subject not insofar as it produces discourse but insofar as it is produced [*fait*], cornered even [*fait comme un rat*], by discourse, is the subject of the enunciation.”<sup>71</sup>

The subject of enunciation could be a speaker, but it could also be God, or science, or any other agency invested with value or meaning for the subject or agent that sets desire in motion through speech. Since Lacan is focused on desire, his theory of the subject or agent is content to trace both the conscious and unconscious operations that

drive the logic of desire at work in a discourse, but it is in the unconscious logic of desire that Lacan's psychoanalytic theory has purchase for rhetorical studies.

For the purposes of theorizing about rhetoric, the speaker-centered conceptualization of rhetorical agency not only forces the theory to limit the explanatory power of rhetorical agency to only those instances in which a person or individual generates the rhetoric, it also theoretically presumes that rhetoric always corresponds to consciousness, and that rhetoric is always put to the service of motivations and intentions that are known to individuals or persons in a transparent manner. A person's consciousness in the conceptualization pre-exists the rhetoric, as the person or individual in the theory is pre-given and exists prior to language. Preserving theoretical space for the self-conscious individual or person who uses rhetoric to achieve some desired objective results in a defective conceptualization of rhetorical agency. These theorists stress the importance of invention, to establish the *a priori* necessity of a speaker, someone indistinguishable from an individual, who harnesses the persuasive power of the language to produce a consciously determined objective. This may all be very well for a speaker or rhetor or author centered approach to the question of agency, but where rhetorical agency is concerned, it is my argument we need to look for rhetorical *agencies* in discourse and not assume that rhetorical agency is locatable and identifiable within a person or an individual or as a function of ideological resistance. For the purposes of theorizing about rhetorical agency as a concept, it is necessary to distinguish between the person or individual and the subject or agent so that we can account for different kinds of agency structured in discourse.

People or individuals are meant to refer to the living, breathing body that exists independently of language—even when that body is comatose. Subjects or agents are distinct from persons or individuals because people and individuals need not breathe or live to persist as subjects and agents for other people or individuals. If it is the case that liberal humanist agency, with its stress upon the will, the intention, the conscious, self-invented rhetorician is theoretically defunct, that does not mean it's opposite, the unwilled, unintended and unawares rhetorician becomes the theoretical alternative. But this is precisely the theoretical alternative Campbell, Crowley, Geisler and Cloud attribute to postmodern and post-structuralist theory—despite the fact such a view is decidedly not postmodern or post-structuralist .

I am not contending that facts and describing the states of affairs in the world accurately is not important or is somehow unrelated to the concept of rhetorical agency. Kenneth Burke is quick to point out this basic function of rhetoric, i.e. setting the facts straight, is not to be overlooked. As he says,

Of course, there is always the possibility of ‘mystification,’ in the sense that language can be used to deceive. And at least as a kind of rough preparation for finer scrutiny, rhetorical analysis should always be ready to expose mystifications...<sup>72</sup>

However, when rhetorical agency is conceived of as a function of the speaker, and the speaker is indistinguishable from a person or individual who creates change or resists ideological domination, then the theory about rhetorical agency that results becomes a theory about an individual's consciousness. The key error here is in assuming that the speaker or author is dispensing rhetoric in a way that is somehow fully intended or motivated by the “I” that is the individual or person.

The criticism of rhetorical agency I am making is that all of these scholars treat rhetorical agency as if it were a function of the speaker or author in keeping with Gaonkar's intentional model of persuasion—it is adapted to suit the elements of rhetorical agency that persist once the full weight of postmodern and post-structuralist criticism is brought to bear on traditionalist assumptions about rhetorical agency. The conceptualization of rhetorical agency that emerges assumes if there must be a speaker or author, and speakers or authors are always individuals or people, then rhetorical agency must be a function of an individual or person. There is no room here for distinguishing theoretically between agency and people or individuals. Since individuals or persons are conscious, they self-direct, in a way that is presumably transparent to them, those intentions or motivations that allow them to connect what they desire in terms of belief or behavior to the capacity to change belief and behavior in others. This is the use of speech to get what you want, which presumes that you know why you want it in some sort of conscious, transparent or directed and unmediated, deliberative thought process. Preserving theoretical space for the speaker or author as an individual or person who uses rhetorical agency to affect social or cultural change is important, but it unnecessarily fuses rhetorical agency to self-consciousness, will and intent, thereby reproducing the fundamental conceptual defect of rhetorical agency Gaonkar criticized.

As Gunn and Lundberg suggest, pointing out that “the subject is constructed and not naturally given,” delineates “one of our scholarly tasks as that of tracking the rhetorical effects of doctrines of agency.”<sup>73</sup> It is not the purpose of their essay to reconstruct an alternative theory of rhetorical agency, but they do provide guiding

principles for reformulating rhetorical agency according to Lacanian psychoanalytic philosophy. They argue Lacan's teaching

Attributes agency to tropes, to the Symbolic, and to enjoyment (Lacan, *Ecrits* 138-168; also see Lacan, Seminar XX 3, 56). This agency possesses the subject, thereby bringing the fantasy of the agent to life. For Lacan, the 'response'-ible reading of the dynamics of subjectivity requires reference to rhetoric (Lundberg 500-501).<sup>74</sup>

For Lacan, analyzing a patient's discourse began by listening closely to the metaphors the patient incorporated to articulate their symptoms. Metaphors often contain clues about the underlying unconscious logic of desire driving the patient's compulsion to create a relationship with a therapist (i.e. seek out therapy). In this way, Lacanian psychoanalytic methods are entirely complimentary to the interpretation and criticism of rhetoric. This is why Gunn and Lundberg conclude "Lacanian psychoanalytic theory can help rhetoricians navigate the posthumanist theoretical landscape in a characteristically rhetorical way."<sup>75</sup> However, setting the methodological complementarity aside, psychoanalytic theory also helps clarify what we mean when using the terms agent and subject to account for rhetorical agency. Rather than assuming the speaker or rhetor pre-exists the discourse, the subject in a posthumanist paradigm only exists as a product of discourse. In this way, a posthumanist paradigm accounts for the structural impact of language on the formation of subjectivity.

Gunn and Lundberg elaborate on this point, arguing "The subject, or rather the idea of an identity that is presumed synonymous with the human subject," merely exists "as a suture that attempts to mediate the alienating process of signification."<sup>76</sup> This means the agent or subject is not necessarily a speaker or an individual person, but rather is a subject or agent by virtue of the fact that signifiers are necessary to have an identity in the

first place. Individual people mediate the alienating effects of language acquisition by assuming signifiers that represent for that person or individual what they signify to other people, objects, and subjects.

The inability of signifiers to match our identity, coupled with the fact that words are necessary for identity, produces alienation—this is what Lacan’s maxim “the signifier represents the subject for another signifier” cryptically refers to. Agent and subject are theoretical constructs meant to describe how rhetorical agency is language governed, determined in part by speech use, and structured by discourse. The common sense version of rhetorical agency as a function of the speaker cannot theoretically account for the subject or agent because the assumption that the subject or agent exists independent of and prior to the discourse subsumes the “radical contingency” of the human subject, “its fragmentary qualities, and/or its dependence on generative systems beyond the seat of an insular individual consciousness.”<sup>77</sup> The conclusion here is rhetorical agency as a concept, when it is presumed to be agency if and only if it is a product of the speaker, captures neither the radical contingency nor fragmentation of the subject or agent as theoretical constructs. Distinguishing between theory and practice yields a better criticism because the unconscious, capital and language structures are the focus and not consciousness or intent.

### **The Unconscious as a Factor in Rhetorical Agency**

Rhetorical agency is not restricted to individuals and people directing consciousness in the interest of creating social change, and Lacan’s version of rhetorical agency does not depend upon an individual directing consciousness. For Lacan, language,

capital and especially the unconscious, all play an integral part in explaining how rhetorical agency is constituted in discourse. Lacan's philosophy holds a certain advantage in this regard, as his contention that the subject is an effect of the signifier is decidedly rhetorical: it necessitates speech and presupposes the centrality of language in producing the subject or agent. The advantages of assuming the subject or agent is constructed and not a pre-given condition makes it possible to assess the effect of rhetoric instead of speculating about its origins.

The contribution Lacan brings to rhetorical agency and the theory in general is his consideration of the unconscious as a factor in speech. Since rhetorical agency has typically been associated with will and intent, and consciousness is considered to be the mechanism for activating rhetorical agency, the unconscious or latent forces at work in rhetorical agency remain neglected in the theory and criticism of rhetoric. Further, because Lacan analytically distinguishes between people or individuals and subjects or agents, his psychoanalytic philosophy proves resilient in trying to explain how rhetorical agency moves even where it is not bent on changing someone's mind or the social injustices inherent in the status quo. Lacan distinguishes between the person or individual and the subject in the most rhetorical statement, "I am lying."<sup>78</sup> The paradox here reveals the workings of the unconscious, a domain that influences rhetorical agency even though rhetoricians do not typically focus on it.

If the statement "I am lying" is true, then paradoxically the conclusion must be I am not lying—this necessarily entails the workings of some other agent who is distinct from the I that is the subject of the statement. If the statement is false, then *I* am not lying, but that

does not mean this is the same *I* that is telling the truth. Either way, the disambiguation is not reducible to the existence of some “I” that exists independent of discourse. There is an *I* in the ambiguity that is only explicable if it is granted that some auditor other than another person or individual is being responded to by the *I* that is the subject of the statement. If the statement depends upon an auditor, an audience, a receiver, etc. to disambiguate its content, but the same auditor, audience or receiver, etc. is not the only arbiter of the message, then the disambiguation of the message is contingent upon an auditor other than the person or individual to whom the statement is supposedly directed. In Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, the Other is this intermediary to which the *I* that is the subject of the statement is responsive; a silent operator at work in speech which regulates the distribution of desire in unconscious ways. Locating the Other at work in a statement, and separating it from the other people or individuals to whom the statement is directed, reveals the analytical working of the unconscious in the distribution desire in a discourse. In a practical way, the distinction between the other and Other is operative in the discourse whenever people or individuals claim they are acting out the will of God or just doing what they are told. The audience of other people and individuals who receive the message are distinct from the Other for whom the speech is directed. The *I* that is passively and latently responsive to the Other is unconscious. Lacan argues,

It is quite clear that the *I am lying*, despite its paradox, is perfectly valid. Indeed the *I* of the enunciation is not the same as the *I* of the statement, that is to say, the shifter which, in the statement designates him.<sup>79</sup>

The conclusion is the *I* as such only exists in the discourse *if* the Other is there to distinguish it from itself. There is an *I* that is more or less directly responsive to the other person or individual in the statement, but there is simultaneously an *I* that is always



already responsive to the Other. Although it is commonplace in rhetorical theory to fuse the I that is the subject of the statement with the person or individual who articulates it, thereby erasing the ambiguous source of the I thought to wholly encompass the subject of the statement, rhetorical theory benefits from the understanding that there is an unconscious operation at play in the statement that too deserves analysis. The I uttering the statement is not the same as the “I” who is also always an individual or a person.

Individual people utter the rhetorical equivalent of the statement “I am lying” every time they deflect praise or pay a back-handed compliment, but these are more than just figures of speech. In discourse, false-modesty and back-handed compliments alike are statements made to other people and individuals that are responsive to the Other, in the sense that individuals or people often go through the motions or enact social perfunctory to satisfy demands they are consciously uncomfortable with, like receiving a compliment or passively insulting someone else. There is a nugget of truth in both false modesty and back-handed compliments, and the recognition of this persistence of truth escapes conscious intervention even in the exact moment in which the “I am lying” confers truth as its opposite. The purpose of conceptualizing rhetorical agency for rhetorical theory, according to the authors cited, is to recover the capacity of the rhetor or speaker to affect change from a phantom argument. Even though all of the authors I cite take care to couch their conceptualizations of rhetorical agency in terms that do not run afoul of the postmodern critique, it is clear the specter of postmodernity forces the conceptualizations that emerge to accept remnants of the liberal humanist paradigm Gaonkar criticized.<sup>80</sup> To conceptualize rhetorical agency according to the dictates of the

criticism requires a rejection of all aspects of liberal humanist agency—rehabilitating rhetorical agency to preserve the centrality of the speaker or rhetor as a source of agency, and their rhetoric as a measure of their ability to resist the status quo, is no longer adequate. Instead, we should adopt a theoretical disposition that accounts for rhetorical agencies rather than one version of agency. It is this argument that forces us to clarify what Gaonkar is referring to when he talks about discourse practices as rhetorical agency. While he is not clear on exactly what constitutes a discourse practice, I believe we can draw upon Lacan's work to clarify this important concept.

### **Rhetorical Agency as a Function of Discourse**

According to Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, the formation of links or social bonds is what defines discourse and makes it distinguishable from rhetoric. Where rhetoric is constituted in a discourse, it is the structure of the discourse that determines the relationship that connects the subject or agent with the other. Discourse, for Lacan, is a social link—a relationship created through speech. The simplicity of Lacan's definition of discourse as a social link should not detract from its explanatory power. Discourse is strictly and simply speaking a relationship constituted rhetorically between subjects in and through the culture with themselves, other individuals, and objects, in a more or less organized exchange designed to regulate the satisfaction of desire. For psychoanalytic purposes, speech then is the particular instance of language use by a person or individual in a discourse structure. Speech in the psychoanalytic theory is both a product of desire, that is, desire is what foundationally drives language, but speech also produces desire, in that it generates desire where no desire existed before the articulation of speech. Humans

exchange speech to create relationships, and all human relationships, even if the person is comatose or marooned on an island, are predicated upon desire mediated by speech. So it is desire structured in a discourse as a practice, not argumentation or the capacity of the speaker to resist ideological domination, which best explains how a culture changes over time as a result of rhetorical agency.

### **Posthumanist Rhetorical Agency: Discourse and Ideology**

If we assume that discourse and ideology are at least partially responsible for driving the formation of subjectivity, but insist, as postmodern philosophy does, that discourse and ideology do not determine the subject or agent, then how is the subject or agent's rhetorical agency affected by ideology and discourse? How is an account of rhetorical agency that makes allowances for the relationship between rhetoric, discourse and ideology theoretically conceptualized? In keeping with Lacan's theory of the four discourses, it is my belief rhetorical agency is constituted in four different discourse structures, and further, that each discourse is distinguishable from the other by the way desire is articulated in the subject or agent's rhetoric. If rhetorical agency does imply rhetoric has the capacity to transform beliefs and behaviors, thereby changing the culture, but we know change does not happen only in those instances in which people change their minds due to the impact of knowledge, then our conceptualization of rhetorical agency must identify some other factor at work in the rhetoric that can explain how rhetoric promotes stasis and creates change. Desire is the phenomena our discipline should incorporate when conceptualizing rhetorical agency. For scholars like Mark Bracher who are committed to explaining rhetoric's capacity to transform the culture, the

theoretical centrality of desire is clear. As he argues in accordance with Lacanian psychoanalytic philosophy, it is the case that

If culture plays a role in social change, or in resistance to change, it does so largely by means of desire. Insofar as a cultural phenomenon succeeds in interpellating subjects--that is, in summoning them to assume a certain subjective (dis)position--it does so by evoking some form of desire or by promising satisfaction of some desire. It is thus desire rather than knowledge that must become the focal point of cultural criticism if we are to understand how cultural phenomena move people.<sup>81</sup>

The conclusion Bracher reaches identifies precisely the advantage had when conceptualizing rhetorical agency as an effect of desire because he acknowledges the central part desire plays in affectively driving the subject or agent to speak on behalf of change and stasis. Subjective dispositions, if they are not totalizing or determined by discourse and ideology, are nonetheless derived from language and are analyzable as such in terms of the ways the rhetoric reflects the articulation of desire. The precise character of any subject position any agent or subject assumes is contingent upon the articulation of desire, a requirement antecedent to its instantiation as knowledge in a discourse.

Knowledge does not activate a transformation in belief or behavior because knowledge only justifies the change in belief and behavior retroactively. Knowledge is ad hoc, as the reasons given for supporting changes to beliefs and behaviors by an individual or person are supplied only after the affective impact of desire exerts its effect on the rhetoric constituting the discourse. Our theoretical outlook on ideology should acknowledge this fact; knowledge plays only a partial role in the formation of belief and behavior. Supporting a candidate for office, for example, is not necessarily reducible to the conscious exercise of choice.<sup>82</sup> Support for a point of view or ideological preference

is often simply expressed as a feeling, an intuition, a hunch or gut reaction— all of which refer to the fact these feelings affecting the person are not reducible to consciousness but instead are unconscious and caused by desire. Ideologically speaking, rhetorical agency must account for the unconscious logic of desire at work here, but the fact that these desires are not conscious does not mean we do not have access to or cannot analyze them in a discourse practice. As Bruce Gronbeck says,

Those other strata of consciousness, however, are not only submerged. They also can operate on the grand, visionary scale that Bormann (1972) attributed to rhetorical fantasies. This is the world of myth, of dream, of individual and collective desire, of what Lacan (1988) discussed as a state...where we are able to connect the wished-for with the here-and-now.<sup>83</sup>

Gronbeck's conclusion lends credence to the belief that desire makes itself felt in a discourse practice as a wish or an expression of what the subject or agent would prefer if they had their way. Desire in speech drives the subject or agent to distinguish what *is* the case from what they *wish* was the case, which is really a more specific way of analyzing ideology. Thus, a theory of rhetorical agency should account for the conscious and unconscious factors at work in discourse practices by attending to the effect of desire on the rhetoric because desire is the factor in speech that expresses the transformative potential of rhetoric for the subject or agent.

Rhetorical agency does function to change minds, but its transformative potential to arrest or promote beliefs and behaviors is best conceived of as the regulation or distribution of perceived excesses of desire had by other subjects or agents in the culture. Theoretically, desire underlies rhetorical agency in any discourse practice, but we can refine our understanding of how desire affects a discourse practice by identifying how the rhetoric suggests some agents or subjects enjoy the satisfaction of their desires more than

other people or individuals in the discourse. Envy, resentment, jealousy, incredulity and shock are words often used to express how speech of this sort feels, but Lacan used a specialized term to refer to this feature of discourse: *surplus jouissance*. This term is directly related to desire, but specifies a certain excessive enjoyment of desire had by other subjects or agents than the subject or agent articulating the discourse. Lacan's use of the word *jouissance* captures in the French the orgasmic and sublime connotations he is trying to convey in talking about desire in its excesses in a discourse practice. Thus, if desire underlies rhetorical agency, and in discourse it is often the perceived excesses of desire that the other enjoys that specifies how desire is constituted in a discourse practice, then rhetorical agency is often best seen in the differences between the subject or agent doing the wishing and the subjects or agents whose wishes are fulfilled. Ideologically speaking, this concept is useful for describing how a discourse practice incorporates desire to move people or individuals in both conscious and unconscious ways.

Lacan's theory of the four discourses gives us an analytical language for interpreting rhetoric in a discourse practice according to four different structures, each of which constitute rhetorical agency as *jouissance* in distinctive arrangements that reflect differences in the unconscious logic of desire driving speech. Rhetoric impacts beliefs and behaviors through the affective force of *jouissance*, and not instinct or intellect alone can explain this key facet of rhetorical agency. Thus, it is conceptually beneficial to locate agency in discourse practices by identifying the underlying structures in which discourse facilitates the articulation of desire by a subject or agent.

To recuperate rhetorical agency, I suggest a conceptualization which assumes for theoretical purposes there are four rhetorical agencies, each fitted to a discrete Lacanian discourse, and each type of rhetorical agency lends itself to analysis according to the unique structural features intrinsic to the discourse in which the specific kind of rhetorical agency is constituted. Rhetorical agency is an effect of speech in the discourses, constituted through tropes such as metonymy and synecdoche, in the symbolic and imaginary codes (otherwise designated as signifiers and images respectively) that align enjoyment with objects and ideas that are invested with meaning and value for subjects. The source of the investment of meaning or value is oftentimes a speaker, and that speaker could be a person or an individual, but since rhetorical agency is a function of discourse and not necessarily an individual or a person, Lacan's theory is adaptable to those instances when rhetorical agency is not directly attributable to a speaker who is necessarily a person or an individual. I am arguing that fitting the concept of rhetorical agency to Lacanian psychoanalytic discourse theory corrects for the confusion created in the literature when agency and subject or agent are used interchangeably, and also offers an alternative for the conceptualization of rhetorical agency endorsed by Campbell, Crowley, Geisler, and critiqued by Ronald Walter Greene in reference to Cloud.<sup>84</sup>

What is needed then is a theoretical outlook that combines the lessons learned from the postmodern and post-structuralist philosophical tradition while accounting for the capacity of subjects or agents to resist the totalizing effects of language that modernist critics unfairly assume post-structuralism and postmodernist implies. As Marshal Alcorn notes, "In some respects Lacan's account of the subject follows the lines of a rhetorical

analysis,” because “Lacan is interested in figures of speech and how speech, creating systems of desire and identification, moves the subject.” He elaborates on the methodological benefits of incorporating Lacan by pointing out that

On the one hand, this analysis is highly theoretical: Lacan is fully engaged in all the conceptual resources formulated by post-structuralist thought. But on the other hand Lacan's analysis is highly practical. As an analyst, Lacan confronted subjects who resisted, denied, and displaced linguistic effects. This forced him to formulate a description of the subject much more active and resistant than the subject imagined by post-structuralist thought.<sup>85</sup>

Recuperating the term according to Lacan's theory preserves the conceptual value rhetorical agency serves in formulating rhetorical theory and operates as a powerful heuristic for rethinking our assumptions about rhetorical agency as a concept.

---

<sup>1</sup> Philip Nel, “Explanatory Power and Truth: The Promise of Critical Realism in Theology,” in *Theory and Method in South African Human Sciences Research*, ed. Johann Mouton et al. (Human Science Research Council: HSRC Press, 1998), 105.

<sup>2</sup> Dilip Gaonkar, “The Idea of Rhetoric in the Rhetoric of Science,” *The Southern Communication Journal* 58, no. 4 (July 1993): 260.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Dilip Gaonkar, “The Forum: Publics and Counterpublics,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88, no. 4 (November 2002): 410.

<sup>8</sup> Gaonkar, “The Idea of Rhetoric,” 263

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>18</sup> Cheryl Geisler, “How Ought We to Understand the Concept of Rhetorical Agency? Report from the ARS,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 10.

<sup>19</sup> Carl Herndl and Adela C. Licona, “Shifting Agency: Agency, Kairos, and the Possibilities of Social Action,” in *The Cultural Turn: Perspectives on Communicative Practices in Workplaces and Professions*, ed. M. Zachery and C. Thralls (New York: Baywood Publishing, 2007), 1.

<sup>20</sup> Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, “Agency: Promiscuous and Protean,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (March 2005): 2.

<sup>21</sup> Dana L. Cloud, “The Matrix and Critical Theory's Desertion of the Real,” *Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies* 3, no. 4 (December 2006): 333-34.



- 
- <sup>22</sup> Michele Foucault, "So Is It Important to Think?" in *The Essential Foucault*, ed. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: The New Press, 1994), 171-72.
- <sup>23</sup> Foucault, "So Is It Important to Think?" 172.
- <sup>24</sup> Sharon Crowley, "Response to Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "Agency," September 2003, Rhetoric Society of America, 5-13-2010 <[www.rhetoricsociety.org/ARS/pdf/campbellonagency.pdf](http://www.rhetoricsociety.org/ARS/pdf/campbellonagency.pdf)>. 1.
- <sup>25</sup> Jodi Dean, *Žižek's Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 2.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 3.
- <sup>27</sup> Geisler, "Rhetorical Agency," 12.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 12.
- <sup>29</sup> Campbell, "Agency: Promiscuous and Protean," 3.
- <sup>30</sup> Crowley, "Response to Karlyn Kohrs Campbell," 2.
- <sup>31</sup> Joshua Gunn and Christian Lundberg, "'Ouija Board, Are There any Communications?' Agency, Ontotheology, and the Death of the Humanist Subject, or, Continuing the ARS Conversation," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (2005): 87.
- <sup>32</sup> Herndl and Licona, "Shifting Agency," 4.
- <sup>33</sup> Ronald W. Greene, "The Concept of Global Citizenship in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's Empire: A Challenge to Three Ideas of Rhetorical Mediation," in *Rhetorical Democracy: Discursive Practices of Civic Engagement*, ed. Gerard A. Hauser and Amy Grim (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), 203.
- <sup>34</sup> Greene, "Greene on Hardt and Negri," 189.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 189.
- <sup>36</sup> Cloud, Matrix, 2006
- <sup>37</sup> Terry Eagleton, "Ideology and Its Vicissitudes in Western Marxism," in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (New York: Verso, 1999), 216.
- <sup>38</sup> Michele Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France 1981-1982* (New York: Picador, 2001), 189.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>41</sup> Lyod Pettigrew, "Psychoanalytic Theory: A Neglected Rhetorical Dimension," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 10, no. 12 (Winter 1977): 46-59.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 46.
- <sup>43</sup> Michael J. Hyde, *The Life-Giving Gift of Acknowledgement* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2005).
- <sup>44</sup> Michael Hyde, "Jacques Lacan's Psychoanalytic Theory of Speech and Language," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 (1980): 96-118.
- <sup>45</sup> Douglass Thomas, "Burke, Nietzsche, Lacan: Three Perspectives on the Rhetoric of Order," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 79, no. 3 (1993): 336.
- <sup>46</sup> Barbara A. Biesecker, "Coming to Terms with Recent Attempts to Write Women Into the History of Rhetoric," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 25, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 222.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 146.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 147.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 144.
- <sup>52</sup> Joshua Gunn, "Refiguring Fantasy: Imagination and Its Decline in U.S. Rhetorical Studies," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89, no. 1 (Feb 2003): 41-59.
- <sup>53</sup> Joshua Gunn, "Refitting Fantasy: Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity, and Talking to the Dead," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90, no. 1 (Feb 2004): 1-23.
- <sup>54</sup> Joshua Gunn, "On Dead Subjects: A Rejoinder to Lundberg on (a) Psychoanalytic Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90, no. 4 (Nov 2004): 501.
- <sup>55</sup> Gunn, "Refitting Fantasy," 9.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

---

<sup>57</sup> Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, 1975, translated by Bruce Fink, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999), 132.

<sup>58</sup> Tom Cruise's character Jerry McGwire recapitulates in a contemporary context the ideas Aristophanes originally wrote on precisely this point. Aristophanes used hemispheres to show how men and women were divided from the other half that would render them whole (the intrinsic benefits of being a sphere goes unexplained in the play because the value or importance of merging with your other half is assumed or intrinsic). Thus, Jerry McGwire's drunken confession to Renée Zellweger's character Dorothy Boyd conveys Aristophanes' centuries old plotline when he says "You complete me." The confession conveys the exact sort of split subjectivity Lacan maintains underlies the human condition generally, but most importantly, illustrates how, as Lacan said, there is no sexual rapport. The desire of the romantic fantasy is directed towards healing some split in subjectivity, as "You complete me" clearly suggests. Gunn's point is however deeper, and it is simply this: there is a structure underlying the fantasy that is fundamental and is best understood as Real. Despite what Aristophanes or Hollywood would make us imagine is the romantic fantasy, the fact remains no woman or man, or for that matter any other person, will ever complete us--the incompleteness is not the absence of some other person (analytically speaking, the other or ego ideal), it is the presence of the fantasy as part of our individual psychological make-up which makes the fantasy persist.

<sup>59</sup> Gunn, "Refitting Fantasy," 9.

<sup>60</sup> While Gunn does not use the example, I believe for rhetoricians the concept of infinity is a good example of the Lacanian Real, as it suggests there is no beginning, no end and no time when it was not, while simultaneously confronting those who contemplate it with the paradox that it both exists and does not exist (if it is everything, then it is nothing). The signifier "infinity" and its image " $\infty$ " convey precisely this lack of a lack that Lacan means when he talks about the Real order underlying subjectivity. For subjects, the Real is therefore an excess or surplus of meaning that communication cannot capture with words or images. As Gunn argues, the Real is "an external absolute," which suggests something completely and undeniably beyond what can be imagined or symbolized in either speech or image by a subject, but persists as such in a fantasy which is itself symptomatic of the fundamental fantasy to be a whole or complete, or "undivided" subject.

<sup>61</sup> Gunn, "Refitting Fantasy," 9.

<sup>62</sup> Christian Lundberg, "The Royal Road Not Taken: Joshua Gunn's "Refitting Fantasy: Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity and Talking to the Dead" and Lacan's Symbolic Order," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90, no. 4 (2004): 9.

<sup>63</sup> Gunn, "Refitting Fantasy," 4.

<sup>64</sup> Lundberg, "Royal Road," 499.

<sup>65</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality*, 56.

<sup>66</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 1991, translated by Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 73.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 169.

<sup>69</sup> Lacan, *Other Side*, 125.

<sup>70</sup> Gunn and Lundberg, "Ouija Board," 86.

<sup>71</sup> Jacques Lacan, *My Teaching* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2008), 36.

<sup>72</sup> Burke, *Rhetoric of Motives*, 178.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 87.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 97.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 87.

<sup>76</sup> Gunn and Lundberg, "Ouija Board," 87.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 86.

<sup>78</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), 138-39.

<sup>79</sup> Lacan, *Four Concepts*, 138-39.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*.

---

<sup>81</sup> Mark Bracher, *Lacan, Discourse, and Social Change: A Psychoanalytic Cultural Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 19.

<sup>82</sup> Charles C. Ballew and Alexander Todorov, "Predicting Political Elections from Rapid and Unreflective Face Judgments," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 104, no. 46 (November 2007): 17952.

<sup>83</sup> Bruce E. Gronbeck, "Rushing, Frenz, and the Matter of Psychological Rhetorical Criticism," *Southern Communication Journal* 71, no. 2 (June 2006): 160.

<sup>84</sup> Ronald W. Greene, "Rhetoric and Capitalism: Rhetorical Agency and Communicative Labor," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 37, no. 314 (2004): 188-206.

<sup>85</sup> Marshall W. Jr. Alcorn, "The Subject of Discourse: Reading Lacan Through (and Beyond) Poststructuralist Contexts," in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society*, ed. Mark Bracher et al. (New York and London: New York University Press, 1994), 29.

## **CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY: POSTHUMANIST RHETORICAL AGENCY AND THE FOUR DISCOURSES**

Rhetorical agency cannot be fully accounted for in conscious terms alone, and to recover the concept of rhetorical agency, I suggest Lacanian psychoanalytic discourse theory provides an analytical terminology and set of models designed to explain how rhetorical agency is a function of discourse and not a function of a speaker consciously inventing rhetoric. Lacan's theory of discourse draws a distinction between discourse and rhetoric. Discourse refers to a relationship, which is an intersubjective, intrapersonal or interpersonal link formed between people, subjects and objects. Rhetoric is the specific instance of language use that constitutes a discourse structure, and Lacan's theory identifies four discrete structures or what Gaonkar calls discourse practices. Lacan's theory of the four discourses allows us to see how rhetorical agency is manifest in discourse practices in ways that follow a particular logic predicated upon the articulation of unconscious desire.

The theoretical value of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory lies in its incorporation of desire as an unconscious factor always already present in speech. To explain how Lacan's theory of the four discourses helps us analyze rhetoric and conceptualize agency

in ways that conform to Gaonkar's criticism without forcing us to rehabilitate the humanist paradigm, I will lay-out those aspects of psychoanalytic philosophy that are necessary to give the conceptualization of rhetorical agency I am proposing explanatory power. I will begin by reinforcing what I have said about desire before turning the reader's attention to the remaining aspects of psychoanalytic philosophy which are needed to conceptualize rhetorical agency.

### **Desire**

Desire is the result of biological needs mediated by language via the demand. Infants, Lacan assumes, are so helpless that they are utterly incapable of satisfying basic biological needs. Consequently, the infant must make demands on someone else in order to satisfy them. In western cultures usually, though clearly not always, this other is the mother. The obvious example of an infant's need is hunger, which is only satiable after the demand (crying) is articulated and the caretaker responds. It does not matter that this biological need is sated with a bottle or a breast, what is important is the fact that the infant associates their articulation of the need with satisfaction from the other. What the demand/need relationship establishes for the child is a dependency on the language to mediate the satisfaction of needs. Once this basic behavior is set in motion, it is only a matter of time before the demands are no longer linked to biological needs and become associated with substitutes for basic needs—we call the result desires. Desire is a circuit or loop the subject or agent follows because all human beings, according to the theory, are bent on achieving satisfaction—even though satisfaction will always elude the subject or agent in discourse because desire is never sated. This fact is part of our elementary

psychological make-up. As Dylan Evans points out, the relationship between a caretaker and the infant is foundational in this regard, as it generates the fundamental structure that drives the formation of desire. As he puts it,

...because the object which satisfies the child's need is provided by another, it takes on the added significance of being a proof of the Other's love. Accordingly demand too becomes a demand for love. And just as the symbolic function of the object as a proof of love overshadows its real function as that which satisfies a need, so too the symbolic dimension of demand (as a demand for love) eclipses its real function (as an articulation of need). It is this double function which gives birth to desire, since while the needs which demand articulates may be satisfied, the craving for love is unconditional and insatiable, and hence persists as a leftover even after the needs have been satisfied; this leftover constitutes desire.<sup>86</sup>

Demand is more than just asking for the satisfaction of a biological need, because in the very asking and the satisfaction of the need there is a surplus produced that repeats the cycle even where no biological demand, strictly speaking, persists. The surplus is what we commonly refer to as love. In this way, in the articulation of a demand, desire is formed as surplus of enjoyment for the infant because more than the biological need is at play here—there is a deeper satisfaction that requires our attention as it forms the basis for our psychology as we mature into adulthood. The ancillary benefit of Lacanian psychoanalytic philosophy for rhetorical theory is this grounding in child psychology. To fully explain, we must recognize that for Lacan the relationship between the infant and the caretaker is an analogy for the relationship between the subject and the language.

### **Desire is the Desire of the Other**

In psychoanalytic theory, the upper case “Other” refers to language, whereas the lower case “other” refers to what is understood as another ego. Demands necessitate language as the Other, but demands are always directed at someone else: the “other”. As Herman Lang puts it,

language forces anyone who wants something from it into its order. In other words, purely vital intentionality needs articulation, the besoin [need] needs the demande (sic).<sup>87</sup>

There is a kind of pleasure associated with having the demand answered—above and beyond the satisfaction of the biological need—and this satisfaction is what we are referring to when we use the word love. Even where and when the biological need is met, the need for the Other to continue to acknowledge that the infant is demanding *recognition* as such persists unabated; it is desire qua desire which we call love. Love is, at least at a basic level, the desire to be or have the desire of the Other, reflected in the desire (usually) of other people's affections (although in cases it is attached to animals and objects).

The subject in psychoanalytic theory is driven by the desire to be desired and/or to have what is desired. Thus, the subject in Lacanian theory is divided between the desire to be and the desire to have the object that the other desires. So, the subject in discourse is a product of this being/having relationship with desire whereby, in a direct sense, the subject is divided by desire (a) because “to be” implies the subject lacks what is necessary for desire and (b) because “to have” implies a certain surplus of what is sufficient for desire, an excess of enjoyment. In either case, the subject in discourse is divided as a consequence of the desire of the other, whether it is of the having or being sort.

Lacan's maxim, desire is the desire of the Other, confers the sense that desire is mediated (having/being) by other people and the language in which the subject or agent is immersed. The fact that desire is mediated by the language (or the Other), which also implies desire is mediated by other people (or the other), led Lacan to devise a term

(divided subjectivity) and a symbol (a “S” for subject) and a bar to strike the subject out—designated as a  $\$$ . Although I will return to this important feature of Lacan’s theory of discourse, at this point it is enough to say the bar in the  $\$$  is meant to represent the way the subject is not an agent in charge of their desire, but is dependent upon the Other for desire—hence, the notion that the subject is divided in discourse by desire. Ellie Ragland captures how this desire qua divided subjectivity sounds in language, as for her, “it is a desire that takes the form of thinking, ‘If so-and-so would only do this, be this, feel this, think this, then I...’”<sup>88</sup> Rather than focus on the definition of the terminology, I think it is important to recognize what this type of speech implies is a lack; something is missing and/or someone has “it,” that thing which would complete our psychology, thereby rendering the subject a complete an undivided person or individual. Since a complete or wholly undivided subjectivity is the implicit goal but remains elusive because satisfaction of this sort is impossible, then subjectivity as such in psychoanalytic theory remains open-ended—the loop of desire never stops, it simply attaches itself to new objects (either inanimate or animate in the case of demands articulated to other human beings or even animals) thereby locking human subjectivity into a process which undergoes consistent reformation but never ends (except in death).

### **Desire is the Desire of the Audience**

Desire as the desire of the Other, can be further theoretically clarified if we think about desire as the speaker’s expectations about the audience’s desires. Again, this is a familiar concept to rhetoricians who have for centuries asked, “How do I adapt my rhetoric to the audience?” This is in many ways a practical answer to a theoretical



question that is foundational to every subject's existence: what does the Other want from me or desire of me? However, at a theoretical level, this becomes more than a question of what does the other person want from me, or even what does the other person want from me so I can get what it is that would satisfy the cause driving the desire.

Methodologically speaking, the analysis of desire in speech begins by identifying the signifiers and images that signify for a subject the missing or absent object; what is referred to in the theory as lack because it is what is missing or lacking that causes desire in the first place. While the missing object could be something material like keys, in psychoanalytic theory desire is manifest in signifiers that metaphorically link the unconscious to the articulation of desire in a word like "keys". For Slavoj Žižek,

what ultimately distinguishes man from animal is not a positive feature (speech, tool-making, reflexive thinking, or whatever), but the rise of a new point of impossibility designated by Freud and Lacan as *das Ding*, the impossible-real ultimate reference point of desire.<sup>89</sup>

These signifiers and images that represent desire for the subject are referred to in psychoanalytic terminology as the *objet a*.

### **Objet a**

For Lacanian discourse theory, the *objet a* is both a cause and source of desire, and serves as desire's signifier or image in speech for a subject or agent. The *objet a* is any object which sets desire in motion, be it someone else's body, a car, or even an individual's sense of self-worth. Bruce Fink distinguishes between the object as satisfaction itself from the object as a cause of desire.

Since the object is a cause of desire and not something that it would satisfy, it highlights insatiability as a key feature of desire. Its relationship to desire is that desire circulates around the *objet a*, either by ruminating or by obsessing about

the cause or fixating on an object – an actual thing – be it an image or a collection of signifiers.<sup>90</sup>

This phenomenon, the fact that humans get fixed on objects, is so commonplace we hardly notice it, but it is a vital concept to understand because it theoretically grounds our discussion of what is moving about rhetoric in the value or meaning invested in objects by people or individuals. As Bracher notes,

The object *a* is that part of the subject's being that is simultaneously left out of and produced by the identity established for the subject...As such, the object *a* holds the key to understanding both the nature of *jouissance* and 'what the incidence of the signifier in the destiny of the speaking being is all about'. The *a* thus figures the lack of being that causes all desire, and it underlies affect as well. And as the cause of desire and the ground of affect, the object *a* is what animates the psychology of the group or the masses.<sup>91</sup>

The meaning or value invested in an object by a person or individual is critical, as this meaning or value helps to clarify what the experience of desire feels like for a subject. *Jouissance* in psychoanalytic philosophy refers to the affective force exerted by desire as it is experienced by a subject or agent via the *objet a*. Since it is clear desire affects subjects and agents differently, this term means to refer to the specific experience of enjoyment, satisfaction and pleasure or pain the subject or agent feels in desiring generally. The phenomena Lacan's term refers to underlie every affective disposition a subject experiences: love, anxiety, fear, even confusion. In short, all of those sensations that distinguish the dead from the living are manifestations of a uniquely human experience Lacan called *jouissance*.

### ***Jouissance***

We should initially define *jouissance* as enjoyment, but the reader should know the French captures the orgasmic and sublime dimension of enjoyment that the English

translation fails to connote in either the words desire or enjoyment. *Jouissance* is a key term in psychoanalytic theory because it refers to the non-instinctual drive that animates agency generally. The pain and pleasure of desiring to desire itself is what is at stake here.

The derailment or prohibition of *jouissance* generates rhetorical agency because it is the lack of fulfillment or satisfaction that causes the subject or agent to demand; satisfying the demand is the object of rhetorical agency for the subject or agent. However, Lacan's theory points out that the satisfaction of *jouissance* is unachievable, and for that reason, is never exhausted until death snuffs it out.

My father told me a joke that illustrates in a political context the way in which desire affects rhetoric in the experience of *jouissance*. A baker, a teacher and a banker are all seated around a table eyeballing the plate of fresh cookies in front of them, when the banker reaches out and takes eleven, looks at the baker and says "That teacher wants to take your cookie." The reasoning in the punch line is humorous because the banker's greed is obvious, and so the attempt to conceal it by scapegoating the teacher makes the banker's arrangement all the more outrageous, and hence, laughable. In this way, the joke clearly appeals to our sense of reason, as our acculturated ideas about fairness makes us see that the arrangement disproportionately benefits the banker, and the outcome of the banker's action seems unreasonable since no reason except the banker's greed justifies the hoarding. The joke also works because the baker might be duped by the banker—which is why one might laugh at the person who does not understand the punch line. In this way, the joke reflects how rhetoric agency is used to conceal the truth, which would

imply the purpose of rhetorical criticism then becomes to reveal the act of concealment or deception at work in the speech.

There is more to criticism than can be accounted for though in this approach because, above all else, the banker's accusation works because it assumes the baker wants the cookie—and this may seem obvious too—but I contend it is a rich place to begin analyzing the rhetoric in the punch line. The banker's rhetorical agency gets its force from the derailment of the baker's desire, not the empty accusation made of the teacher. What is most telling about the joke is the way it informs our understanding of how desire is regulated in the culture. Change or transformation of beliefs and behavior is the function of rhetoric via desire, and in so far as rhetoric makes these changes possible in a culture, it is desire and not knowledge that catalyzes the response.

What the banker produces with his accusation is resentment, but the cause of the resentment for the baker would persist even if the baker hated cookies—it is the desire looped around the satisfaction that drives the banker's rhetoric. In this way, the baker's desire for the cookie is manufactured by the accusation that the teacher is planning to take the cookie. In other words, while the baker may not have desired the cookies, the very act of taking the cookies away from her caused the baker to desire the cookies. The lack of the object which would ostensibly satisfy the subject becomes the source of their desire. Here we see the precise way in which rhetoric works by latching on to the receiver's response to lack—what is taken away becomes the driving force animating the rhetoric. As the banker's rhetoric in the punch line suggests, there is a part for desire to play in our rhetorical analysis.

### **Rhetorical Agency as Desire, as Object and as *Jouissance***

In Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, speech is also intrinsically rhetorical; it consists of tropes (like synecdoche and metonymy), that re-present images and signs that in turn link people together affectively through the experience of enjoyment, both symbolic and imaginary, but always borrowed from the language. For humans, enjoyment is a function of speech and is not restricted to the avoidance of pain and the preference for pleasure. Since pleasure and pain are mediated by the signifier, even acts that are clearly painful can become enjoyable for the person experiencing the pain, if the discomfort reaps symbolic praise (like burns sustained in rescuing a child from fire or BDSM practices). Fundamentally, the extremes of pain (e.g., sadomasochism) and pleasure (e.g., hedonism), are not regulated by instinct or biology, and the experience of both for humans is mediated by the signifier. Humans are unlike all other animals in this regard. An animal chews or cuts off its limb when trapped, but only humans invest the amputation with symbolic value or meaning. The investment of meaning and value in the symbolic and imaginary order constitutes the partial formation of desire in speech, and in this respect, desire is not instinctual or driven by genetics, it is symbolic and imaginary and circulates through the medium of speech as the real psychic foundation underlying a discourse structure. Rhetorical agency is constituted in a discourse through tropes and schemes which are signs recognized in the culture and associated with the distribution of desire for subjects or agents. The currency of these signs, the reason they are invested with value or meaning by subjects or agents, are rooted in the fantasies about satisfaction that exist in the culture or Other. Culture persists in part in the ways enjoyment is

conditioned according to what is permitted or forbidden for subjects or agents. In this way, the distribution of desire operates according to the fantasies that abound in a culture.

Although I will return to the concept, a fantasy in the culture makes itself known in the ways a society regulates sexual expression (straight or transgendered), food consumption (disgusting or appetizing, dieting or going to the buffet), and the expenditure of leisure time (playing golf or taking methamphetamines), etc. Fantasies define the limits of tolerability and intolerability, acceptability and unacceptability of those pleasures and pains used to service the individual prerogatives and social expectations about enjoyment in the culture. As we can see, *jouissance* is a dense and difficult concept, but it is vitally important for conducting rhetorical analysis and can be applied by asking whether the object is connected through *jouissance* to meaning-making, that is the feeling that one has when they “get it,” or if the object is connected to *jouissance* as a function of castration – which is the feeling one has when denied the *objet a*, and the heightened intensity felt because of the denial. And finally, the *objet a* is connected to *jouissance* through the desire of the Other. The *objet a* is the diacritical feature in a discourse that propels desire along its circuit, thereby establishing the uniqueness of a particular rhetorical agency in so far as it is lured along by a particular object of desire in a discourse caused by lack. Desire is the engine of a discourse, but its effect on the subject in the speech refers to another one of the four diacritical features inherent in all discourses: the divided subject.

## The Divided Subject (S)

For Lacanian psychoanalysis, the divided subject (S) is a concept that refers to several theoretical assumptions simultaneously. First, the bar through the S refers to the fact that language acquisition itself during the course of the child's early life turns the body into an object. Not only does this mean learning the actual signifiers that represent the body for the subject in a culture, signifiers like hand, ear, eye and so on. It also means learning to discipline the body, to treat it like a tool (an object) capable of performing some function (like clapping, holding a pencil, etc.) for someone else.

It is clear being caught in language implies a loss for the human being at the level of the body -- as much of his body as of the body of the other. This loss appears as a loss of being whose tongue carries its trace: one does not say of man that he *is* a body, but rather that he *has* a body.<sup>92</sup>

Thus, from the child's earliest experiences and throughout its adult life, the body will be an object—an object distinct from the subject who is thought to inhabit it. This means the subject's body is an effect of the signifier, an object mediated by the signifier and whatever imaginary and symbolic relations these signifiers might confer in the culture. More importantly, what is produced in the process is the subject, which is wholly an effect of language.

By the fact that he speaks, the human being is no longer a body: a disjunction is introduced between the subject and his body, the latter becoming an external entity from which the subject feels more or less separated. The subject that the effect of language brings into existence is as such distinct from the body.<sup>93</sup>

This fundamental relation presupposed in western cultures not only makes the body an object for the subject, it also means that the subject is an effect of the signifier. Signifiers, in this sense, are not just words that exist in a vacuum in the language, they are also other subjects—other language users in the culture. Here is where the second theoretical

assumption the divided subject is meant to confer in the model is revealed. The subject's body is not just an object for the subject thought to inhabit it—it is also an object for other subjects. The limited conclusion here would be that the body is an object to be used by other subjects—but this makes it seem like the relationship is strictly predatory or immoral. It is predictable to assume (in a properly Kantian fashion) that the person should never be used as a means to an end. But, while not dismissing the ethical importance of Kant's maxim, what Lacan is teaching here goes much deeper. As Ragland explains,

Desire is also the structure of a lack (of wholeness) in being. But traits of desire become attached to specific words and images as we strive to represent ourselves to other subjects (signifiers). Each subject-to-be 'desires' initially only through the medium of 'the desire of Other.'"<sup>94</sup>

As Serge André puts it, for the subject, "what remains ... is to inhabit it or to reach [the body] of the Other, however the subject "can only do so by way of the signifier, since it is the signifier that, to start with, tells us that we have a body."<sup>95</sup> Andre's suggestion that the subject is destined to inhabit or reach the Other's body means, in a sense, there is nothing authentic or direct about the experience of the body as it is always mediated by the desire of the other and the alienation experienced in the gap between signifiers and the soma. Thus, the symptom of the divided subject is evident in all the ways subjects use signifiers (assuming of course the drive of desire is to be or have) present in the experience an individual has when they adorn their bodies with jewelry or tattoos, or imitate the dress of celebrities. Since the body is dependent on the signifier, the ways in which the body can be objectified are only constrained by language itself.



The radical impact of the divided subject in discourse, separated from the body and divided by the desire of the other, is therefore fundamentally important to consider in rhetorical analysis. This impact can be explained in two ways. First, the body is divided from the subject or agent by signifiers and is therefore treated in the language as an object of speech. The second impact builds off the first, since it is the case the body is an object of speech, and the object of speech is constituted as the desire of the Other, then the subject or agent is divided by the Other's desire in so far as the Other mediates the experience of the body for a person or individual.

Desire has two impacts that we recognize as rhetorical critics. The first is subjects are always divided by signifiers, that is to say language divides our subjectivity between the reality of our existence and the existence of the language that preceded our individual experience of reality. The second impact desire exacts on subjects is that they are always divided from the idealized image. The subject identifies with an image, but as they are not that image, they are continually reminded of the gap between the image as an ideal and the reality of their lived experience. Lacan calls the sum total of these alienating effects on subjectivity the "divided subject." It is important to note the subject can never not be divided; division is an irreconcilable symptom of speech. Language precedes us as people or individuals. We are borne into the already ongoing conversation that is the language in the culture and are in this respect merely heirs to its enduring presence. The divided subject is the effect of language on the individual person, and every attempt to remedy the division in the subject is a fantasy supported in the discourse.

## Discourse

To recapitulate and elaborate on the definition of discourse I proposed in the first chapter, discourse for Lacan is a social link or bond that requires a language for its activation. Discourse structures the different kinds of relationships that individuals or people form with each other in a culture. The sum total of these always changing relationships in the culture make-up what we call society. As Lacan stresses, "...discourse should be taken as a social link (*lien social*), founded in language," not unlike "what is specified in linguistics as grammar..."<sup>96</sup> Lacan is trying to explain how speech is put into service by people or individuals in order to manage or regulate their intrapersonal, interpersonal or intersubjective relationships. As Paul Verhaeghe puts it,

As discourse produces an effect in the Other, it also forms a social link. A discourse exists before any concretely spoken word; even more: a discourse will determine the concrete speech act. This effect of determination is the reflection of the Lacanian basic assumption, namely that each discourse delineates fundamental relationships, resulting in a particular social bond.<sup>97</sup>

Since discourse is defined as a social link, and speech in language is what constitutes the link, the rhetoric comprising the speech that serves the linking function must necessarily transform every time the agent or subject constructs or changes interpersonal, intrapersonal and intersubjective relationships. Managing these relationships via speech is what constitutes rhetorical agency. This means rhetorical agency is certainly operative when rhetoric (in keeping with the humanist paradigm) is invented by a speaker to persuade an audience to change some belief or behavior. But this definition of discourse as a social link encourages us think about agency as something that is produced or created in speech by rhetoric in order to connect with or distance ourselves from other people in the culture. Viewing agency as a function of discourse, the aim of which is to

create a relationship with the Other (the culture) or the other (other people or objects in the culture), frees our conceptualization of rhetorical agency from the theoretical shortcomings of the humanist paradigm. If agency is not a function of the speaker, but instead is conceived of as a discourse practice wherein the agent or subject creates a relationship, then we can begin to see how agency is as varied as the kinds of relationships people or individuals pursue in the course of their everyday lives. However, this conclusion should not suggest that relationships formed between subjects or agents and the Other are wholly arbitrary; there are consistent features that persist in discourse that drive the structure of a discourse and determine the distribution of *surplus jouissance* in the rhetoric. The divided subject is then a key theoretical feature of Lacan's theory, but it only makes sense when it is related to the other features that make-up a discourse for the subject or agent.

### **The Master Signifier**

In addition to the divided subject, the next key feature inherent in all of Lacan's discourses is the master signifier,  $S_1$ . In a discourse, the master signifier is always the signifier the subject invests their identity in or derives their identity from in a set of oppositional constructs—otherwise referred to as dis-identification. As Bracher defines it, the master signifier is “any signifier that a subject has invested his or her identity in - any signifier that the subject has identified with (or against) and that thus constitutes a powerful positive or negative value.”<sup>98</sup> He continues, arguing “Master signifiers serve as controlling terms,” controlling the “organization and interpretation of all other elements in the discourse.” They exert this control virtually unrestrained in discourse, and in this

way demonstrate the powerful effects on discourse that a person or individual's ego has in creating relationships. In this way we can see how the master signifier acts as a signifier meant to compel ideological acquiescence—and for this reason is helpful in explaining the effects of ideological pressure inherent in the language at work in a culture. As Bracher notes,

Whereas other terms and the values and assumptions they bear may be challenged, master signifiers are simply accepted as having a value or validity that goes without saying. Master signifiers are thus factors that give the articulated system of signifiers, (S<sub>2</sub>) -- that is, knowledge, belief, behavior—currency for a subject: they are what make a message meaningful, what make it have an impact rather than being like a foreign language that one can't understand.<sup>99</sup>

Since the master signifier constitutes the subject's identity and produces an understanding through which the subject comes to know themselves, "it is, by definition self-same, static, frozen and hence in a sense lifeless."<sup>100</sup> When an individual says they are a Democrat, an environmentalist, a patriot etc., they are communicating to the audience or receiver the thing they identify with which simultaneously reveals the lack that is the cause or the lure propelling their desire. In this way, these signifiers become invested with the subject or agent's desire to be something that stands in for what they are not already; otherwise known as an ego-defense. That is not to say the investment in these identifications (like Republican or mother or dishwasher) is disingenuous or fake, but the fact that they are genuine or authentic does not mean these identification are unmediated by language. Identifying or dis-identifying with an image or a word is always done via the language through signifiers, and it does not matter how closely a signifier "accurately" describes the subject articulating it. The importance of the master signifier as a feature of a discourse structure is the part they play in conferring to the other who or

what the speaker or rhetor thinks they are or represent for the audience, receiver or the Other. I am a student, I am an American, I am a disenfranchised voter, etc.

All of these identifications wish the subject or agent into the discourse and represents for the individual or person who utters them the disconnection between their ego-ideal, what they want to be to themselves, and their ideal ego, the signifiers that represent those identifications that are demanded by the other people in the culture via the medium of language. Rhetorical agency is driven by the signifiers the subject or agent invests themselves in, but these signifiers are meaningless unless and until they are implicated in the set of distinctions and differences that determine the precise character of the identification. It is here that identification as ideal ego and ego ideal meets the network of signifiers that are borrowed from the language in order to stabilize the ego in general, which is precisely the phenomenon in discourse Lacan meant to describe by designating it the master signifier or  $S_1$ .

### **Knowledge**

The distinctions and differences that create the relationships which constitute rhetorical agency are derived from a set of terms, the interaction of which should be rightly construed of as knowledge. Knowledge for Lacan is a function of the relationship between the signifiers that the subject or agent invests themselves in and the collection of signifiers that gives the signifier its meaning in relation to the other signifiers in the language. In this way, Lacan's theory is clearly rooted in Saussure's linguistics, but I would submit Lacan enriches Saussure's theory considerably. What constitutes denotative meaning in psychoanalytic theory is derived from the system of distinctions

and differences (in Derridean terms, the *différance*) that sustains language use generally. Meaning is always deferred and slips away as soon as it is grounded in the articulation of language. The very fact that meaning is only produced in a system of differences and distinctions means ambiguity or doubt about the status of identity according to the signifiers is unavoidable and irresolvable. The meaning of a signifier is always deferred unto the other signifiers that make a difference or distinction possible, and this is why identity as such is unstable and constantly undergoing revision. If one's identity is only fixed because it is neither here nor there, it is neither this or that, it is only identifiable in so far as it is distinguishable or different from other identities, then there is nothing stable or foundational about the speaker or author. In this way, psychoanalytic theory hews closely to the subjectivity posited by postmodernism, but there is a reason to the workings of discourse that makes knowledge in the theory into something more than simply a metanarrative about the fragmentary and divided nature of subjectivity.

Knowledge is produced in the rhetoric that structures a discourse by virtue of the fact that the signifiers the subject or agent identifies with or against are instantiated within a field or network of already existing signifiers we call language, the interplay of which is what people or individuals use to make sense out of what would otherwise be an incoherent concatenation of noise. These signifiers are always in the background, and only become foregrounded when they are articulated through the medium of language by a subject or agent, which happens every time the ego asserts itself and recognizes a signifier to identify or dis-identify with. Lacan's theoretical account of knowledge is not to be confused with epistemology in that he is not trying to describe how we know what

we know. Instead, the teaching here suggests that knowledge is literally the systematic ways metonymy and metaphor pull and push signifiers around in a discourse, creating the system of distinctions and differences that arranges speech in some meaningful way the audience claims they either know or do not understand—in either case, its knowledge in discourse. “Knowledge is something that links, in a reasoned relation, one signifier,  $S_1$ , to another signifier,  $S_2$ .”<sup>101</sup> What this means is simply that speech supplies the basic set of associations and distinctions necessary to link them back together synchronically, thereby constituting knowledge as a system of distinctions and differences that locate the subject in some coherent fashion to the words people and individuals are familiar with in a culture.

The constitution of knowledge is, however, diacritically hitched to the master signifier, as these signifiers are the center of gravity and control the structure of relations (be they associative or dissociative) at work in a discourse. This is what Lacan means in observing, “Knowledge initially arises at the moment at which  $S_1$  comes to represent something,” as he describes it “through its intervention in the field defined, at the point we have come to, as an already structured field of knowledge.”<sup>102</sup> For Bracher,

These invisible links make up the network of the subject's pleasures and pains, likes and dislikes, allies and enemies, etc., and thus constitutes the subject's sense of itself. Knowledge thus also determines the nature of the enjoyment -- *jouissance* -- that the subject is able to obtain. This is the case because even the most elementary pleasures of the body are situated within a knowledge; an articulation of signifiers, a network of relationships (associations and oppositions) with other sensations, perceptions, and affective states.<sup>103</sup>

However, this production of knowledge, no matter what force the master signifier possesses, is still always idiosyncratic and unique to every individual or person. This is why Bracher argues, “the force then--psychological and social--of the articulated systems

of knowledge” is derived from “the system’s positioning the subject at certain points within them and thus establishing a certain ‘identity’ for the subject.”<sup>104</sup> As he elaborates,

When knowledge of any type articulates itself within a subject, the subject itself is caught up in the signifying apparatus in a position that is in certain ways unique, not common to all subjects.<sup>105</sup>

These traits are distinct from the living individual, as they are predicates for the subject and not necessarily the subject in its totality. A person or individual is not indistinguishable from the signifier; the signifier is simply an instance of the subject or agent for the other as a bit of knowledge. However, it is the manner in which the signifier catches up with the subject that determines the resulting subjectivity—which is nothing less than the knowledge or signifiers we assume are necessary to entail and create a relationship with other people or individuals. The importance of knowledge for the purposes of rhetorical analysis consists in the way in which (a) knowledge works diacritically with the master signifier(s) and (b), the way knowledge is still determined by the subject (and not simply determined by the discourse) in the course of identifying or dis-identifying with signifiers in the language such that the speech creates the initial distinction or difference necessary to sustain the creation of a relationship.

### **Fantasy**

In psychoanalytic theory, a fantasy is the relationship between the subject who desires and the object of desire, represented in Lacanian algebra as  $\$ \diamond a$ . Fantasy in this sense is a specialized term, and should be distinguished from the conventional meaning we ordinarily associate with the word. It does not suggest that there is a reality and everything else is distinguishable from this monolithic reality. Lacanian theory does not assume there is a true consciousness and everything else is distinguishable from it. The



teaching does suggest that relationships are fantastic in the sense that they are symptomatic of an idiosyncratic connection between what we wish or desire and the object to which the satisfaction of the wish or desire is attached. Since there is always a gap in the loop that would otherwise complete the connection between desire and satisfaction for a subject or agent, Lacan used the losange  $\diamond$  to represent the disconnection between the desire of the subject and the object of desire in the speech. The losange represents the fundamental fact of division or the fragmentary status of the subject in the theory, and in this way shows how the object is just a representation of an underlying psychological structure. More importantly though, the losange designates a universal aspect of psychology in the western world, which is expressed in the belief that a subject or agent is incomplete, divided or somehow disconnected from that which would make it complete, whole or purposeful. As Moustafa Safouan notes, “The function of the fantasy is to fix and define the subject's desire,” which explains why “human desire has the property of being coordinated not to real objects, but to fantasies.”<sup>106</sup>

What is most important about this view of the role that fantasy plays in our conceptualization of rhetorical agency is the recognition of the fact that the fundamental fantasy is for the subject to achieve total unity with the signifier. The fundamental fantasy then is bent on unifying subjectivity through the medium of language even though this is not possible. Vows of silence demonstrate this point, as they are often taken on in order to bring the person or individual into a union with god (the Other), or to disrupt the impact of desire on the formation of consciousness in order to achieve a state of enlightenment (which is the way Zen Buddhism for example solves the “problem,” or

fundamental fantasy, of division--not being whole or afflicted by desire. Since the subject's fantasy is always about being complete or whole or undivided, but this wholeness is impossible for a subject to achieve because speech represents the body but is not the same as the body, then speech functions as a sort of cement, patching-up whatever cracks or gaps that exist for that person or individual as a result of their idiosyncratic expression of the fundamental fantasy.

For Lacan the fundamental fantasy is a product of the alienation every person or individual experiences as they acquire the language that persists in the idea that some signifier could close the gap between experience and the fact that we exist. The function of rhetorical agency as a concept then should be to identify the places where desire is connected to signifiers that are related to objects and causes of desire in discourse because it is in this relation that the discourse is structured and the transformative potential of agency is directed.

### **Unconscious as a Function of the Other/other**

The state of any rhetorical situation is a state in which we desire the desire of the Other. Our discipline's history, tied as closely as it is with a speaker and the arts of rhetoric as persuasion, has long recognized the centrality of artfully inventing rhetoric in accordance with audience (or other's) expectations. The speaker rises to the occasion or seizes upon the moment only insofar as they recognize what is expected of them. But that should not suggest speakers know exactly what is expected of them—that is why we might argue great speakers do not have to think about the situation, they just respond, which suggests they are somehow accessing some dimension of the situation that even

they are unaware of in a conscious sense. If the audience is another, not the Other as in language but rather an other, a target for a discourse necessary for forming a social link, then we can begin to see how an unconscious logic is also operative in the speaker's adaptation to an audience in a way that goes beyond the simple recognition that the speaker themselves are not "in charge" or solely responsible for the discourse. Žižek argues,

"Lacan's dictum, 'The unconscious is the discourse of the Other' is better for to be taken quite literally, beyond the standard platitudes about how I am not the subject/master of my speech, since it is the big other who speaks through me, and so on: the primordial encounter of the unconscious is the encounter with the others inconsistency, with the fact that the parental other is not actually the master of his acts and words, that he emits signals of whose meaning he is unaware, that he performs acts whose true libidinal tenor is inaccessible to him.<sup>107</sup>

Žižek's analysis captures precisely the philosophical importance of the unconscious as a factor not only for analyzing a person or an individual's speech, but as a factor animating speech itself. The unconscious as a factor in the constitution of rhetorical agency transforms the question of agency from one that privileges intent or counter-hegemonic advocacy to one that locates agency in the discourse of the unconscious of the Other which reveals the fragile and inconsistent nature of human subjectivity mediated by language. What Lacan's theory recognizes in locating agency in the unconscious logic of desire is that our subjectivity is not driven by knowledge or consciousness but is largely (at least a surface level) driven by the search for satisfaction for what we lack.

### **Agency**

Conceptually, rhetorical agency is recoverable if we expand our understanding of its function as a property of discourse, a way of forming a social link structured around the unconscious logic of desire, instead of assuming rhetorical agency refers to cultural

transformation or the inventive efforts of a speaker bent on changing other people's beliefs or behaviors by changing minds. The reconceptualization of rhetorical agency I am advocating assumes rhetorical agency can be conceptualized as a speaker attempting to change or transform other people's beliefs and behaviors using rhetoric, but is not limited to this understanding. Agency is not just counter-hegemonic or resistant to ideological domination. Further, Lacan's theory of discourse shows how rhetorical agency is not a function of a speaker or rhetor but instead is a function of discourse which, if we analyze closely, reveals the underlying economy of desire (caused by lack) that compels or drives the subject or agent to articulate a link with the Other (the culture or language), and other people in the speaking situation. What this discourse theory presumes is that subjects or agents are always divided from the desire that drives their discourse and this is what causes rhetorical agency in a discourse.

Rhetorical agency is a function of discourse, which may or may not entail a speaker, but will necessarily entail agency set in motion by desire. As Verhaeghe puts it, "I do not speak but I am spoken, and this speech is driven by a desire, with or without my conscious agreement," adding,

This is a matter of simple observation, but it is fundamentally wounding to man's narcissism; that's why Freud called it the third great narcissistic humiliation of mankind.<sup>108</sup>

In this regard, any conceptualization of rhetorical agency that aligns the speaker and invention with agency in general is really an ego-defense—no matter what ideological injustice it is predicated upon. However, that conclusion does not mean we cannot assess the ethical consequences of a discourse practice; it simply suggests our move to judge

any discourse practice happens after we acknowledge the fantasy underlying the discourse practice in our analysis.

To summarize and recapitulate, if the I is not identical to the I that enunciates the statement in which the I is a subject, then speakers or agents are never the sole progenitors of their discourse. What this means is where common-sense versions of agency err is in assuming the I is a speaker who is also always an individual or person, and further, that this same I, undivided and self-same in every respect, is the same as the speaker that consciously directs their speech to those rhetorical purposes, the reasons for which are transparently and directly known to the speaker. The desire to know itself is a product of the agent or subject's relation with the Other, be it language, God, science or an actual audience. This is in part why Lacan's theory of the four discourses bears directly on the study of rhetoric and in particular on the concept of rhetorical agency.

This level of abstraction has significant theoretical advantages because it allows us to trade out the person or individual who is the receiver of the message with the theoretical construct that is the Other. This accounts for the fact that the agent in a statement is often simply a conduit or vessel for the speech of another subject. So, when someone says they are simply doing God's work or says they are doing something in order to advance the mission of science, both God and science are rightly conceived of in these statements as rhetorical agency—the instrument or mechanism driving the change or transformation as it exerts its force in a discourse. It is the relationship created by the subject or agent's discourse that matters most. The conceptual benefit of adopting this view of agency as a function or property of an agent or subject in discourse resolves the

impasses created when agent or subject are theoretically formulated as coextensive with the person or individual uttering the speech. More importantly, viewing agency as a function of speech inserted into a discourse structure helps distinguish discourse from speech for the purposes of analysis—which conforms to the seemingly simple yet incredibly important definition of discourse Lacan provides—thereby providing clarity for theorists working with and analyzing discourse practices as Gaonkar recommended nearly two decades ago.

#### **Four Rhetorical Agencies in Discourse**

The central preoccupation for rhetoricians is the illusive and enigmatic answer to the question: how does speech move people? Lacan's theory of the four discourses offers critical insights into the ways four specific rhetorical agencies are structured to move people, as Lacan's account deals with the symbolic manipulation of desire and identification or dis-identification in four specific discourse structures. Folding this theoretical account into the analytical models Lacan provided for assessing four specific kinds of discourse yields four discrete rhetorical agencies—a point I will elaborate upon at length in this section. The purpose of this section is to provide a description of each type of rhetorical agency as it is constituted in each of the four discourse structures.

To begin, it is necessary to outline the general model of discourse Lacanian psychoanalytic theory posits. Basic communication theory is consistent with Lacan's approach to the theory of the discourses, in that, at a minimum the model accounts for a speaker and receiver. In this way the model is familiar to rhetoricians who conceive of rhetoric as speaker or orator centered. Where Lacan's models eclipse the basic

communication model is in providing for the representation of message generation and transmission in the loose category identified as the agent or subject. This means the agent could be the speaker, but could also be language or an image,

There is the subject of the utterance [*enounce*]. That subject is quite easy to identify. *I* means the person who is actually speaking at the moment I say *I*. But the subject is not always the subject of the utterance, because not all utterances contain *I*. Even when there is no *I* -- even when you say, 'It's raining' -- there is a subject of the enunciation [*enunciation*]<sup>109</sup>, and there is a subject even when it can no longer be grasped in the sentence...

The subject of the enunciation as agent opens the definition of agency up to multiple forms of communication or discourse practices. In the model below, the agent and the location of the production of speech is located on the left hand side of the model. On the right hand side of the model is the receiver who can be conceived of as audience member, but is really the Other because there need be no flesh and blood recipient of the message. The Other is perceived as a pre-given necessary feature of discourse and it is marked with a capital "O" to signify the receiver's function as a function of discourse. In this way, the Other in psychoanalytic philosophy represents language generally.

agent → Other

This means the model not only fits the standard sender – receiver, speaker – audience approach to studying rhetoric, it also accounts for intrapersonal communication (as when someone spontaneously curses, or is talking to “themselves”), and accommodates speech that is not necessarily produced by any one particular person or individual.

As previously discussed, in contrast with theory rooted in the western rhetorical canon that traditionally treats rhetorical agency as a function of the speaker, and assumes

the self is somehow known to itself in a transparent, unmediated way, Lacan's theory does not assume that rhetorical agency is the function of the speaker, but rather is a function of speech in discourse as driven by the unconscious. The unconscious as a driving mechanism for speech marks a fundamental difference between the western rhetorical canon's philosophical assumptions about rhetorical agency and a psychoanalytic conceptualization. The philosophical value for the study of rhetoric in Freud's discovery of the unconscious lies in the fact that psychologically speaking there is a truth that drives our expression that is not known to the subject or agent, and it is determined by the logic of desire and the circulation of *jouissance*. In adding these factors to Lacan's model, we can see that the subject or agent is driven by the "truth" of their desire, which is below the bar because desire is always alienated from the subject or agent articulating the rhetoric.

agent    →    Other  
 truth        loss

This means speech is always a product of lack, that there would be no speech if there were no desire, and the subject desires according to the logic of the Other. All four discourses Lacan articulated are comprised of four psychodynamic features that he maintained analytically represent the structure of discourse:  $\$$ ,  $S_1$ ,  $S_2$ , *objet a*. This section summarizes these four psychodynamic features in order to explain how the diacritical arrangement of these factors in relation to one another in a discourse indicates the line of force rhetorical agency exerts in the discourse in order to create a relationship. The following section reproduces the analytical models Lacan devised to formulate the



four discourses and gives a summary of the methodology underlying these formulas for rhetorical analysis.

In a characteristically difficult way, Lacan teaches that discourse is a structure and is not to be confused with speech or language. He says, “discourse...is a necessary structure that goes well beyond speech, which is always more or less occasional. What I prefer...is discourse without speech.”<sup>110</sup> What he is suggesting is that there are structures underlying the articulation of speech that persist in the language no matter what words are used to articulate them. As he puts it

discourse can clearly subsist without words...in fundamental relations which would literally not be [maintainable] without language. Through the instrument of language a large number of stable relations are established, inside which something that is much larger and goes much further than actual utterances [*enunciations*] can, of course, be inscribed.<sup>111</sup>

Discourse here is meant to signify the process of forming relationships, and four specific kinds of relationships, the structure of which is clear even though the rhetoric constituting the discourse is different. Lacan was not trying to come up with a master theory of discourse or a meta-discourse, but rather was trying to develop an analytical model designed to explain how desire circulates in discourse generally. In his analysis, he applied the analytical model to demonstrate the structure of four specific types of discourses according to the circulation of desire. The four discourses are the hysteric, the master, the university, and the analyst. Because the four discourses serve different social functions, each respective discourse constitutes a different kind of rhetorical agency because rhetoric in each discourse is predicated upon the formation of a different kind of social link or bond. That is what Lacan means when he says discourse serves a social function – it links the individual to the social (the Other).<sup>112</sup> The four features of

discourse are diacritically arranged to reposition rhetorical agency as the analytical models below demonstrate. This means rhetorical agency is affected in discourse according to the specific structure of the discourse in which it articulated, and by first identifying the signifier that represents for the subject their identity in a discourse, (the agent's place in the model) rhetoricians can distinguish ego ideals and ideal ego projections from the intrinsic transformative property of rhetoric in order to identify those places where change takes place. As Lacan recognized about rhetorical agency in a discourse,

If we designate the agent's place -- whoever it is, this place is not always that of the master signifier, since all the other signifiers are going to pass through there in turn -- the question is as follows. What makes this agent act? How is it possible to produce this extraordinary circuit around which what deserves, strictly speaking, to be designated by the term "revolution" revolves? ... What inaugurates this agent, what brings him into play?<sup>113</sup>

What brings the agent into play is desire; but desire only means something when it is structured in a relationship because desire is always the desire of the other person, and simultaneously, is the particular desire of the Other—the demands of the language which persist as point of irreconcilability that form the points of impossibility that creates or produces subjectivity. Some relationships are predicated upon the total and complete upheaval of the status quo's distribution of desire, some are predicated upon the perpetuation of the status quo, but the resolution concerning any distribution of desire consists in the end of only the desire that structures the relationship and not the rational concern for prestige or knowledge or revolution per se. What Lacan is ultimately talking about concerns the alignment of desire according to the unconscious logic of desire inherent in the different discourses, and this desire is not contingent upon individual or

personal whim or fancy. Agents or subjects are acting because desire drives them to, and the effect of their rhetorical agency on the situation sometimes brings order to a situation—this is true even in the discourse of the revolutionary (the discourse predicated upon creating a bond with others by way of protest) Lacan is referring to in the quotation above. Looking at the agent’s place more closely in the discourse of the master will help illustrate what brings the agent to act, which is to ask, what object or imaginary representation or subject drives the desire in the discourse?

### **The Discourse of the Master**

The diacritical arrangement of the four features of discourse in the discourse of the master are as follows:

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \underline{S_1} & \rightarrow & \underline{S_2} \\ \underline{S} & & a \end{array}$$

In the discourse of the master, the speaker occupies the left-hand side of the model, and the audience occupies the right. The master signifier stands in place of the subject or agent, and signals an attachment to a symbolic identity--an avatar that the speaker or rhetor either identifies with or against in order to constitute subjectivity. A signifier in which the subject or agent maintains the consistency of their ego insofar as it is encapsulated by a word and is able to repress the divided subject which is the source or cause of the fantasy. For Žižek, “the Master is the subject who is fully engaged in his (speech) act, who, in a way, ‘is his word,’ whose word displays an immediate performative efficiency.”<sup>14</sup> Master signifiers are ideographs, in the exact way Michael Calvin McGee meant in calling the discipline’s attention to those words, images and associations that communities invest themselves in, thereby constituting, as Charland put

it, “a people.” These symbolic attachments or identifications paper over the fact of the divided subject  $\mathfrak{S}$ , which in turn erases the workings of the unconscious in the discourse. The master signifier anchors a constellation of signifiers and serves as a center of gravity that symbolically links the subject to the chain of signifiers ( $S_2$ ) constituted by the audience. The audience then passively produces the *objet a*. A good example of this is the war on terror rhetoric used to govern the United States during George W. Bush’s tenure.

Terror was the master signifier ( $S_1$ ) for the president. This signifier is bent on repressing death in the discourse, as it literally means we will kill the people who killed people on September 11, 2001. This is the way the discourse actively works to repress the divided subject, the one made aware of the potential for death (9/11) in a literal sense. Rather than admit we were traumatized and make that a conscious point of our discourse, the President’s speech worked to repress the trauma that is the actual loss of life on September 11<sup>th</sup>. The President did not identify directly with the master signifier “terror,” his identity gets its consistency in relation to his opposition (or dis-identification with) the signifier “terror.” The audience links the master signifier to a set of additional signifiers which constitute the knowledge  $S_2$ , which can be summarized in this case in all the ways the war on terror became associated with WWII, mushroom clouds, Pearl Harbor, our way of life, etc. Desire is symbolically fixed to the word freedom, which is the *objet a* in the President’s discourse, the lure that symbolically acts as both the cause and the object of desire for the audience.

Speakers in this discourse structure narcissistically attach themselves to words and violently defend the  $S_1$  in verbally aggressive ways. It is consciously articulated but

unconsciously driven, and therefore only appears to be the root of agency. Speakers who seek to master impose order in the language by way of a signifier to regulate knowledge and condition the distribution of desire. It is important to recognize that any protest movement or anti-establishment discourse will necessarily bear the trappings of the master because it is a discourse that is bent on imposing a new social order or cultural change. Insofar as the discourse is bent on transforming tradition, or authority or the conventional distribution of enjoyment it will register for the receiver as a discourse of the master even though it is not necessarily a representation of the status quo. This is how the discourse of the master even in the voice of the dispossessed signifies a way of dominating the audience. The revolutionary discourse of Fidel Castro became the discourse of the master once he seized power. In this way the seeds of the revolution will always bear the fruit of ideological domination in the end. This is why Lacan replied to those “revolutionaries” committed to overturning French society in the Summer of 1968 by saying “what you want is a new master, and you shall have one.” The audience in the discourse is structured to be acquiescent, insofar as the discourse positions the compliant receiver to produce the signifier that represents the ego ideal, be it freedom, privacy or no taxation without representation. This is, however, the only discourse in which the concept of interpellation has meaning in so far as the audience becomes malleable or made into a ready-made object for governing. Yet, that should not imply resistance to ideological domination is itself fruitless because every act of mastery will drive its own discourse of resistance to the will of the master. In this way the discourse of the master (or governing) is always intimately related to and difficult to distinguish from the discourse of the

protester—although the distribution of material resources in the status quo and the way that distribution is constituted in a person’s rhetoric makes distinguishing these two discourses from each other possible.

### **The Discourse of the Hysteric**

The analytical structure of the discourse of the hysteric is:

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \underline{\mathfrak{S}} & \rightarrow & \underline{\mathfrak{S}}_1 \\ a & & \mathfrak{S}_2 \end{array}$$

The distinctiveness of the hysteric’s discourse is marked by the fact that the speaker articulates the divided subject as constitutive of their subjectivity. For the hysteric the fact that their subjectivity is divided *is* the basis of their identity. In response to the speaker’s divided subject, the audience produces the master signifier. The speaker in the discourse of the hysteric uses call and response protest rhetoric such as “what do we want?” only to have the audience respond with the master signifier “freedom.” In this discourse structure the audience represses knowledge, meaning for the speaker that only the audience has the knowledge. But the real *objet a*, what drives the divided subject or  $\mathfrak{S}$  in this discourse is repressed by the speaker in the language structure. The *objet a* is the latent feature in the discourse of the hysteric for the speaker, and this means it is the lack of an object, (*objet a*) that drives the hysteric’s discourse. Žižek describes the discourse noting,

the hysterical subject is the subject whose very existence involves radical doubt and questioning, his entire being is sustained by the uncertainty as to what he is for the Other; insofar as the subject exists only as an answer to the enigma of the Other’s desire, the hysterical subject is the subject par excellence.<sup>115</sup>

The environmental movement can be seen to embody the discourse of the hysteric. For the speaker, the divided subject  $\mathfrak{S}$  is articulated by a separation from the planet, or mother earth. The *objet a*, mother earth in this discourse, is latent because fealty to her is lacking

for the subject. In discourse, people will speak of the need to “get back in touch with mother earth,” or that “mother earth is suffering,” in both instances, “mother earth” confers what is lacking. Since the master signifier in this discourse is produced by the audience, it is useful to think of the master signifiers as those the speaker either identifies with or those they identify in opposition to: pollution, erosion, deforestation, global warming are all potential master signifiers ( $S_1$ ) the speaker aligns themselves in opposition to; whereas, “tree-hugging, earth-worshipping, dirt lover” as the popular bumper sticker reads, are all master signifiers ( $S_1$ ) the speaker aligns themselves with in order to constitute subjectivity. Knowledge,  $S_2$ , the latent feature of this discourse, gets communicated in this rhetoric as “we have forgotten how to live in harmony with the Earth.” What this illustrates is that for the audience, the knowledge, (how to live in harmony with the Earth,) is repressed or lost, but notice, the assumption in this statement is that we did at one time have this knowledge.

What this means is knowledge is repressed in the sense that it’s forgotten, lost, and the audience is disconnected from it. The significance of this discourse structure for rhetorical analysis is the way this analytically models protest rhetoric, highlighting how audiences can be moved once the ability to connect the desire animating their subjectivity to the object which would make them whole or unified and therefore no longer a divided subject. Specifically, it accounts for the affective intensity characteristic of protest rhetoric caused by the active nature of divided subjectivity in this discourse structure.

## The Discourse of the University

The diacritical arrangement of the four features of discourse in the discourse of the university are as follows:

$$\frac{\underline{S_2}}{\underline{S_1}} \rightarrow \frac{\underline{a}}{\underline{S}}$$

$S_2$  in this discourse is the active feature, which was meant for Lacan to signify the way in which the pursuit of knowledge, especially in the west has historically been a self-justifying process, that is knowledge is accumulated for the sake of accumulating knowledge. As Žižek puts it,

the agent of the university discourse is, on the contrary, fundamentally disengaged: he posits himself as the self-erasing observer (and executor) of ‘objective laws’ accessible to neutral knowledge (in clinical terms, his position is closest to that of the pervert).<sup>116</sup>

In this discourse the speaker treats knowledge as a transparent process and, in an ideal sense, is not really responsible for producing the knowledge, they simply convey what others already know. The scientist pursues knowledge for knowledge’s sake and isn’t really responsible for justifying why they are pursuing that knowledge in the first place. When a teacher presents knowledge in a classroom they are encouraged to do so as if they are an unaffected observer, a vehicle transmitting the message – baldly producing the facts without taking any agency for producing the knowledge. Instead, they pin the agency or the source onto the chain of signifiers,  $S_2$ . Similarly, the scientist is simply conducting experiments for the purpose of generating knowledge and they are never doing so in a self-interested way, science is always conducting under the auspices of its benefit to humankind—knowledge is pursued for reasons intrinsic to the generation of



knowledge itself—it is knowledge pursued for knowledge’s sake alone and therefore external justifications seem unnecessary or irrelevant.

This is why in the discourse of the university the master signifier  $S_1$  is latent, the scientist, like the teacher, is never constructing knowledge in order to reproduce their ego, it is the ideal ego of knowledge itself they hold out in the voice of the academic, in the voice of reason and the voice of science. The audience in the discourse produces the *objet a*, which in the discourse is always truth. What Lacan meant to teach here was the idea that what the scientist and the teacher are both trying to do with their discourse is reveal the truth, to teach its methods and procedures. In producing the truth, the audience is allowed to resist or repress the divided subject whose source is doubt and uncertainty. Which means in the discourse the student leaves the classroom feeling gratified that they know the truth and are empowered by it, and the divided subject ( $\$$ ) link to the lack of knowledge (doubt) becomes a latent feature in their psychodynamic economy.

### **The Discourse of the Analyst**

The diacritical arrangement of the discourse of the analyst is as follows:

$$\begin{array}{l} \underline{a} \rightarrow \underline{\$} \\ S_2 \quad S_1 \end{array}$$

In the discourse of the analyst, the *objet a* is in the active position, and is suspended in the discourse by the speaker in order to produce the divided subject  $\$$ . In this discourse, unlike the discourse of the master, the divided subject  $\$$  is active. The analyst identifies the objet(s) and causes of desire that split the subject ( $\$$ ) insofar as it is represented in speech. As Žižek puts it,

the analyst stands for the paradox of the desubjectivized subject, of the subject who fully assumed what Lacan calls ‘subjective destitution,’ that is, who breaks

out of the vicious cycle of intersubjective dialectics of desire and turns into an acephalous being of pure drive.<sup>117</sup>

In this discourse, the loop of desire is itself the object; as the question is not why do you desire that object, but rather, why desire the desire to be or to have an object *in the first place*. As Lacan taught, this discourse structure forces the audience (the receiver) to repress the master signifiers – those images and symbols the ego has linked itself to in the discourse that not only produce alienation, but also produce any other clinical symptoms like neurosis and perversion. Unlike the discourse of the university where the professor or scientist is thought of as the subject who is supposed to know, Lacan taught that knowledge in this discourse is latent because the analyst is not the source of a correctly aligned ego or ultimate perspective on reality. The analyst does not have some privileged, unmediated or unbiased view of reality that they must teach the one being analyzed to see correctly.

While this “ego psychology” approach may be fashionable in North America, Lacan’s work suggests this approach to therapy (and by extension, this kind of critical methodology) is fundamentally defective because no reality as such exists from which one could base the distortion. The source of the anxiety about reality for the subject lies in the fact that he or she desires, even if the subject or agent is psychotic and their speech bears no resemblance to what we might conventionally call “everyday reality.” In Lacanian discourse theory, the rhetoric in this discourse structure is distinguishable from the others because it is organized around the drive to manifest desire itself as the object. As such, the discourse reflects the relationship created when subjects or agents are engaged in the discourse practice of interpretation; whether the interpretation or analysis

is geared to help some other in a clinical setting or in a social setting in which the critic is analyzing discourse practices. It is my belief this discourse structure is the key to analyzing and interpreting rhetoric generally, as it provides an analytical way of modeling the type of rhetorical agency entailed whenever the relationship created by the subject or agent is predicated upon the discourse practice we call interpretation or analysis. It is the case that what we do in the discipline is analyze and interpret rhetoric. It is my belief this is why Lacan's theory of the four discourses has theoretical purchase for the discipline, as he analytically modeled for the discipline what we rightly consider to be our preoccupation as a discipline: the interpretation and analysis of rhetoric.

### **Summary of the Four Discourses: Methodology**

Lacan's theory accounts for the power of desire as *jouissance* in rhetoric and therefore helps us explain rhetoric's effects, and it does so in discourses rhetoricians commonly study. In Lacan's theory, subjects or agents constitute rhetorical agency in four key areas of everyday life: protesting, governing, analyzing and teaching. These discourse structures are not exhaustive of all potential relationships in a culture, but for the purposes of conceptualizing rhetorical agency, they collectively represent four discrete and different discourses that structure relationships in a culture. In the broadest sense, Lacan's theory captures how rhetorical agency transforms the discourse of protest, or governance, or education or analysis so that it changes social bonds or links in a way that is not contingent upon the execution of choice in a wholly conscious or volitional manner.

The intrasubjective, intersubjective and intrapersonal links formed in protesting, governing, analyzing and teaching are in this sense sources of contestation for people and individuals because these discourses map the regulation of desire in the culture for subjects or agents. The ever-changing nature of the relationships negotiated when the supporter of the government meets the protester, or the disaffected student meets the committed professor, or the psychologically damaged patient seeks out an analyst, all exemplify discrete instances of rhetorical agency put into motion by its configuration in a discourse structure. Lacan's four discourses account for the concept of rhetorical agency by connecting it to the logic of unconscious desire at work in a discourse structure which forms the basis of all the relationships an individual or a person might have in a culture. Methodologically, Lacan's theory excels because the rhetoric in a subject or agent's speech is interpreted according to what the tropes and schemes suggest about the underlying economy of unconscious desire driving or causing the enactment of rhetorical agency. It is for these reasons I suggest a recuperation of rhetorical agency as a concept that draws upon the Lacanian theory of discourse precisely because it distinguishes between four different enactments of agency and gives those doing the interpretation the tools to breakdown the discourse into diacritical features which lend themselves to analysis according to the workings of desire.

The four features of discourse describe the psychodynamic work of desire in speech. As speech is fitted to a discourse by a speaker, the relationships between these psychodynamic features stabilize the otherwise unfocused articulation of desire, giving the rhetorical analyst a momentary glimpse of the analytical structure Lacan theorized

was at work in discourse. Analyzing the speech that constitutes the discourse refigures the circulation of desire because the object of desire for the analyst or critic is desire itself. It is my argument that, analytically speaking, it is this focus on the analysis of unconscious desire that distinguishes posthumanist psychoanalytic conceptualizations of rhetorical agency from either a humanist view or a rehabilitated postmodern one. Studying desire is foundational to understanding how the rhetoric transforms or changes the culture, and this theory gives us the tools needed to conduct this work in a way that permits the articulation of the various ways in which rhetorical agency is enacted in discourse practices.

---

<sup>86</sup> Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 124.

<sup>87</sup> Herman Lang, *Language and the Unconscious: Jacques Lacan's Hermeneutics of Psychoanalysis*, 1973, translated by Thomas Brockelman (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1977), 127.

<sup>88</sup> Ellie Ragland, "Sexual Relation Versus Culture," ed. Kareen Ror Malone and Stephen R. Friedlander (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 256.

<sup>89</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London and New York: Verso, 2008), xv.

<sup>90</sup> Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 91.

<sup>91</sup> Mark Bracher, "On the Psychological and Social Functions of Language: Lacan's Theory of the Four Discourses," in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society*, ed. Mark Bracher et al. (New York and London: New York University Press, 1994), 114.

<sup>92</sup> Serge André, "Otherness of the Body," in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society*, ed. Mark Bracher et al. (New York and London: New York University Press, 1994), 94.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>94</sup> Ragland, "Sexual Relation," 256.

<sup>95</sup> André, "Otherness," 94.

<sup>96</sup> Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, 1975, translated by Bruce Fink, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999), 17.

<sup>97</sup> Paul Verhaeghe, "From Impossibility to Inability: Lacan's Theory on the Four Discourses," *The Letter. Lacanian Perspectives on Psychoanalysis* 3 (Spring 1995): 4.

<sup>98</sup> Bracher, "Functions of Language," 111.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>101</sup> Bracher, "Functions of Language," 111.

<sup>102</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 1991, translated by Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007), 13.

<sup>103</sup> Bracher, "Functions of Language," 111.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>106</sup> Moustafa Safouan, *Four Lessons of Psychoanalysis*, edited by Anna Shane (New York: Other Press, LLC, 2004), 55.

---

<sup>107</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Center of Political Ontology* (New York: Verso), 284.

<sup>108</sup> Verhaeghe, "From Impossibility to Inability," 5.

<sup>109</sup> Lacan, *Teaching*, 36.

<sup>110</sup> Lacan, *The Other Side*, 13.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>112</sup> Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality*, 17.

<sup>113</sup> Lacan, *Other Side*, 171.

<sup>114</sup> Slavoj Žižek, "Four Discourses, Four Subjects," in *SIC 2*, ed. Slavoj Žižek and Renata Salecl (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 80-81.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 81.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 81.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, 81.

## **CHAPTER THREE: GID AND RHETORICAL AGENCY**

### **Rhetorical Agency, Heterosexuality and Desire**

Posthumanist rhetorical agency is centrally preoccupied with desire, and nowhere is desire more directly implicated than in the rhetoric that constitutes a person or individual's gender and sexuality. Too often desire, at least colloquially, in the context of sexuality and gender, is reduced to a libidinal drive, something akin to a reproductive instinct. Desire, when it is understood as a heterosexual instinct to reproduce and or gratify heteronormative sexual impulses, undercuts the informative value the concept of desire has for rhetorical theory. Heterosexual desire is distinguishable from desire generally, despite heterosexual subjective effects on agency. Heteronormativity is the status quo. As John Sloop rightly points out, heteronormativity is material in the sense that it is resistant to change, and in this way it is "disciplined in advance...understood through particular heteronormative understandings of the human condition."<sup>118</sup> Where neoliberal ideology divides the political-economic debate constituted by Tea Party rhetoric, it is my argument that heteronormativity divides the ground in the sexual-cultural debate about the decision to include GID in the fifth edition of the DSM. Both are representative of the politics of the status quo.

Understanding rhetorical agency in the context of this case study exposes the materiality of heteronormativity, and provides us with the opportunity to analyze the way rhetorical agency in the debate forms links or social bonds via discourse predicated upon arresting or transforming heterosexual hegemony. At the same time, understanding the rhetorical agency of those engaged in the debate whose advocacy is predicated upon transgendered, transsexual and homosexual desire, and is not arranged according to heterosexual desire, is possible because GID calls into question the hegemony and normality of heteronormativity. Since individual and deeply personal heterosexual and homosexual, transgendered and transsexual economies of desire structure the discourses forming the social links that constitute the GID debate, an analysis of the rhetoric at work in the debate helps us better understand how rhetorical agency is constituted in a discourse according to the unconscious logic of desire. Once rhetorical agency is fixed upon desire as its organizing principle, it becomes clearer to what extent rhetoric embodies a particular enjoyment for a person or individual and does not follow a heteronormative pattern of arrangement or distribution on the body.

Therefore, I maintain the controversy surrounding the decision to include Gender Identity Disorder (GID) as a diagnosis in the fifth edition of the DSM helps us understand posthumanist rhetorical agency because it exposes the transformative potential of rhetoric to arrest or adapt to both the conscious demands of others in the culture (parents, peers, etc.), and the unconscious desire of the Other (the source of enjoyment for the subject or agent), thereby structuring the rhetorical agency in the discourses at work in the debate. This case study assists us in analyzing how rhetorical agency follows the unconscious



logic of desire at work in the transformation or change of the cultural Law, which is implicitly heterosexual, and positions this portion of the study to focus on how the prohibition of non-heteronormative desire drives rhetorical agency, and therefore constitutes the formation of the discourses making up the GID debate.

Rhetorically, what is also significant about Lacan's theory of the four discourses is what they say about the relationship between *jouissance*, or surplus enjoyment, and rhetorical agency. In essence, *jouissance* is enacted in the rhetoric to affect the economy of desire that regulates the distribution of enjoyment in the discourse for the subject or agent's body. Lacan offers the following maxim: 'Reality is approached with apparatuses of *jouissance*,'<sup>119</sup> and what he means is that language is an instrument or a tool for the subject or agent; the mechanism through which *jouissance* is enacted in everyday life, or reality. Hence, he says the "formulation I am proposing to you," is contingent upon "the fact that there's no other apparatus than language. That is how *jouissance* is fitted out (*appareillée*) in speaking beings."<sup>120</sup> Lacan's theoretical treatment of discourse presumes that agency is a product of unconscious desire which makes itself felt in a discourse by way of *jouissance*. In the GID debate, the cause of unconscious desire at work in a discourse is the prohibition of non-heterosexual *jouissance*. Since the culture is heteronormative, and transgenderism is culturally prohibited (or, at minimum, seriously marginalized), Lacan's theory is especially well-suited for analyzing the rhetorical agency structured in the discourses that constitute the GID debate because it accounts for prohibition or constraint in the formation of a discourse practice. It can account for rhetorical agency when it is driven by the restriction of enjoyment for those to whom

enjoyment is forbidden (because it violates some unwritten rule operative in the culture concerning what and how people or individuals enjoy). In this way the theory accounts for counter-hegemonic rhetoric which results from the cultural repression or prohibition of desire.

It is my belief studying counter-hegemonic rhetoric in the context of this debate is especially important because some theorists working on the relationship between agency as a concept and its prohibition maintain postmodern or post-structuralist theory is intrinsically heterosexist and phallogocentric. As Lois McNay contends, “recent theoretical work,” on gender identity and agency, which she maintains is principally derived from Lacan and Foucault, “offers only a partial account of agency because it remains within an essentially negative understanding of subject formation.”<sup>121</sup> For McNay a negative understanding of subject formation is the theoretical presupposition that the subject is “formed through an originary act of constraint.”<sup>122</sup> In her view,

If, in following the work of Michel Foucault, the process of subjectification is understood as a dialectic of freedom and constraint—‘the subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or, in a more autonomous way, through the practices of liberation, of liberty’—then it is the negative moment of subjection that has been accorded theoretical privilege in much work on identity construction (Foucault 1988:50).<sup>123</sup>

It is certain Lacan’s writings about the subject cannot be understood as a dialectic between freedom and constraint, and I am equally certain Foucault’s work as a whole should not be read as presuming he accorded “theoretical privilege” to constraint as foundational to subjectivity, however, setting her interpretation aside momentarily, it is clear McNay is also making a broader point, as she is specifically arguing it is the incorporation of these two theorists into the general discussion about agency that

produces an emphasis on constraint as originary to the formation of the subject and gendered or sexualized identity—what she is calling the negative paradigm of agency. In her criticism we can also see a parallel to the question of agency that vexes speech communication theorists. If agency is a function of the negative as McNay surmises, then rhetoric is always counter-hegemonic. The negative view of agency McNay is criticizing assumes rhetorical agency, according to poststructuralist rhetorical theory, prefigures the subject as one recognizable as such only by virtue of its counter-hegemonic possibilities. As I have tried to establish, Lacan’s theory of the four discourses as a solution to this question concerning agency should give McNay some solace, as it does suggest a resolution to the impasse her critique of Lacan posits.

No matter what familiarity McNay demonstrates with Lacan, it is her contention too often the literature about agency begins with the idea that gender or sexuality are culturally constrained, and the task of the author then becomes to point out how the individual or person’s gender or sexual expression subject to normativity by the culture (constrained freedom) nonetheless overcomes the cultural constraint (freedom unconstrained). For McNay this means theorists of agency predominantly assume agency exists wherever there is resistance by a person to the normalizing effects of the culture on an individual’s expression of gender and sexuality. However, she argues

The idea that the individual emerges from constraint does not offer a broad enough understanding of the dynamics of subjectification and, as a consequence, offers an etiolated understanding of agency.<sup>124</sup>

So, while McNay acknowledges the negative paradigm of the subject does offer a theory of agency, it is her contention nonetheless that “it leaves unexplained the capabilities of individuals to respond to difference in a less defensive,” and as she sees it, “a more

creative fashion.”<sup>125</sup> Since Lacan and Foucault, in her view, promote the idea that constraint is foundational and forms the coherence of the subject, and since these two scholars inform much of the work on agency in the literature about gender and sexuality, it is McNay’s contention that much of the literature fails to explain or account for the generative and creative forces of agency that drive the expression of gender and sexuality that are not predicated upon constraint(s).

McNay is not arguing theorists should reject the “negative understanding of subject formation” wholesale; that is, no theorist in her view should underestimate the value of analyzing the constraints upon gender and sexual expression in the culture for their effects upon agency. However, she does question

the extent to which [the negative paradigm—”subjectification as subjection”] is generalized in much recent theoretical work on identity to become an exhaustive account of all aspects of subjectivity and agency.<sup>126</sup>

McNay’s central point of contention with the negative paradigm is “that coherent subjectivity is discursively or symbolically constructed.”<sup>127</sup> This post-structuralist account of subjectivity and discourse, which for McNay assumes the subject is a passive effect of discourse, results in a theory about subjectivity that is discursively deterministic. “This idea of discursive construction becomes a form of determinism because of the frequent assumption, albeit implicit, of the essential passivity of the subject.”<sup>128</sup> Passive, discursively constructed subjectivity is theoretically flawed in her view because it presumes a “uni-directional and repressive dynamic,” that is “reinforced by the exclusionary logic that is used to invest the subject with levels of self-awareness and autonomy.”<sup>129</sup> McNay’s argument is exclusionary logic, or the system of distinctions and differences that compel subjectivity by subjecting individuals or persons to culturally

derived gendered and sexualized constraints, assumes that the resistance by individuals to the cultural constraints is what drives “self-awareness and autonomy” for the subject. Even though it is clear neither Lacan nor Foucault advocate this version of poststructuralism, nor do they advocate whatever rhetorical agency such a view of poststructuralism implies, it remains the case in McNay’s view that

The predominance of a primarily negative paradigm of identity formation—of subject as subjection—comes from the poststructural emphasis on the subject as discursive effect and is a theme common to both Foucauldian constructionism and Lacanian psychoanalysis.”<sup>130</sup>

Two difficulties with McNay’s criticism are immediately apparent. In keeping with Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, I made the argument that the subject or agent is an effect of discourse and only an effect of discourse because presuming as much is theoretically necessary to disentangle people or individuals, who are also subjects and agents in a theoretical sense, from the flesh and blood body that is an individual or a person. McNay’s argument clearly conflates the two. Maintaining the distinction is necessary for preserving a place for theory and rhetorical agency. The only acceptable form of criticism in her eyes is one that follows an essentially historical arc bent on reproducing the specific material constraints a person or individual experiences in a culture bent on regulating the expression of sexuality and gender. McNay’s rhetorical agency is, in this respect, anti-rhetorical, but more importantly what she is seeking to recover was not misplaced. Lacan’s theory of agency assumes that sex and gender are constraints, but what she fails to recognize in both Foucault and Lacan is the theoretical understanding that repression, suppression, or negation, as McNay would have it, only produces power and desire. Negative subject formation is a result of the culture and the language, but

does not determine the formation of subjectivity at the expense of some positive rhetorical agency. McNay's affinity for this "negative subject formation" theoretical approach makes it difficult for her to give full weight to the structural constraints that drive an individual or a person to articulate desire as a subject or agent. This is why in her words the term constraint refers to the "seemingly compulsory nature of the sex-gender system,"<sup>131</sup> which implies there must be some non-compulsory nature at work in the sex-gender system. Her approach presumes some pre-discursive space in which subjectivity arises. Why else would she qualify the argument by using the word "seemingly"? It is my belief no such pre-symbolic or pre-discursive space exists because the subject or agent is always an effect of the signifier and, even if her argument was persuasive, there is no way to theorize about this pre-discursive body without recourse to language.

The substance of her indictment against Lacan's theory of discourse and, by default, post-structuralist theory, is that it follows "a relational theory of meaning, the assertion of the subject's identity is explained through a logic of the disavowal of difference," which means, "the subject maintains a sense of self principally through a denial of the alterity of the other."<sup>132</sup> McNay's argument takes issue with "the poststructural emphasis on the subject as discursive effect," because for her, this theoretical assumption means gender and sexuality are produced by constraint (gender and sexual normativity), and the resulting theory of agency then "tends to think of action mainly through the residual categories of resistance to or dislocation of dominant norms."<sup>133</sup> The conclusion she reaches is Lacan's theory is inadequate because it makes the subject or agent a passive

effect of speech whose only reason for being is to resist the imposition of heteronormative constraints. McNay's criticism ignores the fact that Lacan's theory of discourse does make allowances for and tries to engage the formation of subjectivity in discourse that is not predicated upon the assumption that discourse is either hegemonic or counter-hegemonic.

McNay however considers it more important to point out

The difficulty with Lacan's linguistic account of subjectification, it is widely argued, is that the ahistorical and formal nature of the paradigm forecloses a satisfactory account of agency.<sup>134</sup>

Yet, as I have already laid out, Lacan's assertion that the subject or agent is an effect of speech does not suggest the person or individual is incapable of creating change or taking "action," as McNay puts it, in either specific historical or material aspects. On the contrary, it is my argument Lacan's thinking about agency suggests a more nuanced and varied approach than McNay's reading of Lacan would lead one to conclude. For her, this means "it is difficult to see how [Lacanian theory] connects to concrete practices and achievements of women as social agents," but Lacan did not propose a reductive theory of agency that cannot account for concrete practices; Lacan simply points out that whatever achievements it is that the critic identifies are not simply derived from that subject or agent's command of knowledge or resistance to constraints, but rather the way the discourse puts desire into play in a discourse structure, which in turn arrests or advances the redistribution of desire in the culture. McNay is looking for some positive affirmation of subjectivity, but her failure to see the theory of power as productive that both Lacan and Foucault provide prevents her from seeing rhetorical agency in both thinkers in its full detail. What I think makes McNay's argument more visible is the

exposure of her assumption that discursive effects are indistinguishable from constraints, and constraints are therefore indicative of gendered or sexualized agency. According to McNay's assessment of Foucault and Lacan, since constraints produce the subject, and constraints necessarily imply a passive subject, that is a subject produced as a result of some gendered or sexualized normativity, the theories Lacan and Foucault lay-out can only be limited because they are passive theories of agency. If, as McNay assumes, Lacan and Foucault argue the dialectic between freedom and constraint determines agency, and the discourse therefore determines the subject because of the gendered or sexualized constraint, then the discourse theory both Lacan and Foucault offer cannot account for the counter-hegemonic potential of an individual or person's advocacy, nor can it account for the political power of feminist advocacy generally. Again, I think the argument amounts to the same "phantom criticism" I articulated in the first chapter. Whether negative or positive, posthumanist rhetorical agency means to account for both.

Posthumanist rhetorical agency, as opposed to McNay's "negative paradigm of identity formation," assumes desire and not constraint guides the analysis of rhetoric. Lacan's philosophy does account for constraint by demonstrating how the imposition, or subjection (to use McNay's terms), of gender and sexual normativity in the culture produces a lack for an individual or a person at the level of the unconscious because, as is explicitly the case with GID, at the level of the unconscious there is no signifier for the lack that constitutes the differences between the sexes. There is no sexual relationship, Lacan claims, because a) no other person or individual will ever wholly or fully fulfill the complementarity expected of the perfect love, (every great romance is only romantic



when “lovers unite”), and b) because the notion that the penis and the vagina are necessarily complements to one another is unconditionally false, and c) because the fundamental fantasy upon which every subject who is not psychotic operates under assumes there is something (which does not mean it’s not someone, but, as is often the case, the thing is a person or persons) who could fix or repair the incompleteness that underlies the psychic economy for a subject or agent. The divided, the alienated or subjectified subject would cease to exist if it were possible to become some whole or unified, complete or otherwise unsubjectified and an inalienable thing. But the end result would require an exodus from the very structure of language itself—a renunciation only the religiously devout or spiritually pious seem willing to make. Agency as such always suggests these varied ways in which rhetoric affects subjectivity.

It is clear we want our theory to account for the rhetoric employed to protest or resist domination from the state or the culture because so much of our work contains a general suspicion and awareness about power inequities caused by discrimination and the injustices prejudice creates. McNay’s assessment of Lacan, in its general dismissal of poststructuralism, fails to acknowledge Lacan’s accounting of the historical and material constraints that impose themselves upon the subject in a discourse. Lacan’s emphasis on desire in his philosophy advances this interest because it locates cultural domination within the economy of desire that influences how *jouissance* is distributed in a discourse. The GID debate illustrates the limits of a conceptualization of rhetorical agency that does not account for sex and gender, as these central concerns at work in the GID debate

cannot be interpreted without accounting for the entanglement of rhetoric, sex, desire, and gender in the discourse.

Lacan's theory accounts for the discourse designed to resist or protest the domination of heteronormativity by describing the relationship between a prohibition and its effect on the subject or agent in causing rhetorical agency. It also accounts for the enjoyment subjects or agents experience when they are enforcing cultural norms. Doing the work of policing the culture is a source of enjoyment for some agents and subjects in a culture, and Lacan's theory accounts for this fact in addition to any counter-hegemonic potential the discourse might have for subjects or agents. Lacan's theory assumes the economy of desire in the culture is not identical with the economy of desire that drives the subject or agent, as what an individual desires is a result of the cultural norms regarding what is permitted, at the same time that it is also a product of the individual person's experience of sex and gender as social constructs. Lacan's teachings concerning sex and gender presume the fundamental importance of these concepts for articulating agency and provide the resources needed to account for the connection between rhetoric and sex and gender in discourse.

By applying the theory of the four discourses in conjunction with Lacan's teachings concerning sexuation to the GID debate, it is the purpose of this chapter to demonstrate how psychoanalysis facilitates the conceptualization of posthumanist rhetorical agency. To do so, I analyze the circulation of *jouissance* in the rhetoric that constitutes the GID debate to demonstrate how first, rhetorical agency is a function of the unconscious logic of desire, and second, how the unconscious logic of desire structures

four different kinds of agencies, and third, how the rhetorical agency constituting these four different discourses transforms intersubjective, intrasubjective or interpersonal relationships to arrest or encourage cultural transformation or change.

### **Posthumanist Lacanian Agency, Sex, and Gender**

In his later years, Lacan increasingly stressed the fundamental importance of sex and gender in the formation of the subject. As he put it in Seminar XX,

Everything that's said, expressed, gestured, manifested, assumes its sense only as a function of a response that has to be formulated concerning this fundamentally symbolic relation—*Am I a man or am I a woman?*<sup>135</sup>

This question is central because "...the symbolic is what yields us the entire world system," as he explained in *The Psychoses*, "It's because man has words that he has knowledge of things," which means "the number of things he has knowledge of corresponds to the number of things he is able to name."<sup>136</sup> This line of reasoning suggests that the answer to the question, "Am I a man or a woman?" is contingent upon the signifier and is not a function of anatomy alone.

The symbolic provides a form into which the subject is inserted at the level of his being. It's on the basis of the signifier that the subject recognizes himself as this or that. The chain of signifiers has a fundamental explanatory value...<sup>137</sup>

However, he adds, "there is no doubt either that the imaginary relation is linked to ethology, to animal psychology," as he maintains "The sexual relation implies capture by the other's image."<sup>138</sup> The symbolic, he contends, "appears to be open to the neutrality of the order of human knowledge," which is a sign or name, whereas the imaginary, "seems to be the very domain of the erotization of the object."<sup>139</sup> Since the erotization of an object depends upon the imaginary investment of desire in an object by a subject or agent, but subjects and agents invest signs in the culture with value differently; the

imaginary domain functions according to a peculiar logic. The uniqueness of the imaginary order lays in the opposition between men and women as a basis for ego identification. What this means is that the answer to this question exposes a “fundamental dissymmetry,” which Lacan asserts is no accident

one of the sexes is required to take the image of the other sex as the basis of identification. That things are so can't be considered a pure quirk of nature. This fact can only be interpreted from the perspective in which it's the symbolic organization that regulates everything.”<sup>140</sup>

Additionally, there is no place for agency enacted by a subject or agent that is not a function of discourse, i.e., no pre-discursive space for the subject or agent exists. There is no non-constrained space from which gender and sex could exist for humans.

Discourse exists in a relational structure in both the first and last instance for humans, and it structures the distribution of *jouissance* even in cases of extreme gender ambiguity. As Lacan argues,

In the final analysis, there's nothing but...the social link. I designate it with the term 'discourse' because there's no other way to designate it once we realize that the social link is instantiated only by anchoring itself in the way in which language is situated over and etched into what the place is crawling with, namely, speaking beings.<sup>141</sup>

Lacan's argument is that subjectivity is contingent upon discourse, which means it is in the formation of social links, which happens every time a person or individual communicates with other people and individuals, that the subject or agent—in his words “speaking beings”—form the interpersonal, intrapersonal and intersubjective relationships that constitute rhetorical agency in the culture. However, this agency is always a function of how the signs articulated are invested with desire and fitted into the economy of enjoyment at work in the culture. Lacan contends,

Culture, insofar as it is distinct from society, doesn't exist. Culture is the fact that it has a hold on us (*ça nous tient*). We no longer have it on our backs, except in the form of vermin, because we don't know what to do with it, except get ourselves deloused. I recommend that you keep it, because it tickles and wakes you up. That will awaken your feelings...<sup>142</sup>

Lacan is trying to draw a distinction between culture as a natural or original state which precedes persons or individuals and the necessity of forming social links to be a subject or agent, thereby creating a culture. The reason people or individuals form social links is to access *jouissance*, which is why the source of *jouissance* for the subject or agent is driven by the Other, the Symbolic and Imaginary progenitor of the ways in which the body may serve as an instrument of enjoyment, or as enjoyment's object. In this way, psychoanalysis assumes no individuals or persons decide to be straight, gay, lesbian, bi, transgendered or transsexual; there is no choice exercised here because enjoyment is driven by the unconscious logic of desire. This seems to be the most enduring and important criticism of humanist agency Lacan's teaching provides. Rationality, choice or knowledge does not affect the unconscious logic of desire that drives the *jouissance* for a subject or agent, which is why you cannot unlearn a sexual orientation. No therapy could ever "correct" for sexual orientation unless said therapy involved re-education, or, "reparation."

The structure of desire for an individual or a person therefore manifests itself in various ways that defy reductive explanations which conform to the heteronormative order. Some people or individuals desire nonconformity, and therefore they break the gender and sex norms, rules or laws. Some people derive pleasure from conforming to the law, others get pleasure out of enforcing the law on themselves and others. In every case the point remains it is desire and not consciousness or choice or knowledge that is

operative. Lacan's theory of discourse gives rhetoricians a way of interpreting rhetoric that assumes desire is unconsciously generated and persists in the cultural do's and don'ts that define the limits of enjoyment which are (im)permissible in a particular relationship between individuals and other people in the culture. While individuals can and do self-identify as lesbian or bi or transgendered or straight or gay or otherwise, the underlying connection between the rhetoric employed to self-identify, and the subject or agent's economy of desire, is not consciously derived. Lacanian posthumanist conceptualizations of rhetorical agency assume sexual orientation is a product of the unconscious. Desire, in the sexual gratification sense, is an unconscious function of *jouissance* which is unique to each individual or person. The fundamental question then becomes: How does the underlying economy of desire in the discourse of a transgendered subject or agent affect rhetorical agency?

### **Historical-Cultural Context of the GID "Debate"**

Transgendered people, and as I will contend here, in particular transgendered children, are stigmatized by psychologists. GID is presently recognized by psychologists in North American circles as a pathology consisting of "strong and persistent cross-gender identification (not merely a desire for any perceived cultural advantages of being the other sex)," and also a "persistent discomfort with his or her sex or sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex."<sup>143</sup> Further, any diagnosis of GID must also determine the "disturbance is not concurrent with a physical intersex condition," and find "the disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning."<sup>144</sup> The definition of GID is

presently undergoing revision, but there is little doubt at this point it will remain an official diagnosis in the next edition.<sup>145</sup>

The diagnosis is not limited to adults or even adolescents, as it is also applied to children as young as two who display behaviors not typically associated in the West with masculinity, assuming the child is born biologically male (i.e. with a penis), or femininity if the child is born biologically female (i.e. with a vagina).<sup>146</sup> The present diagnosis is in large part a product of the theory and research amassed by psychologists Ken Zucker, head of the Gender Identity Service Clinic, Child, Youth, and Family Program, and Ray Blanchard, who supervises Zucker as the head of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto. Zucker is also on the sub-committee responsible for revising the diagnosis for the fifth edition of the DSM, so he is strategically placed to ensure its inclusion in the next edition. Blanchard, Zucker and the North American psychiatric community generally insist GID, while its “epidemiology” remains uncertain, is nonetheless a treatable psychiatric disorder.<sup>147</sup>

Zucker’s conclusions concerning GID as a diagnosis, and his insistence on reparative therapy as the clinical method for treating it, are powerful forces within the culture. The fact that he is often interviewed and is regularly and widely cited in North American media circles (not to mention the journals) speaks to his perceived importance as a public expert on GID. Given the enormous weight his opinions bear for North American audiences, we should take what he says seriously and scrutinize it, especially since his opinions as an “expert” are so easy for anyone who is not an “expert” to adopt and later repeat.

## **Analysis of Rhetorical Agency and GID**

For the purposes of rhetorical study, I want to focus on the rhetorical agency constituted in the broadcasts as it is produced by transgendered children, their parents, and the psychologists and psychotherapists who treat them because *jouissance* for transgendered children is considered to be a disorder or pathology. The entire debate exposes the significant force desire exerts in discourse, as the debate is fundamentally about how the economy of desire distributes and regulates *jouissance*. Transgendered children affect the economy of *jouissance* because they do not conform to the cultural expectation that a person or individual's anatomy corresponds with their articulation of desire and gender identity. The rhetoric collected for analysis consists of Gender Confused Kids, the October 29, 2008 Dr. Phil television broadcast, and a National Public Radio broadcast from May 7, 2008. In each of the artifacts, the discourses that constitute the GID debate are clearly represented and, while this is but a sample, it is my contention the analysis of the rhetoric in the artifacts gives us a detailed look at how the discourses that constitute the debate generally function. To elaborate, I offer the following analysis of the discourse of transgendered children, their parents, and the psychologists and psychotherapists who contributed to the broadcast.

The NPR production I selected for analysis includes interview segments with Zucker and psychologist Diane Ehrensaft, as well as the mother and father of Jonah, and the mother (the father did not want to be interviewed) of Bradley, parents of "two boys conflicted," as the lead-in by host Michele Norris says, with GID.<sup>148</sup> To begin the broadcast, host Melissa Block establishes the customary tension expected of news stories



by framing it as a question concerning “parents who face difficult choices about what's best for their child,” as she goes on to say, “Both have six year-old sons who believe they were born into the wrong body—boys who say they are actually girls.”<sup>149</sup> Norris adds, “Now this is nothing new—men who feel they're actually women and vice versa. What's less well known is that this conflict can also affect children.”<sup>150</sup> What is most important to see at work here are the signifiers believe, wrong, and conflict, as these are the places in the speech where words meet the system of opposites that give the rhetoric its heteronormative footing.

Does belief imply children are mistaken? If there is a wrong body, does that necessarily imply there is a right body? What is conflicted gender—or better, what is conflict-free gender? The lead-in suggests what underwrites all of these assumptions about gender, and this is also consistent with other portions of the broadcast, is the unconscious desire to know the truth of another person's body. If there is a conflicted gender, then there must be some conflict-free gender, which implies what is desired is the *jouissance* of knowing the truth about someone's gender identity. It is the desire for the truth that is unconsciously driving the rhetoric, thereby unconsciously conforming to the heteronormative order which assumes gender identity is known already, as the rhetoric suggests, in the conflict-free gender. Further, this entails there must be doubt about the status of the conflict-free gender, and in this way is symptomatic of the heteronormative order's inability to fully explain (or contain) gender and sex. Above all, the lead-in suggests what we want to know is: are these children boys or are they girls?

The two children are Jonah and Bradley, but they are not (for ethical and legal reasons), included in the NPR broadcast. They are silent. Instead, their parents recount how their respective children exhibited non-conforming gender, which they noticed in their child's play, choice of playmates and toys and later, after acquiring some command of the language, the insistence that they were not boys, they were girls. Jonah's parents supported his transition, and he started school as a girl. His parents were encouraged to support Jonah's gender transition by their therapist, Diane Ehrensaft. I will return to Jonah in just a moment, but first I should point out Bradley's story is almost exactly the opposite.

To put Bradley's story into context, it is important to know that while his experiences, at least as they are communicated on the broadcast, are made to match Jonah's, his mother Carol's feelings about supporting Bradley's gender are influenced by something that happened when he was five. Bradley came home after an outing at the playground with a deep wound in his forehead. As Carol recalls in the broadcast,

What had happened was two ten-year-old boys had thrown him off some playground equipment across the pavement because he'd been playing with a Barbie doll, and they called him a girl. And so that sort of struck me that, you know, if he doesn't learn to socialize with both males and females, he was going to get hurt.<sup>151</sup>

At the time the NPR show aired, Bradley had been undergoing reparative therapy for eight months. At this point in the broadcast the audience is introduced to Zucker. As Spiegel narrates,

Carol decided to seek professional help. Bradley's school referred her to a psychologist, a gender specialist in Toronto named Dr. Ken Zucker, who is considered a world expert on gender identity issues, and who runs a clinic in Canada specifically devoted to these kids.<sup>152</sup>

As Spiegel explains, “Dr. Zucker has been treating kids with gender identity problems for close to thirty years.”<sup>153</sup>

Now that Zucker’s credibility is prominently established, the broadcast begins to craft the distinctions that make Zucker’s approach different from the one Jonah’s parents and their therapist eventually supported. As we learn, “his goal whenever he encounters a child under the age of 10 has been the same,” he attempts to “make the children comfortable with the gender they were born with.”<sup>154</sup> At this point in the broadcast, the audience is again caught-up in the desire to want to know the truth of Zucker’s knowledge, as it is learned “there’s a lot of debate about Zucker’s approach,” since some “mental health professionals” make the argument that “trying to force children with these issues to accept the sex they were born with” is like “trying to force homosexuals to be straight, that it’s unethical.”<sup>155</sup> What is important about the unnamed group of therapist is the place they occupy in the rhetoric as opponents to Zucker’s view that GID is a disease. Zucker assumes gender is amenable to change through the introduction of changes to the child’s environment. Children treated with reparative therapy are made to conform strictly to the cultural expectations their biological sex confers. If the child has a vagina, then the parents are instructed, among other things, to take away whatever toys are stereotypically associated with masculinity in the culture, to encourage the child to identify with female characters, and to symbolize femininity in their art, etc. This is all done to teach the child how to be more comfortable with their biological sex. As Zucker argues, therapy is

helping kids understand themselves better and what might be causing them to develop what I call a ‘fantasy solution,’ that being the other sex will make them happy.<sup>156</sup>

But what is it that makes a child’s solution to the problem of being sexed either masculine or feminine a fantasy; that is to say, a delusion? Are there any solutions to this problem that Zucker would not consider fantastic or delusional? Does this not suggest the only rhetorical agency at work in the discourse is the heteronormative one because Zucker knows the truth about sexual orientation and can therefore judge the delusional or fantastic expression of sexuality in the children he diagnoses and treats? In the broadcast, the audience is made to know that the leading psychological authority on the subject maintains

The more you engage in a behavior, the more likely it's going to continue. If a little boy is only cross-dressing and only role-playing as a female, only playing with toys in the culture that we associate with girls, I think that that gets into a feedback loop that reinforces their identity or fantasy that they are a girl or that they're like a girl.<sup>157</sup>

Rhetorical agency in the discourse Zucker is structuring regulates the circulation of desire and is resistant to change, but the very imposition of the heteronormative imperative itself transforms the rhetorical agency embodied by these children in the discourse. This is a key issue for rhetorical agency, as it begs us to consider how gender is both a point of resistance to the heteronormative order but also a source of transformation in which the hegemony of heterosexuality is directly called into question. Lacanian posthumanist versions of rhetorical agency account for how a prohibition of *jouissance* generates a rhetorical agency of resistance without recapitulating the narrow role constraints play in McNay’s criticism.

To elaborate, according to Ragland “...Lacan argued that the sexes are not fundamentally equal and symmetrical. Nor can they be made so by clinical treatment, or reeducation,” but this does not mean the lack of a sexual difference does not matter, “whether it is said to be created by words and language games or by genes and biology.”<sup>158</sup> Lacan maintains the child’s desires are unconscious because they stem from the earliest experiences humans have with a caretaker. All the wiping and feeding and so on produces a link between the actions of another and our experience of *jouissance*. When these touches and feedings and the like are withheld, as they inevitably are, the child learns to link the use of language to their return. Demand enough and a desire will be acknowledged. But that only produces a loop of never-ending demand and desire. It habituates a certain pattern of substitution whereby the signifier is made to stand-in for the original affects that command the desire of the child. Thus, the bodily enjoyment becomes mediated by the signifier.

As an adult, language crafts a sort of net that sections off the various areas of our bodies and makes them into a sign for us, and Zucker assumes, since language is transparent for him, that these erogenous zones, these ways of manipulating the body so it conforms to the desire to be desired is a product of biology and environment, but not the unconscious. Zucker’s account makes homosexual, transsexual and transgendered desire, and the rhetorical agency upon which these economies of desire are predicated, appear abnormal, variant or disordered. Lacanian posthumanist rhetorical agency shows us how, while the economy of desire may differ from one person to another, the fact that they are different does not mean they are necessarily abnormal, variant, or disordered. The

normative preference for heterosexuality is exposed in this way and therefore accounts for the specificity of transsexual, bisexual, etc. unconscious desire without reference to biology or instinct.

All of the children in the NPR broadcast are biological males, and each of the children articulate *jouissance* or surplus enjoyment in and through objects associated with femininity in the culture. It is this preoccupation with the children's interest in objects associated with femininity in the culture, their desire to dress and act feminine, and their desire to be a female body, that derails the heteronormative economy of desire for someone like Zucker. But these objects are what transgendered children have invested with desire, and are therefore what serve as the basis for their articulation of agency. We can see this especially in the objects associated with femininity, such as the color pink, butterflies, fairies, dresses and make-up, and transgendered children's preferred style of play. This preoccupation with the object is clear in Jonah's mother's recollection of the events leading up to the purchase of Jonah's first dress. As Alix Spiegel narrates,

Around the age of 3, Jonah started taking his mother Pam's clothing. He would borrow a long T-shirt and belt, and fashion it into a dress. This went on for months — with Jonah constantly adjusting his costume to make it better — until one day, Pam discovered her son crying inconsolably. He explained to his mother that he simply could not get the T-shirt to look right, she says.<sup>159</sup>

Pam concluded that the time for Jonah to purchase a dress had come. Spiegel continues,

Pam remembers watching her child mournfully finger his outfit. She says she knew what he wanted. 'At that point I just said, you know, you really want a dress to wear, don't you? And [Jonah's] face lit up, and she was like, Yes!...I thought she was gonna hyperventilate and faint because she was so incredibly happy...before then, or since then, I don't think I have seen her so out of her mind happy as that drive to Target that day to pick out her dress.'<sup>160</sup>

Jonah's increasing frustration with the improvised T-shirt and belt dress produces a crisis, what Lacan's teaching suggests is a lack of *jouissance* or a place where the discourse signifies some limitation on the subject which generates desire. While Jonah's desire, just like anyone else's desire, will not be satiated by the trip to Target to purchase a dress, the dress still functions as an object that connects Jonah's demand to a cause or source of desire in the Symbolic and Imaginary orders that produce *jouissance* for the body. For Bradley, it is the color pink.<sup>161</sup> In either case, the unconscious truth is no object could ever completely remedy the anxiety a subject or agent experiences, and this is especially clear when we are talking about gender and sexuality, but that does not stop most from investing the object with value in order to sustain *jouissance* as Jonah and Bradley have.

Jonah's *jouissance*, her "out of her mind" happiness, starkly contrasts with the increasing frustration she outwardly experiences in her discontent with the make-shift outfit. Jonah's frustration turns into a demonstrable privation; that is, the symbolic and imaginary failure of the improvised dress persists as a reoccurring anxiety, and this anxiety builds until it traumatically disrupts the Symbolic and Imaginary order in discourse, thereby compelling Pam as other to act. For Jonah, the inadequacies of the improvised dress moves from a persistent anxiety to experiencing a total loss—without the dress, she experiences an inability or loss of ability to use certain parts of the body in conformity with the unconscious logic of desire that is driving her *jouissance*. In theoretical terms, the agent or subject in this discourse is constituted in the split between the object lost and the effect of loss or lack on the subject or agent, as represented by the  $\$$ .

The division in the discourse is constituted in part in the alienation Jonah experiences in not being the unary trait, the identification with the signifier “girl” that her unconscious desire urges her to be. This shatters her ego and the consistency of her access to *jouissance* (*objet a*) is interrupted in a way people who conform to social norms regarding heteronormative gender never experience.

Jonah’s experience is however typical in the sense that every person or individual questions their identity from time to time, a practice which Lacan describes as hysterical. The hysteric in Lacan’s teaching is not pejorative, it is a fundamental exercise all subjects or agents undergo in order to create an identity, which is why Lacan claims hysterical speech is the “most elementary mode of speech.”<sup>162</sup> Lacan believed “the discourse of the hysteric is fundamental ... because it discloses the structure of speech in general.”<sup>163</sup> Since desire is always the desire of the Other, we can see how subjectivity itself is contingent upon an answer from the Other about what “I” am to other people, but the deeper audience is the Other—the language or culture. Lacan’s dictum, the signifier is a subject for another signifier, brings out the importance of resolving the signifiers associated with identity, as what we are as subjects depends upon other people acknowledging the signifiers we want to have associated with us by other people I light of the Other as language or culture. As a result, it is easy to see how agency often originates in this discourse structure due to the ego’s inability to find a signifier that adequately represents itself to itself due to the demands of other people, but more importantly, the demands of the Other.



Jonah's discourse illustrates how the ego is subservient to the demands of the language and culture, or Other. The reality of the dress for Jonah is real because, in her discourse, the dress signifies for the subject to other signifiers that there is nothing missing here, which is another way of saying the dress completes her or fills some void in her being. In this way the dress is a metaphor for Jonah being the object of desire.

Rhetorical agency in the discourse directly transforms once the dress becomes the object of desire and is no longer prohibited to the child, and it is in the exchange in the symbolic order that desire is suspended for Pam. For Jonah, the dress is a metaphor, the meaning of which is both Imaginary and Symbolic, but nonetheless Real because it signifies the gap in the Symbolic order. The fact that the dress repairs the Symbolic order, or fixes the symptom, only proves there is a Real gap, which signifies the lack of the sexual difference underlying gender identity. The symbolic enjoyment Jonah invests in the object comes from what the signifier is for the subject to other signifiers, and in this way she satisfies the demands of the Other to be a boy or a girl.. This means the dress is but one of many signifiers in the signifying order available, but its function as an object around which desire may form then simply illustrates the point at which desire forms a coherent structure in a discourse, thereby mediating some exchange with other people or individuals in the language to serve the demands of the culture. The acknowledgment of enjoyment by Pam in the discourse is structured around Jonah's enjoyment, which fits Lacan's dictum "the desire is the desire of the Other." For Jonah, the Other is essential, because this relationship to the desire of the Other presses the circulation of *jouissance* into action in the discourse.

Through Pam and Jonah's exchange we can see the interlocutors change and transform their rhetorical agency in a few short moments. The rhetoric constituted in the discourse redistributes *jouissance* according to the demand, and in acknowledging its force, rhetorical agency transforms the unconscious logic of desire from its latent state to an active force. As Pam remembers, in watching her child mournfully finger his outfit,

She [Jonah] says she knew what he wanted. At that point I just said, you know, 'You really want a dress to wear, don't you?' And [Jonah's] face lit up, and she was like, 'Yes!'...I thought she was gonna hyperventilate and faint because she was so incredibly happy. ... Before then, or since then, I don't think I have seen her so out of her mind happy as that drive to Target that day to pick out her dress,' Pam says of Jonah.<sup>164</sup>

Pam's discourse shifts decidedly once she knows what it is that would complete Jonah's disconnected circuit of enjoyment. What is key about her discourse is the way her agency is predicated upon a lack of doubt, a kind of certainty of knowledge that allows her to produce Jonah's unconscious desire (*a*) in an object. Knowledge, which is a lack of doubt or  $S_2$ , produces the *a*. In the discourse, this relationship between knowledge and the *objet a* is symbolized as  $S_2 \rightarrow a$ , which means to represent Pam as the agent on the left and Jonah as object of the other. Jonah in Pam's discourse is the other, the audience, or the receiver, and as the other in Pam's discourse, the result of Jonah's identification as the *objet a* is the repression of her divided subjectivity. Specifically, this is the anxiety Jonah is communicating to her mother about her costume and her inability to "make it right." There is a tacit acknowledgement of Jonah's possession of the unary trait implied in Pam's discourse. In other words, Pam is speaking to Jonah as a girl.

The tacit acknowledgment of Jonah's agency as a girl in Pam's discourse also forces Pam's explicit recognition that Jonah is not a boy, thereby repressing the master

signifier S<sub>1</sub> “boy” in Pam’s discourse. Pam’s discourse renders what was a relation of impossibility into a relation of possibility; thereby facilitating a transformation or change in the discourse such that, Jonah, no longer separated from the object, becomes co-extensive with the *objet a*. This is important because it shows how rhetorical agency, once it is made coextensive with the object, becomes a discourse whose very structure provides unfettered access to *jouissance*. What results is the discourse of the analyst.

Jonah’s agency undergoes a transformation to the discourse of the analyst once her mother acknowledges that Jonah wants a dress. It is clear the discourse structures the relationship in a way that facilitates the child’s articulation of desire for the object (a dress). But more importantly, what matters is the way Pam’s testimonial demonstrates the excess enjoyment experienced by the child in the metaphorical condensation of meaning into the dress as a sign of *jouissance* or love. The happiness conferred in the purchase of the dress consciously reflects the unconscious logic of desire that structures the child’s discourse in the relationship as the want to be the object of desire. Having the dress is only important if it is worn, so it is not in having the dress that desire is lodged. Instead, Jonah’s discourse is structured around being the object of desire; having a dress is a means to that end. When Jonah wears her dress, her agency is operating from the position of the *objet a*, this is surplus enjoyment, total bliss temporarily undisturbed by alienation. Jonah becomes indistinguishable in the discourse from the *objet a*, a transition marked in the Lacanian discourse theory by the following structure:

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \underline{a} & \rightarrow & \underline{\mathfrak{S}} \\ \underline{S_2} & & S_1 \end{array}$$

The agent or subject constituting rhetorical agency in this discourse is located in an object and it is in the redistribution of this object from unavailability to availability, or impossibility to possibility, that changes or transforms Jonah's treatment of her body as an object. If subjects are castrated symbolically, it is because the signifier marks some limit to the capacity to exercise some function of the body in reality. Rhetorical agency transforms the discourse thereby signifying some possibility for exercising the body where only a prohibition existed before the distribution of desire, and hence the discourse, changed or transformed. The discourse of the analyst constitutes a relationship or a bond with the other person via the Other (language) wherein the agent or subject is coexistent with the source or cause of *jouissance* (*objet a*); the subject's discourse is therefore driven by the unconscious truth that is excess enjoyment (*jouissance*), which is "who I am."

Lacan's discourse theory accounts for rhetorical agency in analysis by transforming or changing the arrangement of the desire at work in a discourse by drawing it out of the rhetoric and isolating it. In effect, the distinctiveness of the discourse of the analyst is not only that the object defines the agent or subject, but that the audience or other is forced to reconcile the alienated or divided subject  $\$$ . Specifically, this means every individual or person asks themselves "is this a boy or is this a girl?" Jonah's discourse is a way of revisiting the very same question every subject has encountered regarding their own sexuation, which forces the audience to revisit the foundational trauma of sexuation. There are various ways to reconcile the trauma of sexuation ( $\$$ ) and each

discourse reflects a discrete way of managing this trauma. This is clearly illustrated in the discourse of Jonah's father.

Jonah's father has accepted that his "son" is a girl, but this was not always the case. As the broadcast indicates, before Jonah transitioned, acquaintances would mistake Jonah for a girl.

...while running errands, casual acquaintances, fellow shoppers, passers-by, would mistake Jonah for a girl. This appeared to thrill him ... Jonah would complain bitterly if his father tried to correct them.<sup>165</sup>

According to Jonah's father, "What began to happen was Jonah started to get upset about that," adding Jonah would argue 'Why do you have to say anything!' Joel recalls a particular instance,

when we were walking the dogs and this person came up and said ... 'Oh, is this your daughter?' and I said, 'Oh, no, this is Jonah.'... And Jonah just came running up and said, 'Why do you have to tell! Why do you have to say anything!'<sup>166</sup>

It is clear that Jonah's discourse is at odds with the social opprobrium regarding gender, and he is responding to the social compulsion based on anatomical sex to be a boy instead of a girl. Jonah is clearly responding to the heteronormative imperative: if you have a penis then you must be a boy. Unwittingly and unconsciously his father's discourse serves to reinforce the heterosexual distinction in his insistence to the acquaintance that Jonah is in fact a boy. In this way the father's discourse is structured according to the unconscious logic of the need to master, as what he is doing is providing order to a situation in which ambiguity would otherwise persist.

The key to understanding Joel's discourse in this exchange is in the fact that he corrects the acquaintance using the word Jonah which implies boy but is also the master signifier meant to organize and identify the object of the discourse which is Jonah. Jonah

of course, is a proper noun and is meant to signify the person or individual who is Jonah, but we know from reading Jonah's reaction that this signifier in no way reflects his subjectivity. Nonetheless, Joel's recapitulation of Jonah's name to the acquaintance produces for the acquaintance the knowledge that Jonah is a boy. This happens because Joel's pronouncement of the name Jonah ( $\underline{S}_1$ , or "boy") to the audience or receiver means to repress the *object a* (the doubt implied by the acquaintance's question meant to generate an answer that disambiguates the situation), and therefore the question concerning his sexuation  $\mathbb{S}$ . The implication that Jonah is indistinguishable from this name in the discourse permits the suppression of doubt about Jonah's sexuation.

$$\begin{array}{c} \underline{S}_1 \rightarrow \underline{S}_2 \\ \mathbb{S} \quad a \end{array}$$

From Jonah's reaction it is clear he enjoyed being identified as a girl, and in those moments when he was mistaken for a girl, his rhetorical agency is aligned according to his identification as the *object a*, similar to when he wore a dress. Although Jonah could remain silent and acquiesce to his father's correction that he is a boy, his unconscious desire is clearly manifest in his response 'Why do you have to tell! Why do you have to say anything!' Jonah's response is hysterical in that he is articulating the question of his sexuation as identity ( $\mathbb{S}$ ), and it is clear that he would like to repress the master signifier ( $S_1$ ) that he is, in the discourse, referred to as a boy. Wacjman observes

The hysteric can be said to institute a discourse when we do not cast out her question ... having acknowledged her question, he rises to the position of master endowed with limitless power: here is the master of knowledge supposed to have the answer capable of silencing her.<sup>167</sup>

It is for this reason Wacjman describes the hysteric's enunciation as an injunction: "Tell me!" to which we would add, "am I a boy or am I a girl?" In Jonah's case, the injunction produces a question, as she says, "Why do you have to tell?" which is another way of Jonah saying to his father, your language matters, or "I am who you say."<sup>168</sup> In terms of rhetorical agency

The hysteric plays it as though she commanded the Other, yet symbolically she is entirely dependent on him whom she begs to make her a subject. She commands and at once surrenders. Her question, "Who am I?" receives the answer "You are who I say."<sup>169</sup>

For rhetorical agency, the fact that the subject is contingent upon the other to tell them "who they are," means that discourse "contains an essential flaw."<sup>170</sup> On a practical level, this means we are never the same as the signifiers we or anyone else uses to describe us. The label changes or transforms the subject into an object for the other. For the purposes of conceptualizing agency, this means agency is clearly a function of the discourse, structured primarily around the identifications Jonah is articulating to complete the fantasy that fundamentally animates her unconscious.

Not only does this exchange punctuate how important this question of sexuation is for the subject or agent in discourse generally, it also illustrates the importance of gender as a relation to dis-identification—that is, the importance of gender and sexuality as a product of negation—"I am not that!" Just like Jonah's discomfort with her father's correction, Jonah's sexuation, just like every other child's would be in similar circumstances, is completely contingent upon the Real which is the lack of a lack, signified in the symbolic order as signifiers like the dress that serve as metaphors of the unconscious logic of desire condensed into the signs and images implied in the

identification with the body as an object of desire. The fundamental gender and sex difference is not owed to biology or socialization, it is caused by the unconscious logic of desire that manifests as rhetorical agency each and every time the circulation of desire is rerouted or short-circuited to produce a new relationship in the discourse. Pam and Jonah's relationship is a product of the realignment of desire in the discourse, and this realignment of the discourse produces rhetorical agency for Pam because she changes the availability or access to the object of *jouissance*. Jonah's answer to the question is coherent because the underlying unconscious logic of desire driving the formation of relationships is structured around the reality of desire.

Before continuing the analysis it is worthwhile to note that rhetorical agency in each discourse described so far is structured to either arrest or facilitate change or transformation to the status quo. In contrast to the traditional version of rhetorical agency where the speaker is intent on changing the audience's mind, posthumanist rhetorical agency, according to Lacan's discourses, illustrates how audiences or receivers are structured by the discourse to produce a certain kind of relationship or bond. To illustrate further I would now like to turn the reader's attention to an analysis of the other child featured in the broadcast, Bradley.

Bradley is undergoing treatment for GID at Zucker's clinic presently. Recall that Bradley was the boy assaulted on the playground. Zucker's solution to the violence Bradley experienced, and Bradley's overall discomfort with his gender, is to make Bradley more comfortable with being a boy, what Zucker calls reparative therapy. For Zucker, GID or gender dysphoria, as he calls it, is a "fantasy solution, that being the other



sex will make them happy.”<sup>171</sup> To stress this point, the reader will recall that Zucker’s discourse implies there is some non-fantasy, or true solution to questions concerning sexuation. More importantly, the statement suggests Zucker has or possesses knowledge of the authentic or true solution; that a person’s biology determines whether they are masculine or feminine. Zucker illustrates his thinking about the connection between biology and gender identity by drawing on a contrived clinical analogy. Zucker asks, “Suppose you were a clinician and a four-year old black kid came into your office and said he wanted to be white. Would you go with that? I don’t think we would.”<sup>172</sup> As Alix Spiegel explains,

If a black kid walked into a therapist’s office saying that he was really white, the goal pretty much any therapist out there would be to try to make him feel more comfortable with being black. They would assume that his beliefs were the product of a dysfunctional environment – a family environment or a cultural environment, which is how Zucker sees gender disordered kids.<sup>173</sup>

Even though Zucker provides no evidence of the clinical existence of “racial identity disorder,” his hypothetical reveals the fundamental error in his thinking. Equating race with the color of one’s skin is analogous to equating gender with biological sex. Just like race is socially constructed, so is gender identity. I think the theoretical point of departure driving Zucker’s conclusion is incorrect. Sexuation is unconscious and therefore cannot be grounded in either the nature or nurture explanation. Yet, for Zucker, there is no question of am I a boy or am I a girl that does not have an obvious answer: you are what your biological sex says you are. In this way, Zucker’s discourse is driven by the repression of doubt about the ambiguity (S) concerning the alignment between gender and biology for the subject. His discourse masters the ambiguity by asserting order through the master signifier, (S<sub>1</sub>), in Bradley’s case, the master signifier is “you are not a

girl.” For Bradley then, the knowledge of the other is “you are a boy,” with all that being a boy entails in the culture. The result of the imposition of the master signifier and its connection to the knowledge of the other is the repression of surplus *jouissance* (*objet a*), and impacts Bradley, as both the cause and the source of his desire are repressed.

Zucker’s discourse is propelled by the truth that there is no signifier in the unconscious for the sexual difference, ( $\$$ ). The biological function of the organ or the body that the child is equipped with does not determine the distribution of *jouissance* in the child’s unconscious, rather the distribution of *jouissance* determines the exercise of the body as one would an organ. However, the discourse of the master is not open to ambiguity, as it is structured to produce order, and in this regard, the confusion of the organ and the biological function is not an assertion of scientific fact, but rather an aggressive ego defense bent on erasing the ambiguity. Heteronormativity, ( $S_1$ ) as illustrated in Zucker’s discourse, is a symptom of the underlying irreconcilability of gender and sex.

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \underline{S_1} & \rightarrow & \underline{S_2} \\ \underline{S} & & a \end{array}$$

Another good example of heteronormativity as a symptom can be found in discourse of Glenn Stanton, a research fellow with the Christian-based organization Focus on the Family who appeared on the October 29, 2008 Dr. Phil broadcast. Stanton articulates his symptom, arguing

there are very few Pat – real “Pats” in the world where we just don’t know what they are. Either we start out one way or the other and we identify in a particular way, but we always identify as either a girl or a boy. We can always determine, ‘OK, that’s girl behavior or boy behavior.’<sup>174</sup>

The master signifier in this discourse is clearly “girl” or “boy” which implies the subject is either one or the other but never neither. Knowledge (S<sub>2</sub>) in Stanton’s discourse is contingent upon what the culture expects out of girls and boys behaviors. Stanton’s use of the pronoun “we” in his discourse represents the capital O “Other” which refers to the order of culture and language in Lacan’s theory. The unconscious logic of desire articulated by an individual or a person is subordinated in Stanton’s discourse to the heteronormative demands of the culture, or the implicitly heterosexual Other. Knowledge in his discourse is indistinguishable from cultural expectation as he comments,

If the child wants to be artistic, creative, even do ballet, you know what, encourage them in that, but to do it in a masculine sort of way. You think, what does that mean? It’s very simple. Parents know what that means.<sup>175</sup>

In Stanton’s discourse the culture knows already. There is no need for explanation or persuasion because the knowledge is socially assumed. As its representative, Stanton serves as a sort of cultural lord, mastering the bodies and behaviors of the broadcast audience. As Bracher comments,

Knowledge determines the nature of the enjoyment – *jouissance* – that the subject is able to obtain ... even the most elementary pleasures of the body are situated within a knowledge, that is an articulation of signifiers, a network of relationships (associations and oppositions) with other sensations, perceptions, and affective states.<sup>176</sup>

Rhetorical agency in the master’s discourse makes use of the master signifier S<sub>1</sub> as a sort of center of gravity in which meaning coalesces and in which a chain of signifiers are linked. In Stanton’s discourse, when he says “masculine,” the audience is expected to know how to regulate enjoyment and meaning through a chain reaction ignited by the master signifier. The master signifier is all important because it determines the meaning of knowledge for the audience, as Bracher elaborates,

Senders use them as the last word, the bottom line, the term that anchors, explains, or justifies the claims or demands contained in the message ... master signifiers are simply accepted as having a value or validity that goes without saying.<sup>177</sup>

Master signifiers are uniquely positioned to master identities as they are used in discourse rhetorically to solidify and cover up latent doubts and divided subjectivities.

Although the discourse of the master has a distinct structure, it is intimately related to the discourse of the university in that the master signifier which is explicit in the discourse of the master becomes the assumption driving the discourse of the university. In this case, the master signifier, “there are boys and girls and we know the difference,” is the assumption, and it becomes the repressed element in the discourse. The reason for conducting science is the demand to always know more as knowledge in the system is self-justifying—knowledge for knowledge’s sake. Knowledge in much of the GID debate is decidedly scientific, as the discourse is sustained in part by the disagreement among psychologists about the GID diagnosis. Science as a system of knowledge is clearly driving Seigel’s opening remarks on the Dr. Phil broadcast,

The basic thing we need to realize is that there is something called a gender identity, which isn’t the same as the genitals you have. So your genes determine whether you have male genitals or female genitals, but the exposure to the fetus’ brain as it develops in the womb we think determines the identity, and it’s on a spectrum. So you can be feeling fully male. You can feel fully female or somewhere in between.<sup>178</sup>

What Seigel’s rhetoric assumes is that gender identity is caused by biological-hormonal processes. Dr. Diane Ehrensaft, a Psychologist and Gender Specialist interviewed on the May 7, 2008 *All Things Considered* broadcast, shares Seigel’s basic outlook, and despite her indecisiveness, her rhetoric reflects the biological—hormonal theory of causality.

I would say that in the vast majority of cases it's [transgenderism] constitutional – biological – the child brings it to us ... I think that our gender identity is not defined by what's between our legs but by what's between our ears – that it's somewhere in the brain. It's pretty much hardwired.<sup>179</sup>

The biological—hormonal explanation is the master signifier whose latent force in the discourse is materialized in the cause and effect relationships enacted in Seigel and Ehrensaft's systems of knowledge. The unconscious truth driving the discourse is that there are cause and effect relationships which if properly understood, would allow the audience to know, and this discourse positions the audience not to know in such a way that it doesn't know that *it doesn't know*. Seigel and Ehrensaft's university discourse provides a totalizing knowledge system—able to explain how sex and gender are caused. The “hard-wired spectrum” theory of gender Seigel and Ehrensaft describe neutralizes the capacity to change or transform the culture's understanding of gender identity because the master signifiers are assumed, therefore, it is impossible to see gender identity in any other way other than the biological—hormonal (S<sub>1</sub>).

In contrast to Ehrensaft and Seigel, Zucker's university discourse is driven by the same assumption that gender identity is caused, but the causal mechanism in his knowledge system is stimulus-response behaviorism. According to Zucker,

The more you engage in a behavior, the more likely it's going to continue. If a little boy is only cross-dressing and only role-playing as a female, only playing with toys in the culture that we associate with girls, I think that that gets into a feedback loop that reinforces their identity or fantasy that they are a girl or that they're like a girl.<sup>180</sup>

Zucker's university discourse elaborates a system of knowledge bent on explaining how children deviate from the norm. Zucker's system of knowledge assumes that gender identity need not be predicated on a fantasy and is therefore real in a positivist and

scientific sense: you are a boy or a girl according to your anatomy ( $S_1$ ). Whereas Zucker uses the term fantasy to distinguish a fake or false view of the self from the reality of the self as Zucker sees it, a fantasy in Lacan's teaching is meant to describe the relationship between the subject and the object and the enjoyment connecting them to one another. The unconscious truth ( $S_1$ ) that is assumed and drives Zucker's university discourse is the presumption that there is a gender difference, this difference is conscious, and a "healthy" ego must simply be adjusted by a therapist so that it conforms to this biological fact. For Zucker, the "we" is the culture, the Other, as it is the culture that is the silent arbiter of *jouissance*. As he observes, GID is often manifest in "playing with toys in the culture that we associate with girls." The Other is the "we associate," the silent arbiter and regulator of *jouissance* in the discourse. The rhetoric suggests agency in this discourse is passive, as it is the culture in the sentence that has agency—Zucker is only its passive interlocutor or vehicle. Zucker's cure consists of adjusting the ego so that it conforms to this conscious reality, a reality defined by the master signifier of biological sex.

For Lacan, all gender identity is a fantasy and there is no non-fantasy solution to the question concerning sexuation. Therefore, the latent element ( $S$ ) produced in this discourse for the audience is the elimination of the need for an answer to the question concerning sexuation, as well as the temporary removal of doubt about the object (gender identity). The impact for rhetorical agency of Zucker's university discourse is that in order to introduce change or transformation to the status quo, a respondent would have to question the  $S_1$  which is assumed and latent in the discourse, a challenge for receivers of the discourse because it is not directly or explicitly operative. It is also interesting to note

that when speakers with conflicting knowledge systems attempt to call into question one another's position, they do so by making the opposing system's  $S_1$  explicit. For example, Zucker speaks of the system of knowledge outlined by Speigel and Ehrensaft, "I think the hidden assumption is that they believe the child's cross-gender identity is entirely caused by biological factors"<sup>181</sup> and clearly identifies and makes explicit the  $S_1$  of biological factors. Exposing the master signifier destabilizes the discourse, making it open to attack via the discourse of the master – thereby demonstrating the mutually reinforcing dynamic between the discourse of the master and the discourse of the university.

### **Implications of Rhetorical Agency in the GID Debate**

This analysis shows how rhetorical agency is driven by desire and is constituted in discourse. While traditional conceptualizations of rhetorical agency would identify the exchange and interplay between the discourse of the master and the resistance discourse of the hysteric, this analysis in acknowledging desire as the "prime mover" of agency, reveals the nuances and highlights the specific character of desire in two additional discourses: the discourse of the analyst and the discourse of the university.

The unconscious logic of desire driving rhetorical agency in the discourses does not lend itself to analysis according to the standard view of rhetorical agency because the existing conceptualization places so much emphasis on consciousness. It is difficult to see how a humanist paradigm with its emphasis on consciousness and intention could reconcile the influence of desire and *jouissance* on the rhetoric at work in the GID debate. A posthumanist conception of rhetorical agency is equipped to explain the unconscious logic of desire driving the rhetorical agency for all subjects or agents involved in the

debate. The humanist paradigm would not conceive of the interactive exchange and interplay of the prohibition of *jouissance* between agents and audience because the prohibition would be considered a constraint on the rhetorical situation that the speaker can consciously circumvent or negotiate.

This tendency is aggravated by the ideological presupposition that the rhetoric in the debate is consciously derived. Even a modified version of a humanist conception of rhetorical agency would fail to completely account for what is not spoken in the ostensibly conscious and intended speech. Such an account would provide some insight into the analysis of the rhetoric and its relationship to the cultural constraints that separate the “sides” in the debate from one another, but cannot account for the complexity of the relationships that tie the subjects or agents in the debate to one another and provide an interpretive framework that allows the critic to unwind the entire debate as part of the discourses that structure the interaction between agents or subjects about GID. Critics are able to separate criticism from the act of distinguishing the true from the false or reality from fantasy, and instead are working at a deeper level of the psychic real (the unconscious logic of desire) that motivates the discourse.

A rehabilitated humanist version of humanist agency could only account for a prohibition as a constraint imposed by the “culture master” and those who are attempting to resist this cultural domination. Lacan’s understanding of the word prohibition allows us to see that it is not just the cultural prohibitions that cause or inhibit rhetorical agency, instead it also refers to how subjects or agents themselves are driven by an internal psychological prohibition. The answer to the question concerning gender and sex is



internally derived from the acculturation process that includes language acquisition and care taking of child. Conceptually, rhetorical agency must account for the fact that sex and gender norms are not produced by the culture or only imposed by cultural norms. Each person's rhetorical agency will as a result appear unique and be determined by their individual unconscious logic of desire.

The rhetorical agency embodied by the discourse of the hysteric in the GID debate persists in the question concerning identity. Thus, rhetorical agency in this discourse reflects the centrality of the divided subject in relation to the question concerning sex and gender (i.e. am I a boy or am I a girl?). Because culturally the answer to this question presumes heterosexuality is natural, any individual subject or agent whose unconscious logic of desire is not produced by the heteronormative cultural imperative will be forced to face the fact that their *jouissance* is prohibited. This means the discourse of the hysteric and the rhetorical agency it structures is incredibly fragile as the cultural imperative to eliminate gender ambiguity is coercively and violently imposed upon people or individuals who do not fall into the sex-gender dichotomy. Even if rhetorical agency in this discourse is not overwhelmed by cultural domination, the ambiguity might also be snuffed out by the imposition of the university discourse.

One defining characteristic of the university discourse for rhetorical agency is that it has a totalizing effect on subjects. This means the subject or agent is caught in a system of knowledge in which change is impossible without a challenge to the master signifiers underlying the system. Because the master signifiers are latent in the discourse, rhetorical agency structured according to the discourse of the university colonizes identity and

washes out its particularity in a system of signifiers. Rhetorical agency in the university discourse reflects the imaginary and symbolic importance of “the subject who is supposed to know,” a subject who is an “expert” in determining the economy of desire that is considered natural or normal (scientifically conforming) in the culture. Rhetorical agency in the discourse of the university is thus conveyed in both the expertise and prestige that is associated with the academic credentials and also in the cultural value placed on knowing and doing science. However, the humanist paradigm accounts for that. A posthumanist conceptualization of rhetorical agency in this context allows us to see how the unconscious logic of desire drives the discourse and defines its structure. The prohibition of *jouissance* that underlies this discourse is symptomatically structured around the anxiety caused by not knowing (i.e., gender ambiguity). The unconscious logic of desire at work in the discourse of the university in this debate is driven by the desire to alleviate doubt. The discomfort doubt creates is alleviated by the causal explanation that allows us to empirically account for the question of gendered and sexed identity.

Rhetorical agency in the master’s discourse has incredible power, as the master signifier regulates the distribution of enjoyment in a culture through a system of prohibitions and permissions, and remains unquestioned as the fabric of the status quo. Rhetorical agency as it is constituted in the master’s discourse in the GID debate directly affects all subjects or agents in both the way that the discourse regulates how a person may enjoy their body, and also by reinforcing the cultural expectations associated with being either a boy or a girl. Rhetorical agency for the master in the debate is partly driven

by the *jouissance* experienced in denying the enjoyment of transgendered children. Agents in this discourse derive enjoyment from frustrating or prohibiting the *jouissance* transgendered children embody with their discourse. In this way, the rhetorical agency of the discourse of the master in this debate acts as a mechanism for imposing cultural domination and enforcing heteronormativity. Unwinding the hegemonic effects of both the discourse of the university and the discourse of the master in the GID debate is possible because Lacan provides a theory of discourse designed to isolate the unconscious logic of desire and expose its relationship to people or individual's enjoyment.

The discourse of the analyst denaturalizes a culture's prohibition of *jouissance*, thereby exposing how there is nothing natural about the culture's preferences concerning the enactment of sex and gender. This destabilizes hegemonic heterosexuality, and opens the door for ambiguous gender expression. When the unconscious logic of desire is the operative term, and desire and satisfaction are virtually coextensive, as they are in the discourse of the analyst, the result transforms the unconscious logic of desire into a conscious logic of enjoyment. For subjects or agents, rhetorical agency in the discourse of the analyst explicitly reflects the enjoyment had from the unfettered access to enjoyment, even if it is fleeting and temporary, as Jonah's case illustrated. Rhetorical agency in this discourse allows us to see what happens when agents or subjects reject or ignore the repression of desire. The rejection forces the audience to question their own gendered and sexed identity, because it makes the master signifiers that "normally" determine the sexed and gendered identities of subjects or agents incoherent. Thus,

rhetorical agency in the discourse of the analyst is characterized by temporary enjoyment that forces the audience out of typical systems of signification that would normally explain or repress their divided subjectivities.

---

<sup>118</sup> John Sloop, *Disciplining Gender: Rhetorics of Sex Identity in Contemporary U.S. Culture* (Amherst and Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 23.

<sup>119</sup> Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, 1975, translated by Bruce Fink, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999), 55.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Lois McNay, *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>135</sup> Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, 1975, translated by Bruce Fink, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999), 171.

<sup>136</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Psychoses*, 1981, translated by Russell Grigg, *Psychoses*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993), 177

<sup>137</sup> *Psychoses*, 179.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>141</sup> Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality*, 55.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 54

<sup>143</sup> American Psychiatric Association, "DSM-IV," in *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth Edition (Washington D.C.: APA, 1994).

<sup>144</sup> American Psychiatric Association, "DSM-IV."

<sup>145</sup> To illustrate how this diagnosis is determined, consider the case of a child born with a penis who feels uncomfortable that their outward physiology does not match their inner psychology. Assuming the child maintains a desire to be recognized as a girl, the diagnosis holds that atypical behavior, like a preference for playing with dolls, wearing dresses, or even demonstrating a preference for playing with girls instead of boys, coupled with the child's acknowledged gender preference, would be considered evidence of GID.

<sup>146</sup> Alix Spiegel, "Q&A: Therapists on Gender Identity Issues in Kids," *News*, Children's Health, Health, May 7, 2008, National Public Radio, 3/4/10 <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=90229789>>.

<sup>147</sup> Kenneth J. Zucker et al., "Is Gender Identity Disorder Coming Out of the Closet?" *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 34, no. 4 (September 2008): 287-91.

<sup>148</sup> Alix Spiegel, All Things Considered. May 7, 2008, Two Families Grapple with Sons' Gender Preferences (National Public Radio).

- 
- 149 *Ibid.*  
150 *Ibid.*  
151 *Ibid.*  
152 *Ibid.*  
153 *Ibid.*  
154 *Ibid.*  
155 *Ibid.*  
156 Spiegel, "Zucker & Ehrensaft Q&A."  
157 Spiegel, All Things Considered.  
158 Ellie Ragland, *Logic of Sexuation* (Albany: State University of New York press, 2004), 92.  
159 Spiegel, All Things Considered.  
160 *Ibid.*  
161 *Ibid.*  
162 Gérard Wajcman, "The Hysteric's Discourse," *The Symptom* 4 (Spring 2003): 5.  
163 *Ibid.*  
164 Spiegel, All Things Considered.  
165 *Ibid.*  
166 *Ibid.*  
167 Wajcman, 6  
168 *Ibid.*, 6  
169 *Ibid.*  
170 *Ibid.*  
171 Spiegel, "Zucker & Ehrensaft Q&A." 2.  
172 Spiegel, All Things Considered, 2.  
173 *Ibid.*  
174 Phillip Calvin McGraw, Host, *Gender-Confused Kids*, with contributions from Joseph Nicolosi, Dan Siegel, and Glenn Stanton (October 29 2008), 9.  
175 *Ibid.*  
176 Mark Bracher, *Lacan, Discourse, and Social Change: A Psychoanalytic Cultural Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 110.  
177 *Ibid.*, 112.  
178 Dr. Phil, 9.  
179 Spiegel, "Zucker & Ehrensaft Q&A," 3-4.  
180 Spiegel, All Things Considered, 3.  
181 Spiegel, "Zucker and Ehrensaft Q&A," 2.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: TEA PARTY RHETORIC**

### **Historical Context of Tea Party Rhetoric**

The global financial crisis that began in 2008 disturbed, perhaps for the first time since the Great Depression, the foundations of free-market ideology worldwide. The collapse of Wall Street investment banks Bear Sterns and Lehman Brothers, the near collapse (were it not for US government intervention) of insurance companies like American Insurance Group and banks like Citigroup, and the eventual bankruptcy of General Motors and Chrysler, along with countless other multinational corporations in Europe and across Asia, pushed global capitalism to the brink of depression. Worldwide wealth decreased dramatically as property values, retirement savings and investment earnings evaporated during the collapse, only denting more deeply the already tarnished neoliberal brand. To stave off a depression, governments around the world cut interest rates, increased government spending, nationalized or purchased corporate equity and, in the process, began accumulating record amounts of debt. This legislative pattern in western states is clearly antagonistic to neoliberal ideology, but Tea Party rhetoric gets its traction from the specific legislative moves undertaken in the US.

Congress and the Bush administration passed two separate stimulus bills to avert a recession before crafting the Troubled Assets Relief Program, a fund administered by the Department of Treasury meant to infuse the banking system with money in order to forced feed liquidity into the system and drive lending. In February 2009, the Obama administration and Congress passed a 787 billion dollar stimulus package, The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which was followed by a major overhaul of healthcare legislation contained in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act—further enraging those with neo-liberal ideological leanings. While neoliberal advocates and their supporters in the US Congress decried these laws, the nascent forces that are now part of the Tea Party wing of the Republican Party were steadily organizing in opposition.

Organizations within the conservative political establishment like Freedomworks, Grassfire.org and RapidNet.com, among others, redoubled their efforts to reinvent the neoliberal brand following the disintegration of the world economy and the legislative responses western states crafted to avert depression. To organize consent, these groups and their like-minded conservative counterparts on the World Wide Web began to build an Internet presence early in 2008, a move that gained an increased visibility when CNBC on-air editor Rick Santelli screamed his now (in)famous and perhaps premeditated rant.<sup>182</sup> Almost immediately after Santelli's outburst, Tea Party websites all over the Web went online, with the first "Tea Party protest" following less than a month later. Promotion by cable television and radio personalities like Glenn Beck on Fox News (who already had established a companion movement, the 912project.com; a movement presently fused with the Tea Party), Rush Limbaugh, then Alaskan governor Sarah Palin,

and other media hosts in local markets all around the country significantly increased the number of people attending the next “Tea Party” on April 15<sup>th</sup>, the day US federal income taxes are due. Against this historical backdrop, Tea Party rhetoric, a blend of Revolutionary War propaganda, libertarianism, and Cold War era McCarthy-styled xenophobic political paranoia, seems to have carved out its own corner in American political life, bent on preserving a neoliberal way of life. As Hudson explains,

Neoliberalism can be defined as the belief that the unregulated free market is the essential precondition for the fair distribution of wealth and for political democracy. Thus, neoliberals oppose just about any policy or activity that might interfere with the untrammelled operation of market forces, whether it is higher taxes on the wealthy and corporations, better social welfare programs, stronger environmental regulations, or laws that make it easier for workers to organize and join labor unions.<sup>183</sup>

As I outlined above, in terms of a history of the present, neoliberalism as an ideology is suffering through another systemic crisis. The neoliberal response in a time of crisis for its advocates becomes defensive. Hudson notes, before the most recent crisis, the defense of neoliberalism meant

When the promised good life fails to materialize, [neoliberal advocates] fall back on their ultimate defense and claim that, imperfect as the status quo may be, there is, unfortunately, no viable alternative. They point to the failed “socialist” societies of the twentieth century and warn ominously that, no matter how bad things get, any attempt to remedy the situation by forthrightly interfering with the market and the prerogatives of multinational corporations can only lead to state-bureaucratic authoritarianism.<sup>184</sup>

Post-crisis, this defense seems prescient. Western states did take over multinational corporations. They are interfering with the market. However accurate these perceptions and my characterization of them may or may not be, the fact remains: the political-economic entanglement of western states and multinational corporations is as inseparable now as it has been before. Neo-liberal ideology is now more than ever before the order of



the day, despite the systemic crisis that threatened to undo it. It is for this reason I maintain the most important development in the political economic climate in the U.S. in the last decade is the rise of what is now loosely identified as the “Tea Party.”

Studying the rhetoric that constitutes this political constituency helps us understand how rhetorical agency is designed to arrest change in the political-economic culture, as I believe it is clear neo-liberal ideology is what all other ideological orientations are compared to, at least in the United States. Lacan’s theory is helpful in analyzing ideological discourses because it focuses on what the rhetoric in a discourse says about desire, and desire is often articulated in values. This is especially true when analyzing the rhetoric of governing and protesting, which in American political language incorporates values like freedom, change, justice, liberty, limited government, etc. almost incessantly. Tea Party rhetoric reveals how closely the discourse structures of protesting and governing are related. Tea Party rhetoric is not of course the only rhetoric to mask its domination in the language of victimage or the voice of the outsider. In Lacan’s theory of discourse these two distinct forms of rhetorical agency, protesting and governing, are mutually reinforcing. This assumption helps us set aside the paradoxical way in which Tea Party advocates are proponents of the dominant ideology but position themselves in the political language as if their rhetoric had little or no power. However, Tea Party rhetoric is powerful in large part because it is fundamentally resistant to legislative changes enacted by the US government during the recent recession. The question then becomes, “How is Tea Party rhetoric structured in a discourse to resist change?”

To answer this question, I am limiting the texts I analyze to transcripts detailing the rhetoric of Rick Santelli, Bob Basso, and Glenn Beck. The discourse generated by each of these individuals is related to significant turning points in the development of Tea Party rhetoric. In the rhetoric of these influential speakers, we can see the speech begins to crystalize around certain signifiers and images that creates a more or less consistent way of speaking. These images and signifiers comprise the ideological vocabulary linking the individuals who comprise the Tea Party political constituency together. Tea Party rhetoric constitutes a discourse in the Lacanian sense, it forms a social link. What I am calling Tea Party rhetoric is meant to refer to a way of speaking that links people together. In a direct way, what I am calling Tea Party rhetoric links self-identified Tea Party advocates with one another in a discourse structured to form bonds predicated upon resisting the legislative enactments adopted to combat the recent recession.

Tea Party rhetoric is often reactionary, aggressive and, in its extreme, can promote a pre-psychotic way of speaking. By pre-psychotic I mean to refer to the ways in which the rhetoric always confers an outsider status or, more precisely, the way in which the rhetoric always makes it seem as if the ideology is on the brink of being forced out of the language and culture. Part of the rhetoric's appeal must consist in this idea that it represents the underdog or oppressed viewpoint in the culture. But the question remains, "What do these qualities of Tea Party rhetoric say about rhetorical agency?" How is the rhetoric structured in a discourse so that its affective impact is felt emotionally as envy, resentment, anger or jealousy, if these emotions drive the resistance to change? One need only recall the arguments about Obama's citizenship, his race, his nation of origin and not

forget the monstrous joker-styled posters carried by so many during rallies in order to reflect upon the intensity of emotion generated by Tea Party rhetoric. So, while Tea Party rhetoric is clearly a defense of the pre-existing neoliberal order, its purchase as a discourse bears itself out with audiences by way of its resistance to change, and in this way, functions as a discourse designed to control and regulate the circulation of desire.

Analytically speaking, what is at issue is not necessarily the alignment between Tea Party rhetoric and reality, but rather the relationship between desire and its prohibition. The sources of and context for the prohibitions that define the limits of enjoyment for Tea Party advocates determine the circulation of *jouissance*. Retracing this circuitry is the key to understanding how rhetorical agency is constituted in discourse. Within the network of signifiers constituting the TPR symbolic order is an unconscious hitch, a symptom, a sticking-point, persisting as an always coercive and violent, sometimes murderous, and essentially white, patriarchal speech.

The victory of President Obama last year marked a point of no return—what Lacan would call a “dramatic conjuncture.”<sup>185</sup> It opened up a gap in the symbolic order, displacing the reality of the imaginary figure of a traditional and historical white man as the paradigmatic political avatar and source of authority for the law. In short, for the TPR order, Obama’s victory displaced the patriarchal center of gravity distributing the effects of the white conservative symbolic economy. In a clinical setting, this type of an event often coincides with the onset of a psychosis, the effect of which is made known in the delusional speech of the patient. Where Congress serves as the source of rage in Basso’s speech, as will be seen below, President Obama does in the movement generally, as

reflected in Santelli's rant and Beck's speech in particular. What is distinct here is the importance of the white source of fatherly authority distributing the patriarchal law within the symbolic order because, as Lacan contends "For psychosis to be triggered, the Name-of-the-Father--*verworfen*, foreclosed, that is, never having come to the place of the Other-- must be summoned to that place in symbolic opposition to the subject."<sup>186</sup> In terms of Tea Party rhetoric, the trigger that animates the structure of this speech is an absence of legitimate white authority.

The place of the Other in the speech is only taken up when the calls to live up to the "greatest generation," and the "founding fathers" fleetingly fill the gap as a sort of image or imaginary subject meant to remind the audience of the insufficiencies of the existing symbolic order. As long as TPR maintains this absence in the symbolic order, the signifying chain will continue until it finds a coherent set of metaphors capable of suspending the entropy and establishing the patriarchal order inherited from past generations. As Lacan says,

It is the lack of the Name-of-the-Father in that place which, by the hole that it opens up the signified, sets off a cascade of reworkings of the signifier from which the growing disaster of the imaginary proceeds, until the level is reached at which signifier and signified stabilize in a delusional metaphor.<sup>187</sup>

Here we should be clear in saying what Lacan is talking about is not an actual father, he is taking about the concept of authority as it has been a part of Western Culture for thousands of years. It is the reason behind the reason why property, inheritance, and suffrage, to name a few, are relations of power based on hetero-normative patriarchal authority. Since this is the Rule for making rules, the Law of laws, etc., it is never fully

present or made fully explicit because it is already an implied anchor point in western people's speech. This is what Lacan means in arguing the

father need but situate himself in a tertiary position in any relationship that has at its base the imaginary couple a-a'--that is, ego-object or ideal-reality--involving the subject in the field of eroticized aggression that it induces.<sup>188</sup>

The "imaginary couple a-a'" is the process whereby a person or individual makes an object of their body, which is what is referred to as a "self," and is articulated in speech as a set of adjectives that signify for the subject what it means to be identifiable as such—that is, what it means to be a subject to other people (which necessarily entails the relation to the Other). Using adjectives to describe to other people "who you are" is another way of referring to what Lacan means in talking about the ego-ideal and, since this is an ideal description for the person supplying the adjectives, it is also best thought of as an ideal-reality relation. In this way, Lacan is simply recognizing in his own technical language what is a common current in posthumanist thinking: that the self is a construction. Calling the use of adjectives to describe who you are to other people as an "eroticized aggression" may seem strong, but the conclusion makes sense if we think about how the construction of the self or ego-ideal serves to condition the perceptions people have about one another for the purposes of creating desire while simultaneously revealing the workings of the unconscious source of desire for the subject—to be something to the Other.

Since the source of unconscious desire is bound up with the father's desire (signified by words like founding fathers) in TPR, the rhetoric is erotized in the sense that it is linked to the persistence of the founding father's desire. The aggressiveness of the rhetoric is amplified whenever the ideal-reality is perceived to be under attack or at risk

of being rejected as the source of desire in the discourse. For Tea Party advocates, this means rhetorical agency is structured according to the demands of the father, and it is the desire of the father threatened, and the desire to do the father's bidding, that forms a stable core from which the discourse emanates.

The aggressive drive to protect the economy of desire that structures the discourse, coupled with perceived threats to this *jouissance* or way of enjoying, distributed as it is around the paternal metaphor(s), what Lacan is calling the Name-of-the-Father—is what I am arguing initiates the pre-psychotic hitch at work in the structure of TPR. The foreclosure of the father's *jouissance* from the economy of desire constituted in a discourse activates the erotized aggression of ego-ideal formation. If the father's *jouissance* is crowded out completely, the person or individual will experience a psychotic episode because there is no law or rule about the access to *jouissance* driving the unconscious desire to enjoy, which is why, in part, Tea Party advocates get so aggressive in projecting and protecting their ideal-reality.

What I believe is at work here helps explain why this rhetoric leans so heavily on Revolutionary wartime propaganda. It gets its energy in part from the desire to own up to or pay back previous generations of Americans to whom present day Americans owe an imaginary debt. Authority, tradition and prohibition are the forms in which the symbolic debt bears out its effects on the bodies constituting present history, which helps explain why President Obama has had his life openly threatened by Tea Party protesters like Ted Nugent—Obama signifies the foreclosure of the father's desire from the discourse. In this sense, the founding fathers and other authority figures (i.e. Ronald Reagan) control the

distribution of the signifiers in the protester's symbolic order, which articulates and positions the imaginary relations suspended in a reality that does not exist but nonetheless creates reality—at least in so far as someone talks about it as a “patriot” whose actions are justified by “our founding fathers.” But the founding fathers are foremost a metaphor for the unconscious logic of desire that constitutes the discourse and conditions the relationships that people in and out of the movement have with one another. The persistence of the unconscious logic of desire structured around the desire of the father is, in part, what makes Tea Party advocates violent and easily agitated, as the health-care forums held over the summer of 2009 illustrate.

TPR consists of a set of relations between signifying elements that separate the audience from freedom, which circulates around a psychotic hitch, a debt to dead fathers of fathers who represent the law and control enjoyment by maintaining the point of symbolic opposition occupied by President Obama and Congress as the purveyors and progenitors of socialism, communism and fascism. “Our nation,” “We the people,” “Americans,” etc. are the targets of this symbolic opposition and freedom's champion. But, as I will show in the following sections, the organization of consent along “freedom's” lines will always produce slaves for freedom.

### **Santelli's Rant**

To begin, I think it most helpful to start where many agree Tea Party rhetoric gained national attention, “Santelli's rant,” for it is here we start to see the contours of TPR coalesce. We must acknowledge Santelli is speaking from the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME), a billion dollar corporation where commodities brokers pay

hundreds of thousands of dollars in desk fees just to sit in the same room and conduct commodities transactions. While the rich in this room are the public face of the “working investor” class, the wealthy paying their salaries and commissions are also de facto present in their absence. This is the top two percent of all American income earners represented. Everyone in this room and everyone responsible for the Power Lunch broadcast at the CNBC network (on which Santelli appeared in making the rant) is affected by President Obama’s 2008 campaign pledge to raise taxes only for those making more than \$250,000 annually. And, to be fair, Santelli has been consistent in his opposition to both stimulus packages (G.W. Bush and President Obama’s) and the Toxic Assets Relief Program (TARP). This particular rant is directed at homeowners whom he perceives as being irresponsible. Thus, he reduces the mass of homeowners who might be able to modify their existing mortgages by compressing them into a single type; an image defined by undeserved excesses, like “extra bathrooms,” and failure, as in “losers” who “can’t pay their bills.”

RICK SANTELLI: The government is promoting bad behavior. Because we certainly don’t want to put stimulus forth and give people a whopping \$8 or \$10 in their check, and think that they ought to save it, and in terms of modifications... I’ll tell you what, I have an idea.

You know, the new administration’s big on computers and technology– How about this, President and new administration? Why don’t you put up a website to have people vote on the Internet as a referendum to see if we really want to subsidize the losers’ mortgages; or would we like to at least buy cars and buy houses in foreclosure and give them to people that might have a chance to actually prosper down the road, and reward people that could carry the water instead of drink the water?

TRADER ON FLOOR: That’s a novel idea.

(Applause, cheering)<sup>189</sup>



At this point in the rant, video evidence supports the sense even his co-hosts began to have, that Santelli is angry. His face and brow are pinched, and fleeting looks of contempt and disgust cross his face as he waves his hands and shouts; the contempt and disgust as effects of anger amplify the affective intensity of his appeal. The first claim, that the “government is promoting bad behavior” is rhetorically fused to the “stimulus,” in an implied denigration of Keynesian economics which assumes government’s role in an economy is to maintain full employment (a model opposed by the Milton Friedman Chicago school supply side theorists like Santelli who constitute the status quo). Santelli indicts “modifications” not on economic grounds, but rather on moral ones; in essence, for reasons of supply side, free market neo-liberal ideology. It is in this way that Santelli’s discourse is structured to arrest change. His advocacy suggests the government should not act to aid homeowners and instead demands that the “old way of doing business” persist.

Rhetorical agency in Santelli’s discourse is structured according to the relationships between the subject, the object and enjoyment in the discourse. In Santelli’s rhetoric, rhetorical agency is constituted in the master signifiers that structure the discourse. The master signifiers are the signifiers that the agent or subject identifies with or against, designated in the Lacanian algebra as  $S_1$ . For Santelli, capitalism and free markets are key identifiers, as he explicitly articulates toward the end of his speech. “All you capitalists that want to show up to Lake Michigan, I’m gonna start organizing,”<sup>190</sup> This was followed by whistling and cheering from the floor. That Santelli self-identifies as a capitalist, and the cheering from the floor suggests other traders (mostly men)

identify similarly, is significant psychoanalytically because the articulation of what I want to be to myself so I can recognize myself as such (which is what Santelli and his audience are doing) is driven by the very absence or lack of an identity in the first place. The signifier “capitalist” is a product of alienation, an alienation rooted in the split or gap that produces an ego-ideal and is symbolized in the left-hand side of the master’s discourse.

$$\frac{\underline{S}_1}{\underline{S}} \rightarrow \frac{\underline{S}_2}{a}$$

These signifiers are a defense constructed by the ego which represses the lack of identity causing the discourse. In identifying with the master signifiers, the ego maintains symbolic and imaginary consistency by repressing the division or alienation that would otherwise force a failure in the constitution of subjectivity. “Capitalism” and the “free market” thus serve to produce a certain consistency of identity for the audience and the speaker, and in so doing, the signifiers constitute a particular kind of knowledge; the knowledge necessary for deriving any meaning or sense from the rhetoric at all.

Santelli’s discourse circulates largely around the master signifiers linked to freedom, either of a market-based kind or endorsed as a version of popular sovereignty, as in “Why don’t you put up a website to have people vote on the Internet as a referendum to see if we really want to subsidize the losers’ mortgages...” The final part of his claim here about “subsidizing losers mortgages” is an instance of identification by dis-identification, where the rhetoric makes it clear what identity the subject or agent affirms by negating the possibility of being something or someone else. This is a way of

establishing a distinction between the master and the slave in the discourse structure. Hence, Santelli is not identified as a loser, but rather gets his identity from *not* being a loser. Santelli's master signifiers structure for the audience a knowledge system (S<sub>2</sub>) surrounding the status quo of capitalism, which is modeled onto the version of democracy and popular sovereignty Santelli's rhetoric endorses. Where the free market operates according to the logic of majority rule, so too does Santelli's vision of democracy. The implication here is "we," that is, the subjects, agents and the audience, have no say in the outcomes of the "President" and "new administration's" actions. This means Santelli's rhetoric is infused with energy based on the perception that his voice and his style of thought are somehow crowded out of the discourse.

For Santelli, what is lost in the discussion about mortgage modification is a voice for his discourse (the objet a). If we think more closely about the way this argument positions the agent or subject, the "we," in relation to its symbolic opposition, the "President and new administration," it is clear that Santelli's text communicates a certain sense of exclusion that means, quite literally, the audience needs to use its voice, that the symbolic opponents are not listening (where listening and doing are the same) and finally, that the majority, whatever this phrase actually constitutes, is lacking the object (their voice). Here is where it is clear the discourse is structuring "popular discontent" through the lack of voice as an effect of the rhetoric--what in political jargon is euphemistically referred as a "silent majority," a term he uses later on in the broadcast. The trope "silent majority" reflects how *jouissance* is distributed in the discourse according to Santelli's rhetoric. Since the trope suggests Santelli represents the

disenfranchised and can appear as the slave rising up against the master who is responsible for derailing *jouissance*.

Santelli's rhetoric incorporates the signifiers "free market" and "capitalism" to structure the relationship between the subject and desire in his use of a metaphor: reward those "who could carry the water instead of drink the water." He poses a rhetorical question to convey the metaphor, saying,

Or would we like to at least buy cars and buy houses in foreclosure and give them to people that might have a chance to actually prosper down the road, and reward people that could carry the water instead of drink the water?<sup>191</sup>

What is implied here is two different types of people, two classes of persons, in essence, *two identities* are distinct from one another in so far as they derive pleasure, and hence arrange their desire, in two different ways of enjoying. Since we can infer that Santelli's rant connects "bad behavior" and its "promoting" by the "government," to those who only "drink the water," we can conclude this is another way of saying, "we should not allow people to enjoy this way," you must work if you wish to drink because work is a necessary requisite for enjoying in the culture. Clearly the situation is much more complicated than Santelli's metaphor suggests, but what is more important is what Santelli's metaphor suggests about the way desire is structured ideologically in his discourse.

The discourse structure mirrors the structure of capitalism itself, because in an abstract way, the subject or agent of capitalism uses the worker to produce the object intended for consumption in the same way an audience often does the work for the speaker in order to produce the object of desire—usually knowledge. The slave, who in this discourse possesses the knowledge needed to labor, not only to produce the chain of

signifiers linking the system of knowledge to the master signifier, also possesses the practical know-how—the requisite skill for doing the work. Santelli’s audience, the slave, possesses the knowledge or skill to keep the money circulating in a free market system. Because the worker knows how to labor, they can produce the object (money in this case) for the master, which makes the master dependent on the worker to produce the object, but also returns the surplus value generated in the exchange to the master, thereby alienating the worker from the object. In Santelli’s rhetoric, the one who drinks the water but does not carry the water is a metaphor for the unconscious truth driving the discourse: there are some who take money (or steal *jouissance*) undeservedly or disingenuously from those masters who have a right to it.

The energy pent up in Santelli’s speech begins to percolate and generate spontaneous reactions from the co-hosts and the traders within earshot of his microphone. And perhaps as an example of how effective the master’s discourse can be in creating an effect on the audience, Santelli’s co-host Joe Kernan observes, “Hey, Rick... Oh, boy. They’re like putty in your hands. Did you hear...?” To which, like a typical master, Santelli shouts back, “No they’re not, Joe. They’re not like putty in our hands,” adding, “This is America! How many of you people want to pay for your neighbor’s mortgage that has an extra bathroom and can’t pay their bills? Raise their hand.”<sup>192</sup> Santelli’s rhetoric “This is America!” suggests metaphorically that America is another signifier for capitalism or the free market—and in this way serves as the master signifier or  $S_1$  at this point in the rant. This is why Lacan says, “ $S_1$  is, to say it briefly the signifier function that the master relies on” and also why he teaches “that the slave’s own field is knowledge,

S<sub>2</sub>.”<sup>193</sup> The audience is structured to produce the knowledge, which in the discourse structure relies upon the vast reservoir of signifiers that are already at work: hard work, profit, freedom, prosperity, labor for reward, etc. which are provided by the audience. The effect of the master signifier on the audience is to structure the economy of *jouissance* according to the speaker’s master signifier, which in turn explains why the audience so vehemently agrees with Santelli. In response to Santelli’s statement, the traders on the floor are heard booing, signifying the immediate audience’s clear identification with his master signifier.

Rhetorical agency in the master’s discourse is designed to produce this kind of an effect on an audience. The trader’s vocal boos were followed up by Santelli posing another rhetorical question, “President Obama, are you listening?”<sup>194</sup>, which implies that in Santelli’s marshaling of the master signifier(s), the audience has begun to produce the *objet a*, which in this rhetoric is organized resistance to President Obama’s policies, i.e. have a Tea Party. The broadcast had begun to get uncomfortably agitated, prompting Joe Kernan to nervously quip, “It’s like mob rule here. I’m getting scared. I’m glad I’m...” only to be interrupted by Carl Quintanilla who added “Get some bricks and bats...”<sup>195</sup> What is important about this exchange is difficult to capture with words, because it becomes clear how a certain aggressive enthusiasm seemed to surround Santelli as he shouted out his disagreement. It is as if this outburst and the reaction it generated from the audience served to encapsulate or speak to the intensity and violence the Tea Party movement has come to embody since the rant. It foretold the kind of violent and coercive alignment of actors, (the administration, President Obama) and actions (subsidize and

promote bad behavior) that now circulate in the symbolic order, a set of tensions forming the nascent structure of TPR. The irony here is that democracy, that is, majority rule, the kind of power configuration a referendum is predicated upon, is precisely what the audience to the broadcast is watching. It is the agitation of the majority claiming to be the oppressed minority, using the mantle of sovereignty, of authority, to assert itself as if it were powerless and thus the last bastion of democratic rule.

The effect on the audience is further demonstrated by the response of the traders on the floor who are whipped into a veritable frenzy by Santelli's rhetoric. One need only pay superficial attention and get a sense of the affective impact rhetorical agency in the discourse of the master has on an audience. This is evidenced in the next portion of the broadcast as Santelli, after a brief exchange about economic data, says, "We're thinking of having a Chicago Tea Party in July. All you capitalists that want to show up to Lake Michigan, I'm gonna start organizing,"<sup>196</sup> This was followed by whistling and cheering from the floor.

QUICK: Hey, Rick? Can you do that one more time, just get the mob behind you again?

QUINATILLA: Have the camera pull way out.

QUICK: Yeah, pull way out. Everybody listen to Rick Santelli.

KERNEN: He can't... I don't think... You can't just do it at will, can you Rick? I mean, you have to say something.

QUICK: No, do it at will. Let's see.

SANTELLI: Listen, all's I know is, is that there's only about 5% of the floor population here right now, and I talk loud enough they can all hear me. So if you want to ask'em anything, let me know. These guys are pretty straight forward, and my guess is, a pretty good statistical cross-section of America, the silent majority.

QUICK: Not so silent majority today.<sup>197</sup>

This exchange illustrates exactly how persuasive the master's discourse is in constituting an audience and channeling their affective sensibilities into one unified mass of like-minded people; and it was this collection of comments that the Tea Party today claims it owes its partial inception. We cannot let the irony escape us. Santelli is a millionaire, surrounded by wealthier people who work for some of the wealthiest people on earth, and it is their disapproval of a bill meant to unsnarl some of the most unethical, and in many cases unlawful, underwriting practices the mortgage industry has ever seen that is at the source of their agitation. Hardly a "cross-section of America," as this group would be saddled with the tax burden for much of these reforms. But the structure of the symbolic order places Santelli and the "we" he is alluding to in the position of the oppressed, and explains why taxation is akin to oppression for the Tea Party advocate, even if that person's taxes never go up as a result of anything President Obama proposes. Here is where Santelli's rhetoric links up so tightly with Revolutionary War propaganda.

WILBUR ROSS: Rick, I congratulate you on your new incarnation as a revolutionary leader.

SANTELLI: Somebody needs one. I'll tell you what, if you read our founding fathers, people like Benjamin Franklin and Jefferson,... What we're doing in this country now is making them roll over in their graves.

This fundamental antagonism symbolically erected in Santelli's speech is but a precursor to the same sentiment that in part cements the moral legitimacy of the Tea Party movement in so far as it confers its outsider status as the defender of the status quo. In part, the movement asserts its legitimacy every time it reestablishes its distance from the power it already assumes it has, but gets its power, its legitimacy, from its political



heritage by making it seem like this is not political. The scheme here is to be political by disavowing politics; which is exactly how ideology at its most effective works--precisely where not having a politics *is* politics itself. Quintanilla in the broadcast speaks to this very point when he suggests Santelli should run for office, only to have Santelli answer, "Do you think I want to take a shower every hour? The last place I'm ever gonna live or work is D.C."<sup>198</sup> This kind of response will become part and parcel of TPR, as political representatives get their credibility in part by establishing their distance from the political establishment.

Traditional rhetorical criticism would acknowledge Santelli's political economic situation and be equipped to point out that he is indeed a master masquerading as a slave. The risk inherent in this view is it reduces ideology to the tired Marxist argument that Santelli is spreading false consciousness. The posthumanist version of rhetorical agency Lacan provides does not pretend to function as a tool for distinguishing between rhetoric and reality. Instead, Lacanian psychoanalysis is designed to articulate the underlying Real of *jouissance* at work in a discourse. Were we to apply the humanist, speaker-centered, consciously directed conceptualization of rhetorical agency, critics would examine the master signifiers being articulated as if they originated solely from the consciously directed motives and intentions known to Santelli, and would evaluate Santelli's persuasion of the audience for its appeals to their sense of reason, while leaning on his stature and credibility as an anchor on MSNBC. Clearly his rhetoric is a product of neo-liberal rationality, and critics are already equipped to recognize and critique the disparity between his rhetoric and reality, but that does not account for the underlying power of the

prohibition of *jouissance*. In Santelli's case, the prohibition entails either his *jouissance* being inhibited by other's excess pleasure (homeowners borrowing more house than they could afford), or his pleasure in prohibiting *jouissance* for others (rejecting President Obama's legislative initiatives). The understanding of rhetorical agency as driven by the unconscious circulation of desire allows critics to see both.

### **Take It Back!**

Tea Party rhetoric, if perhaps self-defined, is rhetoric of protest—that is why the idea of “taking the country back” is so often incorporated into the Tea Party advocate's speech. While this phrase is not unique to Tea Party advocates, what is “it” exactly that was stolen from them and how was it taken in the discourse? What activates rhetorical agency in this discourse is the threat to “our nation,” or “our way of life” as these phrases capture the ineffable real that exists beyond discourse but nonetheless holds the interpersonal, intrapersonal and intersubjective relationships together. This is why the discourse borders on hyperbole to establish the significance of the threat to the established cultural order. Analytically, the rhetoric follows the structure of the master's discourse.

$$\frac{S_1}{S} \rightarrow \frac{S_2}{a}$$

Although his rhetoric is distinctive for other reasons, Tom Tancredo serves as a good example here of what I am referring to in referring to these threats to “our way of life.” In a speech he made after President Obama's inauguration, Tancredo derided voters who supported President Obama saying, “They could not even spell the word ‘vote’ or say it

in English and they put a committed socialist ideologue in the White House — Barack Hussein Obama!” As Tim Reid writes, in

Decrying America’s multiculturalism, Mr. Tancredo said that Republicans and Democrats had voted for a black man because they felt they had to. To a standing ovation, he shouted: ‘We really do have a culture to pass on to our children: it’s based on Judeo-Christian values...This is our country. Let’s take it back!’”<sup>199</sup>

“Taking it back” of course implies the subject or agent in Tancredo’s discourse at one time possessed “it.” So, rhetorical agency constituted in the signifier “our country” is, for the subject or agent of the discourse, generated in the act of taking back or repossessing the stolen object. Since what was lost (the culture) never really existed in the first place as anything other than a fantasy designed to connect the object (in this case, white culture) to the subject or agent (Tancredo’s audience, including himself) to *jouissance*, then “our country” must signify for the subject the imaginary and symbolic relations that derail the otherwise expected and ordinary distribution of *jouissance*, i.e. the way things were before they were lost.

Elaborating on the *jouissance* from which the subject or agent is separated, and the implied or latent signifier driving the discourse, present in its absence, is the unarticulated presumption of whiteness, *the objet a*. It is the essential indefinable surplus enjoyment that is only articulated by proxy and inference (a black man in the White House) but is in its inability to be explicitly articulated remains as the resistant core of the real dividing the subject or agent in the symbolic order. When Tancredo says “Let’s take it back!” the “it” is the *objet a*, the cause or source of enjoyment, which is real in the psychic order and therefore remains beyond speech. It is real not in the sense that it exists, it is real in the sense that for the subject, there is nothing embodied in the signifier

whiteness that is missing--there is a lack of a lack. The latent symptom that drives the discourse can be identified as “Barack Hussein Obama.” The discourse is designed to repress the trauma caused for the white, patriarchal subject in the event of having a black man in the Oval Office. This is why, in this discourse, it is all important that Tea Party advocates malign the president by referring to his full name in order to imply or infer what would otherwise be interpreted if uttered explicitly as overt racism. The repetition of the symptom in the discourse reinforces the sense of alienated subjectivity conveyed in the discourse, which means the Tea Party advocate is locked in a discourse of constant division and protest. The identification with master signifiers is always a vain attempt to master or repress the symptom, and this can be seen in the extent to which they are repeated and the aggressive tone in which they are spoken.

In the hysteric’s discourse, rhetorical agency is an effect of questioning which produces a demand for the other (audience) to supply a master signifier ( $S_1$ ). As a rather clear illustration of this structure in action, let us consider the You Tube speech delivered by Tea Party advocate Bob Basso, a motivational speaker and actor whose videos, in which he pretends to be Thomas Paine, embody much of what I have been arguing lies at the heart of TPR. The speech, viewed by almost ten million people, is entitled “We the People Stimulus Package.” Basso was interviewed and his speech aired on Sean Hannity and Glenn Beck’s Fox productions. In short, his work is central to at least the early formation of the Tea Party movement’s foundational rhetoric. Bob Basso introduced his March 2009 rallying cry to the Tea Party faithful with these opening lines:

What would have happened in 1789 or 1942 or 9/11 if a top government official stepped in front of the people and publicly proclaimed “America was a Nation of

Cowards”? He would have been run out of the country on a rail, packaged in tar and feather, at least - but that's what happened in 2009. And you did nothing! Have you become a nation of cowards America?<sup>200</sup>

With this initial salvo, Basso launches into a wholesale attack on the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress and President Obama. Notice in the rhetorical question, as I believe is characteristic of TPR in general, the gloss over the “Nation of cowards” accusation. What Attorney General Eric Holder actually said was

Though this nation has proudly thought of itself as an ethnic melting pot, in things racial we have always been and continue to be, in too many ways, essentially a nation of cowards.<sup>201</sup>

Omitting the context concerning race from the quotation is disingenuous and unethical, but it supports the radical sense of estrangement Basso feels his audience perceives as reality. This sense of failure, of estrangement, of political alienation is a cornerstone of TPR; it is symptomatic of the underlying discourse structure that forms the protesters relationships to one another. Tea Party advocates are united in their conviction to protest, and it is this shared conviction that forms the foundation of their relationship which is structured according to the discourse of the hysteric.

$$\frac{\mathfrak{S}}{a} \rightarrow \frac{\mathfrak{S}_1}{\mathfrak{S}_2}$$

In the discourse of the hysteric, the agent or subject’s speech is a product of alienation. The symptomatic expression of alienation in the discourse is formulated according to a simple question concerning identity. Holder’s discourse is distinct from Basso’s discourse because for Holder the rhetoric does not suggest cowardice is categorical or unqualified, but Basso takes cowardice to be a universal signifier of identity for the subject ( $\mathfrak{S}$ ). Cowardice is the signifier that symbolizes castration in the

discourse, and as a symptom, constitutes the questioning of identity as illustrated in Basso's rhetoric "Have you become a nation of cowards America?"<sup>202</sup> This is another way of asking the simple question of identity, "Tell me what I am" and requires the answer from the other (audience), "America is not cowardly". The audience does the work in the discourse of supplying the unary trait, the signifier that represents for the audience all that it means to be unified, in this case "America" (S<sub>1</sub>), the signifier that an ego self-identifies with in order to give its fragmented identity consistency. Keep in mind the signifier is arbitrarily assigned meaning; there is a chain of signification initiated in Basso's rhetoric that drives a specific answer to the question his speech implies. The impact for rhetorical agency for the audience of Basso's discourse is that the audience does the work of remedying the symptom, in this case, their individual ego is subsumed into the big Other: America. This means the audience expresses the desire to be the Other which is an active, narcissistic expression of desire. This explains how the identification with the nation-state colonizes audiences who then become extensions of the state's prerogatives.

As he articulates his identification with the master signifiers, Basso's discourse shifts structure to the discourse of the master. No longer is Basso's speech an effect of the symptom, that is to say, his discourse is not driven by the question "Tell me what I am," it is instead animated by the master signifier which is designed to provide answers, and not persistently ask a question about identity. Basso's rhetoric tells the audience what they are, as Basso argues,

The greatest show of arrogance and disdain any congress ever showed any citizenry, your dysfunctionally (sic) elite, self-interested, non-representing

representatives passed the largest spending bill in history without reading it, and you did nothing!<sup>203</sup>

Adding, in a string of epistrophes,

You want them to obey your constitutional mandate and secure your borders and they ignore you! You ask them to enforce your immigration laws and they ignore you! You say stop the madness of handing three hundred billion dollars of a bankrupted treasury to illegal alien welfare rewarding them for making a mockery of your laws and they ignore you! And now in open defiance of the overwhelming will of the people are preparing more amnesty programs. You say stop exporting my nation's vital industries to foreign shores and they ignore you. You say no to using your money to bail out failed, corrupt and greedy businesses and they ignore you. You say implement the E-verify system so American jobs go to American workers and they ignore you.<sup>204</sup>

The rhetoric creates identification by negation; by establishing what something is not, i.e. this discourse structures identification with secure borders, with respecting laws, with keeping money with people who earned it, and with xenophobic nationalism. The repetition of “you want and they ignore you” amplifies the intensity of the divided subjectivity latent within the discourse as the audience is symbolically castrated from the capacity to use or exercise the voice or body, which results in the feeling that one must recoup that which is lost.

Basso clearly illustrates the discourse of the master's structure in the following sentences

Wake up America. While you were playing with the toys of your consumer wealth you lost much more than your bloated economy of living beyond your means. You lost your representative democracy. Your servants have become your masters.<sup>205</sup>

According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, rhetorical agency in this series of sentences could be diagrammed like this:

$$\begin{array}{c} \underline{S}_1 \rightarrow \underline{S}_2 \\ \underline{S} \quad a \end{array}$$

“Wake up America.”

→

“While you were playing with the toys of your consumer wealth you lost much more than your blotted economy of living beyond your means.”

---

“Your servants have become your masters.”

“You lost your representative democracy.”

What the structure illustrates is how the discourse of the master drives is made explicit in Basso’s rhetoric. The master signifier is “America”, and the demand to “wake up” metaphorically treats the signifier “America” in the rhetoric as if it were a person or individual, and it is no coincidence that this is the line which orients the identity of the subject. The system of knowledge that follows from the demand, “Wake up,” is articulated according to an economy of desire. The implication is that one should not enjoy excessively, and there is a veiled protestant consumption ethic that one should be frugal, or at least not conspicuously consume. By extension, this criticism of individual consumption habits is also meant to indict the federal government. The object of derision in the system of knowledge Basso’s rhetoric constructs is an infantilized consumer who plays with toys like a child, which is another way to endorse a specific mode of enjoyment – that to be identified as a subject according to the rhetoric is to be mastered in way. The affective impact of the indictment is designed to encourage action on the part of the audience, caused by the lost object – the *objet a* – “your representative democracy.” What is important in this sentence is the word “your” because it represents in Basso’s rhetoric the narcissistic subject who aims to repossess representative democracy as if it were theirs alone. The authentic or genuine “representative democracy” constituted in Basso’s rhetoric is one that represents the subject, “me” in their entirety. In other words, a



representative democracy is only defined as such when it re-presents “me” or my interests. In this way, Basso’s rhetoric turns around a paradox, as representative democracy is defined by the active narcissistic exclusion of all others from representation if they do not mirror Basso’s belief structure.

It is important to keep in mind that Bob Basso is dressed in colonial garb, complete with the Constitution as back drop, two large old-looking books, a burning candle and his tri-corner hat. He is doing his best to speak from a position of authority embodied by Thomas Paine. The costume speaks to the unconscious truth that is driving the discourse which is that Obama is an illegitimate source of authority. The servants, a metaphorical way of referring to Obama in the speech, are “running the house.” The rhetoric articulates this symptom in the phrase “Your servants have become your masters,” and it is here the latent racism in the discourse surfaces.

Basso’s discourse is designed to manufacture a protesting subject. He exhorts the audience to reject, “Taxation without representation, is tyranny but still you look to government to solve problems they created in the first place. You’re sucking at the hind tit of a dead cow.”<sup>206</sup> The argument Basso is making reinforces the cause or source of desire in the rhetoric to restore white patriarchal authority, which temporarily surfaces as a part of the subject’s identity in the form of a series of rhetorical questions.

Why isn't there a three million 'We the People' march on Washington? A nationwide taxpayer revolt? Thousands of cars and trucks surrounding your nation's capital, bringing your failed government to a standstill?<sup>207</sup>

The rhetorical questions position the audience’s identity to be fragmented, to be unable to reconcile the current state of affairs, and to lack what they want to be aligned with: specifically a movement bent on revolt.

The temporary hysterical positioning of the subject shifts back to the discourse of the master. Basso has amplified the castration, the divided subjectivity and the importance of the missing *objet a*. For rhetorical agency, the discourse of the master compels the audience through the generation of anxiety about the subject-object-enjoyment relation. Desire in the discourse is castrated and is used as a lever to animate and move the audience to adopt the speaker's desired ends. This sets the "master," the subject or agent up to provide an exhortation,

Democracy doesn't repress power - it unleashes it to We the People! Take it now! They dictated an economic salvation plan to you, now it's time to stick it to them with a 'We the People Stimulus Package'.<sup>208</sup>

In this line the audience does the work of imagining a chain of signifiers that forms the knowledge circulating around revolution ( $S_2$ ). In so doing, the audience is primed to "take the country back" and the latent remainder produced is the unstated pleasure of reinstating the reactionary cultural ideal – the *objet a*. The importance of this line is that it gives form to the nascent movement and targets its disaffection with the US government.

Basso continues his speech by linking the audience to previous and future generations, and gives the reactionary cultural ideal some depth by generating more anxiety,

Wake up America - you have allowed yourselves to become little more than cowering spectators, watching the nation your grandparents built, the richest, most powerful, most self-sufficient republic, in history with the highest standard of living any nation ever achieved. Now in the middle of the greatest unprecedented decline in modern history. The world's only superpower can't defend its borders, balance its budget, win its wars, manufacture its own products or protect its own currency. You're total government debt obligation in the next several years is approaching the gross domestic product of the entire world! You've diminished the future of your children, grandchildren and ten more generations of Americans.<sup>209</sup>

The audience is moved to action in part because of the way the rhetoric ties the listener to a symbolic debt owed to an imaginary generation of Americans. The affective impact of these claims is guilt, and the guilt in turn pushes the audience to take up the action Basso advocates. The rhetoric functions to establish what the audience does not want to be, and they react against that image. And the reason the audience is expected to conform is owed again to a symbolic debt, conferred in Basso's histrionics,

Two hundred and thirty three years ago the silent majority in Boston got fed up with Taxation without representation and held a little Tea Party to prove the anger of We the People is on the march. It started the first American revolution. Now it's time to start the second American Revolution. Take an envelope, put a teabag inside, simply seal it and send it to your non-representing representatives in Congress. They'll get the idea. We are mad as hell and we want our country back.<sup>210</sup>

The fusion of present discontent with historical circumstances surrounding the American revolution not only gives the rhetoric its definition, it also constructs the necessity for action and gives it its moral purpose. Action in the present is morally necessary in order to vindicate the generations who have already sacrificed or who will sacrifice in the name of the country.

In the end, Basso encourages the audience to "Look in your mirror, there's your leader, phone your talk radio host," before imploring them to "call for a tax protest, set your internet communities on fire with the idea, but if you decide to do nothing again then buy a gun. You'll need it." Adding,

My name is Thomas Payne. Don't give up hope America. Your country needs a new greatest generation, answer the call, get into the fight. It's a good time to be a patriot! The second American Revolution has just begun.<sup>211</sup>

The moral force the rhetoric picks up by association with the American Revolution also links Tea Party advocacy to the violence associated with war.

The Tea Party rhetoric evolved from the capitalist morality defining audiences in Santelli's rant to a more xenophobic and nationalistic form of speech in Basso's "We The People Stimulus Package." The violence that is implied by Basso's rhetoric is more clearly and fervently articulated in Glen Beck's rhetoric.

### **Glenn Beck**

Glenn Beck's rhetoric is actively narcissistic. The ego defense in the rhetoric is so strong that the speech constructs wildly divergent systems of identification and dis-identification; all of which function to patch up the fragmented subject or agent at work in Beck's speech. A good example of active narcissism in Beck's rhetoric is his lament, "Because if you are a white human that loves America and happens to be a Christian, forget about it Jack."<sup>212</sup> The master signifiers that Beck identifies with "white, Christian American" are indistinguishable from the subject or agent in the discourse and it is narcissistic because his self-image is contingent upon the fact that it is under attack or at risk in the discourse; in other words the stability of his identity depends upon the knowledge about its instability in relation to the other. The anxiety for the subject or agent in the discourse is generated by the concern about your ability to be yourself.

For Beck, identification with the master signifier "America" assumes whiteness; to be American in his rhetoric is to be white. As Beck articulates, "African-American is a bogus, PC, made-up term. I mean, that's not a race. Your ancestry is from Africa and now you live in America."<sup>213</sup> What is driving this discourse is that blackness, or persons of color are seen as the source of derailment in the economy of desire, and this unconscious impulse condenses into the metaphor or image of President Obama in all its

various guises, and that is why his inauguration is traumatic for the subject of this discourse. As Beck makes clear,

Barack Obama ... chose to use his name Barack for a reason – to identify, not with America – you don't take the name Barack to identify with America. You take the name Barack to identify with what? Your heritage? The heritage, maybe, of your father in Kenya, who is a radical? Is – really? Searching for something to give him any kind of meaning, just as he was searching later in life for religion.<sup>214</sup>

The signifier “America” is a categorical term in the speech which washes out all other races and ethnicities, but in so doing it entrenches whiteness as an invisible center; the implied arbiter of identification in the rhetoric. Beck makes this clear in his rhetoric in saying “you don't take the name Barack to identify with America” which implies an African name is incongruent within the signifier “America” his rhetoric assumes. The strongest source of dis-identification is President Obama, which is why he is most often the symptom driving the discourse. On the surface of his discourse, there is a critique of Obama for his policies, but the latent symptom of the divided subject is racist--the signifier Obama represents for the subject the sign of “black power.” Because Beck does not distinguish between America and whiteness, anything President Obama does not support is not whiteness, which is why Glenn Beck thinks,

This president I think has exposed himself over and over again as a guy who has a deep-seated hatred for white people or the white culture....I'm not saying he doesn't like white people, I'm saying he has a problem. This guy is, I believe, a racist.<sup>215</sup>

Here, Beck in a pattern consistent with his speech generally, uses the trope accismus to pretend to refuse or to deny what it is that he actually desires or thinks. Beck's comment “I'm not saying” prefaces what he actually does want to say – that Obama does not like white people. And although his speech suggests there is a difference between hating

people because of the color of their skin and being racist, this is a distinction without a difference. The trope reveals the working of the unconscious truth driving Beck's discourse which is that blackness is an illegitimate source of authority.

Being the object of God's desire explains why Beck's rhetoric is also constituted to dis-identify President Obama and Christianity.

When you're getting Christianity from that trio, after growing up in a family environment — no fault of his own — where your father is a Muslim, an atheist, your mother at least is not practicing any religion, your stepfather is non-practicing Muslim, your grandparents in frequent something called the "Little Red Church," I don't even — I mean, is there any wonder why so many Americans are confused by him? They don't recognize him as a Christian. No.<sup>216</sup>

The master signifiers of identity for Beck are white, Christian and American and the signifiers of dis-identification for the discourse surround Barack Obama. In other words, the knowledge that would be produced for the audience of this discourse is a mutually exclusive relationship between anything associated with Obama and its antithesis: white, Christian, America.

In Glenn Beck's rhetoric, rhetorical agency is structured according to the discourse of the master, but also relies on the discourse of the university. Once the speaker or agent has established the master signifiers organizing the identity, this alignment can then be elaborated upon as a system of knowledge. As Bracher describes, "It is precisely because of the more and more extreme uncovering of the discourse of the master that the discourse of the university finds itself manifested"<sup>217</sup> The master signifiers in the discourse of the university are latently driving the discourse, and are therefore assumed in the system of knowledge. The discourse of the university is apparent as Beck's rhetoric is at times characterized by his use of chalk boards and references to

supplement his broadcast material as if to give it an intellectual credibility; the subject who is supposed to know, and in this way Glenn Beck acts as a kind of teacher. For Beck, the US government under Barack Obama's leadership is a socialist, fascist, communist totalitarianism.

I am not saying that Barack Obama is a fascist. If I'm not mistaken, in the early days of Adolf Hitler, they were very happy to line up for help there as well. I mean, the companies were like, 'Hey, wait a minute. We can get, you know, we can get out of trouble here. They can help, et cetera, et cetera.'<sup>218</sup>

Beck employs accismus which betrays the unconscious truth in the discourse, "Barack Obama is a fascist." In this quote Beck's rhetoric constitutes a system of knowledge which is designed to teach the audience by way of analogy how to understand the Obama administration and its relationship to private industry is analogous to the relationship between Hitler and fascist incorporation in Third Reich Germany. On a surface level this is simply guilt by association, but despite the factual inconsistencies that separate one instance from the other, the rhetoric is effective because it teaches the audience the truth, which is the cause or source of enjoyment in the discourse structure. For Beck this is a consistent system of knowledge,

This is not comparing these people to the people in Germany, but this is exactly what happened to the lead-up with Hitler. Hitler opened up the door and said, 'Hey, companies, I can help you.' They all ran through the door. And then in the end, they all saw, 'Uh-oh. I'm in bed with the devil.' They started to take their foot out, and Hitler said, 'Absolutely not. Sorry gang. This is good for the country. We've got to do these things.' And it was too late.'<sup>219</sup>

Again, Beck uses accismus, but the unconscious hitch in his discourse reveals the truth about the system of knowledge that purports to explain how Obama and these companies enjoy. Obama in this fantasy is one who will take excess pleasure, take advantage of others and trap them for his own purposes. The audience is exposed to a system of

knowledge the support of which is a fantasy about the way Obama and Hitler enjoy similarly. The cause or source of enjoyment in the discourse is generated in the work the audience does to understand the distribution of enjoyment that Obama shares with Hitler. Hitler, and by association, Obama, in Beck's rhetoric represent death, not just an end to life, but also symbolically an end to the capacity to use your voice or to speak. That is why Beck says, "I fear a Reichstag moment. God forbid, another 9/11. Something that will turn this machine on, and power will be seized and voices will be silenced."<sup>220</sup> In actual death, no one can speak and so symbolically the inability to use the voice figures as an imaginary death in the rhetoric. The inability to use or incapacity to exercise some part of the body, including the voice, signifies what psychoanalysis calls castration.

In Beck's rhetoric, history gives the knowledge articulated a degree of credibility—it becomes the foundational assumption driving the veracity of the discourse. What happened in the past comes to life in the form of this analogy which bears directly on the present circumstances as a result. Beck claims,

I know the progressives are using progressive tactics. They're not using Nazi tactics. The real answer is the Nazis were using early American progressive tactics. And that's not my opinion, that's historic fact.<sup>221</sup>

By speaking from a historical subjectivity, Beck's discourse is driven by the latent master signifiers inherent in this system of knowledge. As Dean comments, "What is hidden under the facts, however, what the facts want to deny, is the way they are supported by power and authority  $S_1$ ."<sup>222</sup> For a historical system of knowledge, one assumption driving the credibility of this discourse is that what happened in the past is known objectively and the facts described speak without interpretative bias. That history repeats itself is a further assumption in this discourse, and in the system of knowledge told through Beck,



audiences get to temporarily suspend their doubts about what is as well as make predictions about what will come. History provides explanations of how events unfold, and as Beck aligns Obama with Hitler, and provides the a chain of signifiers linking them, the audience is structured to continue the production of knowledge providing further linkages as well as inferring the effects of the system. Beck further invokes the comparison,

This is fascism. This is what happens when you merge special interests, corporations, and the government. This is what happens. And if people like you don't take a stand ... at some point, you know what poem keeps going through my mind is 'First they came for the Jews.' People, all of us are like, well, this news doesn't really affect me. Well, I'm not a bondholder. Well, I'm not in the banking industry. Well, I'm not a big CEO. Well, I'm not on Wall Street. Well, I'm not a car dealer. I'm not an autoworker. Gang, at some point they're going to come for you.<sup>223</sup>

The affective impact of linking Obama to Hitler is the generation and amplification of fear, when Beck says "They're going to come for you" in the university discourse this is seen as inevitable.

Lacan's dictum that desire is the desire of the Other is all important in accounting for the distinctiveness of Beck's Christian rhetoric. What Lacan's psychoanalytic theory is trying to explain is how the subject or agent's desire is derived from the desire of the Other. For Lacan, the Other in the discourse can be another person, an image, a signifier or something else that acts as a cause or source of unconscious desire for the subject or agent. Since desire is the desire of the Other, and the Other as God or founding fathers figures prominently in Beck's rhetoric, Lacanian psychoanalysis is uniquely positioned to analyze Beck's Christian rhetoric. Beck's Christian rhetoric is distinctive in part because the subject or agent in the discourse is an object of the Other's *jouissance*. This means the

subject or agent in the discourse is a passive object of the Other's desire, and the Other in the discourse is the one who actively enjoys for the subject or agent. In Beck's rhetoric, the Other activates the libidinal drive for the subject or agent in the discourse, and the subject or agent then is structured to serve as a sort of conduit for communicating the desire of the Other—whether it be God or some other signifier representing the Other in the rhetoric. On Beck's television show, he said,

God is giving a plan I think to me that is not really a plan. ... The problem is that I think the plan that the Lord would have us follow is hard for people to understand. ... Because of my track record with you who have been here for a long time. Because of my track record with you, I beg of you to help me get this message out, and I beg of you to pray for clarity on my part.<sup>224</sup>

Beck's rhetoric structures the subject or agent in the discourse to be the object of God's *jouissance*. God, or the Other to whom Beck's rhetoric is directed, provides the discourse with the object of desire, "a plan." The "plan" activates the subject or agent's drive to desire, and the aim of desire in the rhetoric is to receive the object, "God is giving a plan I think to me." The object is invested with a value (it is a "message") that "is hard for people to understand," but "understanding" or "clarity" functions in the discourse as signifiers meant to confer the satisfaction of desire. In other words, the subject or agent in the rhetoric is driven by the desire to understand clearly, which is another way of saying the subject or agent enjoys in the rhetoric by making sense (*jouis-sense*) of God's speech (the plan or message). The subject or agent functions as a sort of decoder machine, as a tool for producing God's desire. While the passive positioning of the subject or agent in the discourse is common in religious rhetoric generally, in Beck's rhetoric it is especially obvious that rhetorical agency for the subject or agent is structured to transmit the desire of the Other or God. The subject or agent in Beck's rhetoric is simply an intermediary or

transparent channel for the desire of the Other, or in other words, the object of God's desire.

Beck's rhetoric reflects the tension caused by the desire of the Other in the unconscious as his rhetoric is ambivalent and conflicted yet nonetheless remains committed to God's desire.

I'm only writing a few bullet points. And I am doing that so I don't get in the way of the spirit, in case he wants to talk...if you would just pray that I would be able to hear because sometimes -- sometimes he's screaming at me and I still can't hear it.<sup>225</sup>

The inability to use the ear correctly in the service of God's desire illustrates the source or cause of the subject or agent's divided subjectivity in the discourse. Rhetorical agency in the discourse gets its force from channeling the desire of the Other, in this case God. Beck's divided subjectivity in part stems from his subjectivity or agency as a passive libidinal object. Beck's rhetoric unconsciously driven by his desire to be the object, but because the subject or agent in his discourse can never be fully integrated into the signifier God, (what we commonly call sin), the discourse for the subject or agent remains fixated upon integrating this excess and in this way it structures the fundamental fantasy.

God's desire or the desire of the Other is so strong that at times the subject or agent becomes virtually indistinguishable from God's desire. "The plan that He would have me articulate, I think, to you, is get behind Me -- and I don't mean 'me,' I mean Him. Get behind Me. Stand behind Me."<sup>226</sup> The impact on rhetorical agency of this fusion is that the person or individual is no longer directly morally responsible for their actions. Which means rhetorical agency in this discourse is driven by the Other's active

articulation of the libido, “get behind Me”. The subsumed identity of the subject is evident in the struggles to disentangle “Him” and “me”.

Beck’s rhetoric is not however, exclusively constituted in God’s desire, his speech also incorporates the desire of the Founding Fathers as the Other. Beck makes this linkage clear with respect to the Founders in the following quote,

Tea parties believe in small government. We believe in returning to the principles of our Founding Fathers. We respect them. We revere them. Shoot me in the head before I stop talking about the Founders. Shoot me in the head if you try to change our government.<sup>227</sup>

Beck’s insistence that he should be shot in the head if he fails them indicates his relation to the source of the active libido in the discourse signified in the “Founding Fathers”. Just as his ears will never be able to listen completely to service God’s desire, he will never be able to talk enough to service the Founders. No signifier in the language could possibly eradicate the demand or the desire of the Other. The desire of the Founding Fathers, constituted in the customs, traditions, history and hegemonic authority, are an effect of the violent and aggressive derailment of desire.

It is also absolutely critical that we note the Other in Beck’s rhetoric is generally a man, (God is referred to with masculine pronouns in Beck’s rhetoric, the Founding Fathers are represented this way); the desire of the Other is always already patriarchal. The active libido exerting its force in the discourse is the direct result of the demands made by these patriarchs, which is why Beck and so many other Tea Party advocates back up their arguments by appealing to God, to Ronald Reagan, the Founding Fathers, and Jesus etc. The masculine gender of the Other in the rhetoric produces the phallic signifier in the discourse. For Lacan, the phallic signifier is a metaphor meant to confer

conceptually where the rhetoric gets its force or power. The phallus is not to be confused with the penis, the phallus is the signifier in the discourse that represents the energy propelling the generation of speech for the subject. The phallus represents the capacity to survive, to reproduce, regenerate, etc. and in this way, is directly connected to the system of prohibitions that constrain the circulation of desire in the culture. But the phallus also signifies the very structure of unconscious desire, which is, the desire to be the desire of the Other. Lacan incorporated the term “Name-of-the-Father” (NotF) into the psychoanalytic nosology to capture the nuances of the phallic function in discourse.

The term “Name of the Father” indicates that what is at issue is not a person but a signifier, one that is replete with cultural and religious significance. It is a key signifier for the subject’s symbolic universe, regulating this order and giving it its structure. Its function ... is to be the vehicle of the law that regulates desire – both the subject’s desire and the omnipotent desire of the maternal figure [mOther]<sup>228</sup>

The paternal metaphor generates desire because it limits the circulation of *jouissance* in the culture. What this means is, the system of prohibitions (rules, norms, what Grigg is calling the vehicle of the law) constitutes the Father’s desire to order and regulate desire but in the very act of regulating and ordering, these rules, norms and laws generate desire. In either case, the introduction of the phallic signifier into the discourse produces an imaginary castration. Imaginary castration refers to the lack which is signified in the rhetoric in all the ways custom, tradition, history, and white male capitalist hegemony is eroding. Ultimately the mOther’s desire is to sustain desire itself, which implies desire will always find new signifiers in which the libido is invested. In speech, the phallic function is articulated as what Lacan called the paternal metaphor. As Grigg describes,

...the paternal metaphor is an operation in which the Name-of-the-Father is substitutes for the mother’s desire, thereby producing a new species of meaning,

phallic meaning, which heralds the introduction of the subject to the phallic economy of ... castration.<sup>229</sup>

Because the Name-of-the-Father is only a substitution, it is a constant source of anxiety and imaginary castration in the discourse, but it nevertheless attempts to temporarily suspend the castration through order. In this way, order is always superimposed on the subject or agent by the imaginary relations that exist with respect to the Other in the rhetoric, whether it be the Founding Fathers, Ronald Reagan, God (Him), Jesus etc. The castration that Beck is attempting to suspend in his discourse, if it were reconnected, would allow the subject or agent to activate the desire of the (m)Other—which in this case is the values and ideals represented in the discourse by the signifiers “Founding Fathers,” Reagan, etc. The signification of the paternal metaphor by the subject or agent represents the Name-of-the-Father, which conceptually refers to the speech in the discourse that constitutes the disruption of the otherwise unfettered repetition of custom, tradition, history and authority in the culture. The discourse is structured so that President Obama can never be a source of active libidinal enjoyment; Obama and his administration are constituted in the rhetoric as a block or short – circuit that derails active libidinal enjoyment. As the quotation illustrates,

When you see the effects of what they're doing to the economy, remember these words: We will survive. No -- we'll do better than survive, we will thrive. As long as these people are not in control. They are taking you to a place to be slaughtered!<sup>230</sup>

Although cryptic, what is clear is that “they” or “these people” (meaning the Obama administration), are directly threatening the capacity for Beck’s audience to survive which also constitutes a direct threat to the Other. Not only does the quotation link the administration to death, but symbolically, this signifies how the Obama administration is

constituted in the discourse as the very antithesis of the phallus. The only power the Obama administration has in the rhetoric is the power to produce death, and his discourse is driven by the phallic signifier, which represents the “survival instinct,” “life-force” or libido necessary for speech to continue as all discourse requires a substitute for the mOther’s desire (otherwise the subject or agent becomes psychotic).

In order to restore the relationship between libido and desire, Beck’s rhetoric incessantly appeals to masculine imagery in order to realign the economy of *jouissance*, which is defined by the knowledge of enjoyment signified by the Founding Fathers. The Founding Fathers in the discourse operates as the signifier Lacan calls the paternal metaphor because it defines what is impermissible, i.e. “taxation without representation,” “big government,” “deficit spending” etc. But the Founding Fathers also signify what is permitted, in other words there is a specific knowledge of enjoyment embodied in the image and signifiers constituting the Founding Fathers that constructs the economy of *jouissance* driving Tea Party advocates. The impact of the paternal metaphor in Tea Party rhetoric affectively unites advocates in the desire to prohibit surplus enjoyment. This means Tea Party rhetoric derives pleasure from the pain produced by the prohibition of surplus *jouissance*. There is no word that in English that captures this impulse better than what Germans call *schadenfreude*; taking pleasure in other’s misery.

Glen Beck’s rhetoric is also distinctive in that his speech reflects periodic, pre-psychotic moments in which there is a conflation of the subject and object. The phallic meaning is absent in psychosis, but for Beck whose discourse is pre-psychotic, the phallic meaning is not absent, it is simply impotent. Unlike full blown psychosis, Beck’s rhetoric

merely flirts with foreclosure. In a full-blown psychotic, there is no “no” in the language, and the no is foundational for subjectivity. Beck describes his own sense of foreclosure from the social discourse, “Because if you are a white human that loves America and happens to be a Christian, forget about it, Jack.” In effect, Lacan’s teaching allows us to see how rhetorical agency in the example is contingent upon the near erasure of the subject or agent’s master signifiers, those words in the speech that represent the subject as an object to the subject (self-consciousness). Agency in this respect is not linked in any way with the speaker, as the speaker in this instance is clearly delegating their agency to another (God). In this way, Beck’s rhetoric illustrates the fading of the subject from the discourse in the quotation cited above when he said “Shoot me in the head before I stop talking about the Founders. Shoot me in the head if you try to change our government.”

What this means is if your master signifiers are unable to be represented in the social discourse, then you might as well be dead. This is a symbolic death for the subject as indicated by Beck’s constant insistence that if the relation is disturbed he would rather not identify at all— “shoot me in the head.” The master signifier  $S_1$  is missing from the social discourse and the subject is unable to provide a substitute for the mOther’s desire (paternal metaphor), and therefore the trauma of the symptom so overwhelms the subject or agent that they constitute themselves in the discourse by the very nature of their being crowded out of the discourse. When Beck says “Shoot me in the head” this represents a suicidal motive that is an enigma of psychosis: the subject either exists in the discourse structure or the subject doesn’t exist at all. The reason Beck’s otherwise hysterical discourse becomes pre-psychotic is because in there is a getting out from underneath the



desire of the Other so that the law no longer exists and the subject is no longer bound by the discourse.

Moreover, the “maternal figure” in the speech structure, a point to which I have only hinted at so far, concerns what this speech is always geared to reproduce: freedom. The phrase “lady liberty,” is not transparent. The reason freedom, which goes by “liberty” in the phrase, is feminized is because it is the thing subordinated in the speech. If freedom is always the rallying cry, then it is the thing we are always lacking. Otherwise, why would we want more of it? It is this way in which freedom and its rhetorical equivalents are used to push the audience into political action. The connection to the maternal figure eludes us only if we do not at least consider by way of analogy the ideal relation between the child and its mother. Since the infant is dependent upon the mother for comfort and nourishment, anything that distracts the mother from the infant would be regarded by the infant as an imposition estranging it from its only source of satisfaction. Whatever this distraction is, be it the father as psychoanalysis for Freud contended, or the phone or the dog, no matter what it is that distracts, that there is an interruption at all is what matters for human psychology. For Lacan, this interruption which functions to intervene in the articulation of the mother’s desire is called the paternal metaphor. Again Grigg explains

The paternal metaphor is an operation in which the “Name-of-the-Father” is substituted for the mother's desire, thereby producing a new species of meaning, phallic meaning, which heralds the introduction of the subject to the phallic economy of the neurotic and, therefore, to castration. This phallic meaning, as both a product of the paternal metaphor and the key to all questions of sexual identity, is absent in psychosis... in psychosis, then, the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father is accompanied by the corresponding absence, foreclosure, of the phallic meaning that is necessary for libidinal relations.<sup>231</sup>

For our purposes, what this mean is that freedom is the metaphor that stands in for the mother desire. Since freedom is a political value we inherited from our father's fathers (our founding fathers according to the Tea Party movement). We are not so much cut off from the founding fathers as they are “excluded” from the Tea Party symbolic order by President Obama and the Congress. We are rendered impotent without them—hence the importance of libidinal relations. This also helps explain why the Tea Party movement seems bent on advocating economic issues but nonetheless gets wrapped up in other conservative establishment imperatives like hetero-normative marriage (the libidinal relations imply the ability to reproduce, which is what got us here and will ensure there are more of us in the future). This is why understanding how socialism, fascism and communism fit into this structure is important, as these elements function to cancel the access to freedom for the audience. “If there is socialism in the world, then there can be no freedom,” goes the simplified version of these structural relations.

To contextualize and illustrate why liberty or freedom is somehow like a mother, we need only look at the way it is always positioned as something left lacking, something the audience is made to want because, like the mother, it is the source of satisfaction, whose attention is distracted by the specter of communism, socialism or fascism (sometimes all three). The patriarchal signifier operates according to the desire that supposes if we want her back, then we must suppress, repress, destroy, fight, and so on, those things which keep us from having her. This is the paradox of freedom, for those who assert it will get a new master so long as they are a slave to freedom. And that is precisely what TPR is designed to do.

### **Conclusions: Rhetorical Agency and Tea Party Rhetoric**

What does Tea Party rhetoric tell us about rhetorical agency? The discourse of the hysteric and the discourse of the master are mutually reinforcing. Subjects or agents can prime an audience to be mastered by intensifying a sense of alienation, in a sense intensifying the trauma of identity fragmentation experienced by the subject. Intensifying the trauma of identity fragmentation is manipulative and results in a coercion of the audience which produces the effect of indoctrination.

While at times hysterical, Tea Party rhetoric is structured most often according to the discourse of the master. The agent or subject in the discourse of the master will attempt to repress the divided subject, which for Tea Partiers is marked by the symptom of President Obama by articulating master signifiers of either identification or dis-identification. It is divided subjectivity that produces the feeling of castration which in Tea Party rhetoric is expressed in all the ways the movement is not listened to, does not have a voice, as well as in the perceived lack of white patriarchal capitalist power. The discourse structures a specific way of enjoyment defined in the rhetoric by the disdain for excess procured by those who “didn’t earn it.” This circulation is a form of psychosis, where the symbolic order has no point from which power is legitimately directed unless it is necessarily produced by the servant who wishes to become a master. Speakers or agents in this discourse work to master the audience through the use of master signifiers, and the effect of the master signifier on the audience produces an automatic response, wherein the audience hears or sees the signifier and immediately works to produce the system of knowledge surrounding the signifier. The master signifier is totalizing in that

they provides the otherwise fragmented identity with a series of unary traits which catch the person or individual up in the symbolic order so that the ego attaches to the signifiers as if they were self-same. The rhetorical agency in the discourse of the master is actively narcissistic and this is why Tea Party rhetoric is often aggressive and violent, and also why Tea Party advocates are resistant to any form of compromise or discussion of other perspectives.

How does the circulation of desire driving the rhetoric affect rhetorical agency? In the discourse of the master the prohibition of *jouissance* takes place in a fundamental fantasy that the speaker is separated from their *jouissance* because of a perceived slave who gets to enjoy surplus *jouissance*. This fantasy defines the agency of the master discourse in that rhetoric will always be clung to in an attempt to relieve this perceived injustice. This discourse further attempts to entrench the status quo and is very powerful in aligned audiences to its rhetorical looping. It essentially defines who subjects are in an egoic attempt to repress the fact that identity can never be fully consummated by any signifier. Thus, the agency of speakers aligned in the master discourse is one of constant speaking, as subjects attempt to “master” their own divided subjectivity as well as the audience’s subjectivity with master signifiers, and is one in which rhetoric will often be repeated, shouted, and consciously affirmed, all the while playing off of the unconscious divided subjectivity of the audience. The need to consciously affirm the master signifiers is never done, as subjects repress and are haunted by a looming unconscious divided subjectivity.

Overall this is a powerful discourse, as its structure facilitates the indoctrination of subjects. The rhetoric constitutes a sort of discursive machinery that automatically engages subjects or agents and is driven by intense anxiety about the cause or source of desire. Yet, as resistance to Tea Party rhetoric also suggests, the process of interpellation is not totalizing. Lacan's theory of discourse helps us see this point as well giving the analysis a pivot point in desire by which interpretation of the rhetoric in the discourse can proceed.

---

<sup>182</sup> Rick Santelli, On-air editor, "Santelli's Rant," in *Power Lunch*, Editorial (Chicago/New York: CNBC, February 19, 2009).

<sup>183</sup> Mark Hudson, "Understanding Information Media in the Age of Neoliberalism," *Progressive Librarian* 16 (Fall 1999): 26.

<sup>184</sup> Hudson, "Age of Neoliberalism," 26.

<sup>185</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, 1966, translated by Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 481.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 481.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> Santelli, *Power Lunch*.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 1991, translated by Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007), 21.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> Tim Reid, "Tea Party Turns Nasty: 'It's Our Country—Let's Take It Back.'" *The Times* February 6 2010, *The Sunday Times*, 1-8-2011.

<[http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us\\_and\\_americas/article7017218.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us_and_americas/article7017218.ece)>.

<sup>200</sup> Bob Basso, "We the People Stimulus Package," speech (San Diego: YouTube, March 9, 2009).

<sup>201</sup> Eric Holder, United States Attorney General, "Remarks as Prepared for Delivery by Attorney General Eric Holder at the Department of Justice African American History Month Program," speech (Washington D.C.: The United States Department of Justice, February 18, 2009).

<sup>202</sup> Bob Basso, "We the People Stimulus Package."

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

- 
- <sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>212</sup> Glenn Beck, Host, *The Glenn Beck Program* (Premier Radio Networks, April 2, 2007).
- <sup>213</sup> Glenn Beck, Host, *The Glenn Beck Program* (Premier Radio Networks, January 7, 2010).
- <sup>214</sup> Glenn Beck, Host, *The Glenn Beck Program* (Premier Radio Networks, February 4, 2010).
- <sup>215</sup> Brian Kilmeade, Host, *Fox and Friends*, commentary by Glenn Beck (Fox Television, July 28, 2009).
- <sup>216</sup> Glenn Beck, Host, *The Glenn Beck Program* (Premier Radio Networks, February 4, 2010).
- <sup>217</sup> Mark Bracher, "On the Psychological and Social Functions of Language: Lacan's Theory of the Four Discourses," in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society*, ed. Mark Bracher et al. (New York and London: New York University Press, 1994), 117.
- <sup>218</sup> Glenn Beck, Host, *The Glenn Beck Program* (Premier Radio Networks, April 1, 2009).
- <sup>219</sup> Glenn Beck, Contributor, *Fox News* (Fox Television, April 1, 2009).
- <sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>221</sup> Glenn Beck, Host, *The Glenn Beck Program* (Premier Radio Networks, January 20, 2011).
- <sup>222</sup> Jodi Dean, *Žižek's Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 83.
- <sup>223</sup> Glenn Beck, Host, *The Glenn Beck Program* (Premier Radio Networks, June 10, 2009).
- <sup>224</sup> Glenn Beck, Host, *The Glenn Beck Program* (Premier Radio Networks, April 20, 2010).
- <sup>225</sup> Glenn Beck, Host, *The Glenn Beck Program* (Premier Radio Networks, August 26, 2010).
- <sup>226</sup> Glenn Beck, Host, *The Glenn Beck Program* (Premier Radio Networks, April 20, 2010).
- <sup>227</sup> Glenn Beck, Contributor, *Fox News* (Fox Television, June 9, 2010).
- <sup>228</sup> Russell Grigg, *Lacan, Language, and Philosophy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008), 9.
- <sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>230</sup> Glenn Beck, Contributor, *Fox News* (Fox Television, Nov. 3, 2009).
- <sup>231</sup> Grigg, *Lacan, Language, and Philosophy*, 115.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

### **Posthumanist Rhetorical Agency, Discourse and Ideology**

Since its publication nearly twenty years ago, Gaonkar's criticism of the Neo-Aristotelian interpretive turn and his indictment of the humanist paradigm of agency have remained central to the discipline's dialogue about the conceptualization of rhetorical agency. Gaonkar maintained the humanist paradigm of agency was theoretically defective because it assumed the "conscious and deliberating agent," is a "seat of origin" for discourse rather than a "point of articulation" in a "discourse practice."<sup>232</sup> Assuming that the speaker is a "seat of origin" for the discourse results in criticism that reads a "given discourse practice (or text) as a manifestation of the rhetor's strategic consciousness," thereby marginalizing as "so many items in the rhetor's design"<sup>233</sup> those "structures that govern agency: language, unconscious, and capital."<sup>234</sup> Although scholars like Campbell, Crowley, Geisler and Cloud remain suspicious of the postmodern alternative Gaonkar's line of argument seems to suggest, I have shown how the disagreements can be clarified through recourse to Lacan's theory of the four discourses and psychoanalysis generally, as they aid us in refining the theory and methods that underlie our analysis of discourse and ideology, and hence, rhetorical agency.

With respect to the first issue Gaonkar's criticism engendered, Lacanian psychoanalysis clarifies what Gaonkar vaguely referred to as a "discourse practice," because, for Lacan, discourse is defined succinctly as a social link—an interpersonal, intrapersonal, or intersubjective bond between subjects constituted in language. Thus, what is considered a discourse practice in a Lacanian framework is not thought of as merely "a point of articulation," but instead is an articulation meant to create a relationship between speaking subjects. This gives the phenomenon Gaonkar meant to identify some definitional precision, which in turn aids rhetorical critics in the process of analyzing the rhetoric constituting the bond between subjects in a specific practice. The second issue Gaonkar's criticism engendered concerns ideology, and here too I maintain a Lacanian framework clarifies what some in the discipline see as a key defect implied in the postmodern turn Gaonkar advocated.

For some theorists, as Crowley's essay illustrated, postmodern theory replaces the humanist subject with a conceptualization that is so theoretically fragmented and de-centered by discourse that agency becomes unimportant, or worse, is cancelled out by ideology. However, as Alcorn concludes,

Lacan's understanding of the subject, as composed of components and processes essentially divided and self-alienated, neither reduces, devalues, nor eliminates either the importance or the phenomenal character of the subject.<sup>235</sup>

This mistaken belief about the postmodern or post-structuralist subject, and in particular, the belief postmodern or post-structuralist subjectivity implies the subject or agent is virtually powerless to resist the effects of ideology, as Campbell and Cloud attest, is often based upon Althusser's conceptualization of interpellation. Despite Althusser's reading, Lacan's Imaginary order and the rhetorical agency it entails, does not assume that



ideology interpellates the subject in some totalizing fashion. Instead, Lacan's theory of the four discourses shows that, while the subject can get caught-up in the discourse, and in this sense becomes bound to the ego identifications that support an affirmation of an ideology, subjectivity remains split—this means the fundamental structure of subjectivity itself means the effect of ideological speech is never totalizing or deterministic. As long as there is a speaking subject, subjectivity as such can never be fully determined or totalizing. Therefore, while Althusser remains a resource for many in the discipline, his misreading of Lacan renders his notion of interpellation suspect, and for this reason, encourages us to return to the nuances of Lacan's theory of discourse to explain how ideology affects rhetorical agency.

Since Lacan's theory does not assume discourse determines the subject or agent, but is capable of explaining how subjects or agents are affected by discourse in non-totalizing ways, the theory of the four discourses allows us to see that rhetorical agency in a discourse is capable of both resisting change and acting as its conduit. Even if rhetorical agency is conceptualized as either counter-hegemonic or hegemonic, as Cloud and many other critical theorists maintain it should, it remains the case that our conceptualization of rhetorical agency needs to account for both. In light of this demand, Lacan's theory of the four discourses and the conceptualization of rhetorical agency it entails accounts for rhetoric's resistive and acquiescent possibilities in discourse practices. As Alcorn observes,

For Lacan, relations between discourse and the subject are two-sided. The subject operates upon the discourse, and discourse operates the subject. This dialogical interaction between subject functions shaping discourse and social forces

providing the original matrix of discourse is useful for understanding the particular nature of speech products.<sup>236</sup>

Since it is the case rhetoric is put to the service of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic ideological possibilities, sometimes in the same discourse practice, it is necessary to employ a conceptualization of rhetorical agency that accounts for either possibility.

Lacan was focused on desire as the key ingredient underlying the structure that drives the articulation of rhetorical agency, whether this desire manifests itself in hegemonic or counter-hegemonic discourse practices or not. Therefore, it is my contention it is Lacan's theory of discourse which gives rhetoricians a key resource for analyzing rhetoric in ideological circumstances.

While Gaonkar certainly advanced the conversation about rhetorical agency, and many have join it, I meant to add Lacan's teaching as yet another voice in the discussion because it is clear psychoanalysis enriches our understanding of discourse, ideology and the relationship both have with rhetorical agency. However, we should also be certain to acknowledge that, for Gaonkar, what was missing in the humanist paradigm, and what any rehabilitative effort must restore to the concept of rhetorical agency, are those features that govern the generation of agency: the unconscious, language and capital. As Gaonkar rightly points out, a satisfactory effort at recuperating rhetorical agency should account for these governing features. While Campbell, Crowley, Geisler and Cloud all contend in their own ways with this conceptual burden, I have shown how Lacan's account of the unconscious, language and capital in discourse is directly responsive to the defect Gaonkar identified. Therefore, as I will reiterate next, in this dissertation I have

also tried to establish how Lacan's theory of discourse accounts for the unconscious, language and capital as governing features of rhetorical agency.

### **Posthumanist Rhetorical Agency: The Unconscious, Language and Capital**

As I indicated above, Lacan is certainly not the first to address the need to account for the unconscious, language and capital in explaining agency. However, the advantage of including Lacan as a resource is his theory addresses these concerns without resorting to a rehabilitated version of humanist agency to account for them. Rehabilitated versions of humanist agency are especially ill-equipped to account for the unconscious as a factor in the production of rhetorical agency—although it is clear (even to those who endeavor to rehabilitate humanist rhetorical agency), that rhetoric “persuades” or “compels” people or individuals in ways they cannot account for consciously. This is why Lacan always assumed psychoanalysis and rhetoric were so closely related. As Lacan said in a letter to Chaim Perlman, “it is on the basis of the unconscious’ manifestations, which I deal with as an analyst, that I have developed a theory of the effects of the signifier that intersects rhetoric.”<sup>237</sup> What sets Lacan’s theory of the four discourses apart, is his insistence that agency is not preoccupied with subject positions or even “situated around the subject,” it is an unconscious expression of desire. Desire or *jouissance* is what drives the subject or agent, which why Lacan insists “the key [to agency] lies in raising the question of what *jouissance* is.”<sup>238</sup>

While Lacan does not dismiss the value of the humanist subject, as he says “the entry of the subject as agent of discourse has had very surprising results,”<sup>239</sup> the criticism or interpretation of discourse should not be predicated upon the humanist agent of

discourse. Instead, he insists “the key to all the mainsprings is to be found...in *jouissance*.”<sup>240</sup> The subject’s rhetoric is symptomatic of the unconscious desire for *jouissance*, which is what the posthumanist paradigm assumes is the source of rhetorical agency. Rhetorical agency then, is the realignment of rhetoric in discourse in an attempt to regain access to the *jouissance*, which is transformative because it changes the circulation of desire in a relationship. Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory allows us to see how the unconscious logic of desire drives different manifestations of agency in discourse. This approach gives critics an analytical tool for identifying the effect of desire on subjects, and a means for rearticulating desire to change and analyze the interpersonal, intersubjective and intrapersonal relationships that constitute our everyday life. In this way and for these reasons I am claiming Lacan’s theory of discourse satisfies Gaonkar’s first conceptual demand—that a conceptualization of rhetorical agency should account for the unconscious as a governing feature of agency. What remains to be seen is how Lacan’s teaching informs the remaining conceptual demands Gaonkar pointed out, language and capital.

The theory of the four discourses and the conceptualization of rhetorical agency they entail are grounded in the theory of language Lacan developed, which emphasizes the role speech plays in producing human subjectivity. In this way, Lacan’s theory of the four discourses satisfies Gaonkar’s expectation (and one our discipline expects generally), that agency in a postmodern vein account for language as a fundamental aspect of human existence. Lacan’s earliest thinking, as Gunn illustrated with his work on the Imaginary order, is preoccupied almost entirely by language and the role it plays in

the formation of subjectivity. As Lacan's thinking evolved, one only finds an increasing emphasis placed upon the Symbolic order. No matter what stage we consider in Lacan's career, it is clear he remains faithful to the advancement of rhetorical agency as a distinctly Symbolic and uniquely human activity.

The theory of the four discourses and the conceptualization of rhetorical agency it entails also accounts for the final requirement Gaonkar specified: capital. Lacan's theory explains how the subject regards the accumulation of the satisfaction of desire as something akin to the accumulation of capital. As Lacan's analysis of Marx's theory of surplus value reveals, for the subject, admittedly at a significant point of abstraction, the accumulation of surplus value is indistinguishable from the accumulation of surplus *jouissance*. That is why Lacan claimed the master-slave discourse did not disappear with the prohibition of slavery—it was merely generalized into the basic underlying character of capitalism. While the remaining discourses do have a part to play in the analysis of capital and its effects on rhetorical agency, in particular it is the discourse of the master (and the dialectic it sets in motion) that models most closely the way in which desire in a global capitalist system operates in discourse practices.

Lacan's strength as a theorist in part rests upon his understanding of the value subject's invest in the exchange of desire through speech in the interest of accumulating satisfaction. In Lacan's theory of the four discourses, the subject seeks the satisfaction of desire in the same way the capitalist seeks the satisfaction of capital through the accumulation of wealth. The posthumanist conceptualization of rhetorical agency which emerges from Lacan's theory of the four discourses accounts for Marx's theory of surplus

value in its conceptualization of desire as surplus *jouissance*. For Marx, surplus value was a necessary function of capitalism, but he does not make the psychological connection to the way in which surplus value reflects the underlying economy of desire for the subject. Lacan accounts for the satisfaction associated with surplus value by creating a conceptualization of surplus *jouissance*. Lacan's theory of the four discourses incorporates Marx's insight about the centrality of surplus value in a capitalist order into an economy of exchange predicated upon the unconscious and its formation in the language making up a culture.

In Lacan, we can see Marx's basic suspicion about capitalism joined to a theory of language and its unconscious workings in an underlying economy of desire. The only difference, with respect to the theory, is the insistence upon *jouissance* as a conceptual requisite. The conceptualization of rhetorical agency which emerges ties together capital, the unconscious, and language into a comprehensive theory that rises to the challenge Gaonkar initially laid-out. Therefore, as the preceding paragraphs established, not only does the theory of the four discourses and the conceptualization of rhetorical agency it entails account for the unconscious, language and capital, thereby satisfying Gaonkar's conceptual burden, it also helps us to see past the theoretical impasses Gaonkar's criticism spawned within the discipline about the relationship between discourse, ideology and rhetorical agency. The Lacanian subject or agent is neither determined by discourse, nor is the agent or subject in the theory powerless to create changes with discourse—Lacan's subject or agent is only encumbered by desire. Desire, not knowledge, explains how discourse structures the subject or agent, and it is desire that

accounts for how the subject or agent changes the discourse structure with rhetoric. For these reasons, I submit Lacan's theory of discourse offers rhetorical theorists an alternative framework for conceptualizing rhetorical agency along posthumanist lines.

### **The Posthumanist Conceptualization of Rhetorical Agency**

Lacan's theory of the four discourses provides both the terminology and the theoretical foundation needed to examine rhetorical agency in any subject's speech by providing models that identify and distinguish between different articulations of desire in distinct discourses. The rhetoric constituting the discourse reveals the subject or agent's unconscious desire, and in distinguishing between the different ways in which desire manifests itself in the speech, we can begin to differentiate between different manifestations of rhetorical agency. The analysis of the GID debate and Tea Party rhetoric shows the four rhetorical agencies at work in discourse practices as they function according to the unconscious logic of desire, thereby demonstrating the utility of Lacan's theory of discourse in action for rhetorical analysts. I turn first to Tea Party rhetoric.

### **Posthumanist Rhetorical Agency and Tea Party Rhetoric**

The first discourse structure and the rhetorical agency it entails that I discuss in this section is the discourse of the master. In the analysis provided in chapter four, I showed how rhetorical agency in the discourse of the master is driven by the desire to produce order in the knowledge-system. The subject or agent in the discourse of the master provides the signifiers necessary to make the interlocutor's knowledge coherent, to provide some organizing principle, a signifier, or some systematic attempt to resolve

confusion. Basso clearly illustrates the discourse of the master's structure and the rhetorical agency it entails in the following example,

Wake up America. While you were playing with the toys of your consumer wealth you lost much more than your bloated economy of living beyond your means. You lost your representative democracy. Your servants have become your masters.<sup>241</sup>

The loss of *jouissance*, signified in the word "representative democracy," confers for Basso the truth of the unconscious desire driving the discourse structure, which is established in the order Basso makes out of the knowledge-system in his rhetoric with the sentence "Your servants have become your masters."

I think we can hardly overlook his metaphor as just a coincidence, as what he is saying suggests the inversion is not only a political one, as the words "representative democracy" suggests, but is also plainly a statement about the inversion of the racial hierarchy Obama's presidency represents. The signifier "slave" in Basso's rhetoric orders and makes coherent for the subject or agent how the economy of desire presently distributes *jouissance*, and thus, what remains, and what Basso exhorts the audience to do is take back what was usurped while Americans "were playing with toys." The unconscious desire to not only order, but to do so in the interests of serving the old order, is what makes the rhetorical agency of the master into a structure worth noting. The discourse to which I turn attention to next is the discourse of the hysteric.

The discourse of the hysteric and the rhetorical agency it entails, like the discourse in the GID debate, is predicated upon the subject or agent's identity. A good example of the discourse of the hysteric and the rhetorical agency it entails is contained in the following quote,



Tea parties believe in small government. We believe in returning to the principles of our Founding Fathers. We respect them. We revere them. Shoot me in the head before I stop talking about the Founders. Shoot me in the head if you try to change our government.<sup>242</sup>

In Beck's rhetoric in the quotation, his rhetorical agency is caused by the identity crisis he experiences when the signifiers that represent his identity are called into question in the opposition to Tea Parties and reverence for "the Founding Fathers." What is also typical about the discourse of the hysteric and the rhetorical agency it entails, is the way in which Beck's rhetoric conveys its most extreme articulation by proposing that he would rather be dead than not be identified with the "Founding Fathers." This is another way of saying that if I am not identified, and therefore do not take on this subjectivity, then I am dead to the symbolic order. Beck's identity crisis reflects the unconscious logic of desire to have a true identity in the Symbolic order. What the discourse of the hysteric does here, as it did in the GID debate also, is position the subject or agent (Beck) as the one demanding that the interlocutor provide the signifier that would restore the coherence of Beck's subjectivity in the Symbolic order. The jouissance Beck's rhetoric implies is driven by the unconscious desire to be recognized in the symbolic order so that the subject or agent enjoys when other people affirm the identifications in his discourse. Before turning to the discourse of the university and the rhetorical agency it entails in Tea Party rhetoric, we should note that the discourse of the hysteric creates a rhetorical agency that questions identity, but in this context, it sounds like a kind of political protest. As Beck's rhetoric demonstrates, the political protest is fixed around the search for the signifier that would make Beck's identity complete, and in this search for the signifier that closes the gap in the Symbolic order, we see the discourse of the hysteric as plainly

here as we did in the GID debate. This feature is what makes the discourse of the hysteric and the rhetorical agency it entails distinguishable from the other discourses. To close the gap in the Symbolic order, it is necessary for Beck to use discourse to make links or bonds with other subjects or agents that will result in the production of the signifier. This is why his rhetoric demands the interlocutor produce the signifier and be identified with the “Founding Fathers.”

Turning attention now to the discourse of the university and the rhetorical agency it entails, I think it is again useful to revisit quotations I cited in the section on Beck’s Tea Party rhetoric. As Beck says,

God is giving a plan I think to me that is not really a plan. ... The problem is that I think the plan that the Lord would have us follow is hard for people to understand. ... Because of my track record with you who have been here for a long time. Because of my track record with you, I beg of you to help me get this message out, and I beg of you to pray for clarity on my part.<sup>243</sup>

Beck’s rhetoric structures the subject or agent in the discourse to be the object of God’s *jouissance*. God is the Other to whom Beck’s rhetoric is directed. In this way, Beck’s rhetoric functions much like the university discourse in the GID debate, except that the knowledge-system that Beck’s rhetoric is referencing is not premised in the culture or the language. Instead God plays the knowledge-system in Beck’s rhetoric for which he is simply a passive conduit or channel. The knowledge-system Beck’s rhetoric suggests exists independent of his experience of it as he is not responsive to other people with his rhetoric, because he is only responding to God. The subject or agent in the rhetoric is driven by the desire to understand clearly, which is another way of saying the subject or agent enjoys in the rhetoric by making sense (*jouis-sense*) of God’s speech (“the plan” or “message”). The subject or agent is a tool for producing God’s desire. While the passive

positioning of the subject or agent in the discourse is common in religious rhetoric, and also appears in the examples I showed from the GID debate, in Beck's rhetoric it is especially obvious that rhetorical agency for the subject or agent is structured to transmit the desire of the Other or God. The links or bonds his rhetorical agency creates mean to transmit the unconscious desire to know and therefore speak the truth.

The final discourse and the rhetorical agency it entails is the discourse of the analyst. The discourse of the analyst is structured to produce the object of desire which is the truth of the unconscious desire that underwrite the drive to desire itself. Because rhetorical agency in Tea Party rhetoric is grounded in the prohibition of jouissance, is fixated upon the fragmentary nature of identity, and assumes the knowledge-system is either a product of God or inherited from Founding Fathers, the discourse of the analyst remains absent. Since the unconscious desire to desire itself is never enjoyed explicitly in Tea Party rhetoric, the objects of desire remain symbolic shields that paper-over the gaps in subjectivity. Perhaps this absence of the discourse of the analyst in Tea Party rhetoric explains why the interlocutors remain resistant to change or introspection.

In illustrating the four rhetorical agencies at work in the rhetoric of Tea Party advocates like Santelli, Basso and Beck, it becomes clear how Lacan's theory of the four discourses helps to shape the analysis of the transformation of desire in discourse, as each discourse structure lends itself to analysis according to the unique way in which the unconscious logic of desire drives each discourse in distinctly different ways. In the next section, I will again use the rhetoric analyzed in the previous chapters to illustrate the four rhetorical agencies as they are constituted in the GID debate.

## Posthumanist Rhetorical Agency and GID

The unconscious desire to know the truth of another person's body drives the debate generally, but it is in the discourse of the hysteric that I think we can begin to see how rhetorical agency is reflected in the desire to know the truth of the body's gender in the GID debate. Rhetorical agency in the discourse of the hysteric is manifest in the unconscious desire to have the other identify the subject or agent by answering the question: "Am I a boy, or am I a girl?" For Jonah, we can see rhetorical agency operating according to the discourse of the hysteric in the exchange she had with her father.

Before Jonah transitioned, "passers-by and acquaintances would mistake Jonah for a girl," and her father would correct them. As Jonah's father relates, his corrections, meant to answer this fundamental question about gender, only prompted "bitter complaints" from Jonah. According to Jonah's father, "What began to happen was Jonah started to get upset about that," adding Jonah would argue 'Why do you have to say anything!' Joel recalls a particular instance,

when we were walking the dogs and this person came up and said... 'Oh, is this your daughter?' and I said, 'Oh, no, this is Jonah.'...And Jonah just came running up and said, 'Why do you have to tell! Why do you have to say anything!'<sup>244</sup>

In the rhetoric Jonah's father is reiterating, we can see how the answer to the question Jonah's father provides creates a breakdown in the Symbolic order for Jonah, and her demand, that he not say anything, reveals how *jouissance* in Jonah's rhetoric is tied to the signifier "girl." The attribution of the signifier "boy" to Jonah is what drives her rhetorical agency, as it is the imposition of this signifier and all that it entails in the culture that causes her to exclaim "Why do you have to say anything!" which implies if

she cannot be identified as a girl, then she is restricted from the *jouissance* suggested by the signifier “girl” in her economy of desire.

The restriction of *jouissance* is what causes her rhetorical agency, as Jonah’s rhetoric is clearly predicated upon maintaining the satisfaction of desire she experiences in her identification with the signifier “girl,” which is lost or lacking from the discourse. In this way, Jonah’s rhetoric follows the hysteric’s discourse, as it is structured to compel her father (as it would other interlocutors or an audience) to provide the signifier(s) that would produce the subject’s identity in the Symbolic order, thereby completing the loop of satisfaction Jonah has invested in the signifier “girl” in the discourse structure. Jonah’s exclamation reveals it is the absence of the signifier “girl” that is most uncomfortable to her, and for the purposes of subjectivity, it is this signifier for Jonah that fills the gap in the Symbolic order. This search for the signifier that closes the gap in the Symbolic order is what makes the discourse of the hysteric and the rhetorical agency it entails distinguishable from the other discourses. To close the gap in the Symbolic order, it is necessary for Jonah to use discourse to make links or bonds with other subjects or agents that will result in the production of the signifier.

Jonah’s discourse is bent on creating an interpersonal bond with her father, and an intersubjective one with other people, but these bonds are not predicated on what other people or her father desire. For Jonah, the rhetoric suggests the link or bond underlying the discourse is the desire of the Other—the language and the culture in which the signifier “girl” is invested with meaning and hence, is the ultimate source of her unconscious desire to be identified as a boy or a girl. This is why other people’s, her

father's, and especially her intrapersonal desire in the discourse are all subordinate in importance to the Other's desire, which she expresses in the signifier "girl." For the hysteric, hearing the signifier in the discourse of the other implies that the truth of the body is no longer in doubt, and in this way, maintains the loop of satisfaction that connects the object of desire (what being a "girl" in the culture means to Jonah) to the *jouissance* for the subject (what being called a "girl" does for Jonah's relationship to her body as an object).

Before turning to the discourse of the university and the rhetorical agency it entails in the GID debate, we note two points about rhetorical agency in the hysteric's discourse. First, agency in Jonah's discourse is caused by the failure of other people to supply the signifier that would complete Jonah's subjectivity in the Symbolic order, which is symptomatic of the unconscious desire Jonah invests in the desire of the Other, signified in the word "girl." Second, since the drive to be desired by the Other is what drives the discourse, but the rhetoric supplied by other people fails to supply the signifier, Jonah's rhetorical agency is bent on creating links or bonds with her discourse that will make the signifier "girl" appear in the Symbolic order. Hence, rhetorical agency in the discourse of the hysteric is structured around the subject or agent's symptom to be identified generally, which in Jonah's case in particular is constituted in the signifier "girl," as its alternative, the signifier "boy" in the rhetoric signifies for Jonah's what she is *not* identified with to other persons, thereby suggesting what she *is* to the Other. The discourse of the hysteric and the rhetorical agency it entails is predicated upon producing the desire of the Other in the actual rhetoric of other people's speech, and in seeking out

this signifier, rhetorical analysts can begin to interpret the rhetoric constituting the subject or agent's subjectivity.

While Jonah's rhetorical agency is caused by the imposition of the signifier "boy" in the Symbolic order, which negates her identity and therefore drives her desire to create a different set of social links with other people that affirm what she desires to be the truth about her body, the desire driving the discourse of the university is the unconscious desire assumed to be the truth the body reveals as an object for all subjects or agents. The rhetorical agency this discourse structure entails is predicated upon the elimination of doubt for other subjects or agents in the discourse, which in the context of the GID debate means asserting the truth about the body's gender despite what the subject or agent tells us about the truth of their body. Zucker's rhetoric exemplifies the rhetorical agency this discourse structure entails, as his rhetoric is bent on creating relationships with other people that assume the Other (the culture and language) knows the truth about the body, and his rhetoric is therefore simply conveying what the Other knows. We can see this manifestation of rhetorical agency in a couple of examples.

First, as Zucker expresses in the following analogy, he knows what the subject or agent does not, and therefore takes it as his task to convey this information to the subject or agent so that they will produce the truth of his rhetoric in their discourse. Zucker asks, "Suppose you were a clinician and a four-year old black kid came into your office and said he wanted to be white. Would you go with that? I don't think we would."<sup>245</sup> As Alix Spiegel explains,

If a black kid walked into a therapist's office saying that he was really white, the goal of pretty much any therapist out there would be to try to make him feel more

comfortable with being black. They would assume that his beliefs were the product of a dysfunctional environment – a family environment or a cultural environment, which is how Zucker sees gender disordered kids.<sup>246</sup>

Zucker's rhetoric in the hypothetical example assumes that "we," which is the signifier that represents for Zucker the culture and the language or the Other in his discourse, know the truth about the body because the truth in the culture or language is that biological sex, were it not for dysfunction in Zucker's view, would determine a person's gender. The assumption his knowledge makes in the rhetoric is that there is some conflict-free or non-dysfunctional expression of gender underlying the behavior transgendered children enact, and his discourse is predicated upon correcting for the fantasy or confusion exhibited by transgendered children.

As Zucker argues, reparative therapy is "helping kids understand themselves better and what might be causing them to develop what I call a 'fantasy solution,' that being the other sex will make them happy."<sup>247</sup> In this example, we can see how Zucker's rhetoric assumes that he knows the reality underlying the "fantasy solution," and how his rhetorical agency is predicated upon creating a link designed to erase the fantasy and restore the reality that sex determines gender which would otherwise manifest itself were it not for some dis-order in the psychological make-up of the child. His rhetoric assumes that if the child simply accepted the latent truth, which is Zucker's object of desire in the discourse, then their body would no longer reflect the fantasy that gender non-conformity belies.

In this way, Zucker's rhetoric has a paternalistic feel to it, just like a discourse would any time the rhetoric suggests the subject or agent who is speaking "knows what is best." This is precisely how the discourse of the university is structured to manifest



rhetorical agency, as Zucker's rhetoric presumes he is simply doing the work of the culture in some innocuous way that will improve or correct the dysfunctions that disrupt the otherwise natural relationship that would be expressed if the child's sex determined their gender. Zucker's rhetoric reflects the ostensibly objective and dispassionate manifestation of rhetorical agency that is characteristic of the discourse of the university, as he is simply doing his part in the heteronormative knowledge-system which exists independent of his interaction with it. His rhetoric then is not responsive to the speech of the child, as he has invested his agency in the truth conveyed in the culture and is therefore only responsive to the heteronormative, "sex determines gender" knowledge-system in which his truth is unconsciously invested. Before turning to the rhetorical agency embodied by the discourse of the master in the GID debate, we note that rhetorical agency in the discourse of the university is predicated upon the subject or agent's unconscious enactment of the desire to produce the truth of the Other's knowledge. In this particular case, producing the true knowledge-system means entrenching the heteronormative order which is Zucker's object of desire, as his rhetoric unconsciously invests the heteronormative knowledge-system with *jouissance*. In this way, Zucker does not derive *jouissance* directly, as he is only the passive steward accumulating *jouissance* on behalf of the Other. This is why rhetorical agency in the discourse of the university, as it does in Zucker's case, sounds as if the person articulating the discourse is just passively enacting the preferences of someone or something else. The agent or subject in the discourse of the university enjoys the satisfaction of *jouissance* through the Other, as if they were merely the conduit for

conveying the truth which exists independent of their knowledge about it. Rhetorical agency in this discourse is therefore distinctive because the subject or agent articulating the rhetoric only enjoys *jouissance* if the Other accumulates the excess and is therefore satisfied.

Where *jouissance* in the discourse of the university assumes rhetorical agency is driven by the truth of another person's body as it relates to the knowledge-system, the discourse of the master is driven by the desire to order the knowledge-system itself. Rhetorical agency in the discourse of the master manifests itself in the ways the subject or agent imposes a signifier to clarify or make sense of the knowledge-system. We can see an example of the unconscious desire to impose order on the knowledge-system in the same series of excerpts used above to demonstrate the discourse of the hysteric and Jonah's rhetorical agency. Rather than focus on Jonah's rhetoric, and look instead more closely at Joel's rhetoric in the excerpts, it becomes clearer how his discourse is bent on providing signifiers in the Symbolic order that eliminate ambiguity in the knowledge-system. As his answers to acquaintances and passers-by when asked about Jonah's gender suggest, his rhetorical agency is driven by the unconscious desire to tell the truth about another person's body. As Joel recalled in one particular instance, "...we were walking the dogs and this person came up and said... 'Oh, is this your daughter?' and I said, 'Oh, no, this is Jonah.'"<sup>248</sup> Joel's rhetoric suggests his rhetorical agency is driven by the unconscious desire to tell the truth, even though it is obvious to him his response is greatly unsettling for his child Jonah.

The cause of Joel's rhetorical agency in the excerpt is not, however, Jonah's discomfort, as his rhetoric suggests it is actually caused by passers-by and acquaintance's confusion. The object of Joel's desire in the rhetoric is not to provide Jonah with a signifier, at least not at this stage in their lives prior to Jonah's transition; it is to provide other people with signifiers that order the knowledge-system. In this example the link or bond Joel's rhetoric constitutes in discourse is based upon resolving the miscommunication or confusion expressed by other people. Joel's discourse is structured to provide the signifier that orders the knowledge-system for the interlocutor by providing the truth. In this way, the discourse of the master functions as the obverse of the discourse of the hysteric, as it is structured to provide the signifier that tells the truth to the interlocutor who is demanding it. Joel could provide the signifier to Jonah, and if and when he did, his discourse of mastery would simply tell the truth of Jonah's unconscious instead of telling the truth of another person's body. Whether Joel's audience is Jonah or other people, however, does not change the structure of the discourse because, in both instances, the unconscious desire driving the discourse remains the satisfaction of the *jouissance* which results when the subject or agent tells the truth that orders the knowledge-system.

Before turning the reader's attention to the final discourse structure, the discourse of the analyst, we should note the rhetorical agency entailed in the discourse of the master is distinctive because, unlike the discourse of the university, it is structured to provide the truth, whereas in the discourse of the university, the discourse is structured to produce the truth from the interlocutor. The discourse of the hysteric is also structured to produce the

truth from the interlocutor, but what the hysteric seeks is not the unconscious truth of the knowledge-system, but rather the unconscious truth of their identity. Rhetorical agency in the discourse of the master is structured to deliver the signifiers that order the knowledge-system for the subject or agent, and in this way can be used, as Joel's rhetoric mildly suggests, to order the knowledge-system in ways that preclude access to *jouissance* for other subjects—including Jonah. Clearly, Joel supported Jonah's transition, and in this way his discourse of mastery accommodates Jonah's *jouissance*, but the discourse of the master is not always so flexible, and can be just as easily employed to frustrate access to *jouissance*. Before elaborating further on this feature of the discourse of the master any further, as I will with Tea Party rhetoric in just a moment, I want to explain how the discourse of the analyst drives the fourth and final kind of rhetorical agency at work in the GID debate.

The best example of the rhetorical agency the discourse of the analyst entails is constituted in Jonah's relationship to Pam and the dress she agrees to purchase for her daughter. To recall this moment, in the broadcast we learn

Pam remembers watching her child mournfully finger his outfit. She says she knew what he wanted. 'At that point I just said, you know, you really want a dress to wear, don't you? And [Jonah's] face lit up, and she was like, Yes!...I thought she was gonna hyperventilate and faint because she was so incredibly happy...before then, or since then, I don't think I have seen her so out of her mind happy as that drive to Target that day to pick out her dress.'<sup>249</sup>

What Pam's discourse reiterates about Jonah's rhetorical agency in this moment is how agency is bound-up with the signifier; in this instance it is the *jouissance* Jonah invests in the dress that underwrites the discourse. However, rhetorical agency for Pam in this discourse is driven by the desire to provide the *jouissance* Jonah has invested in the

object, and in this way, her rhetoric exemplifies how the subject or agent in the discourse of the analyst is bent on transforming the relationship by producing the truth of the subject or agent's symptom. In this instance, Jonah's discontent prompts Pam to transform the distribution of desire in the Symbolic order by acknowledging Jonah's symptom and the unconscious truth it contains. In this way, the cause of Pam's rhetorical agency in the excerpt is the desire to make Jonah's unconscious desire itself an object in the Symbolic order via the dress. This means, as is characteristic about the discourse of the analyst generally, that the unconscious logic of desire in the discourse is the truth about desire. The unconscious truth about desire is the fact that humans desire to desire in the first place, and unless their rhetorical agency is structured to produce the unconscious truth about desire itself, as is the case with the discourse structure of the analyst, then this fact of desire goes unnoticed or, more accurately, remains unconscious and therefore, latent in the discourse.

The reason Pam's discourse produces *jouissance*, or, in paraphrasing Pam, Jonah's out of her mind happiness, is because her discourse is structured to create a relationship with Jonah that circumvents the gap in the Symbolic order, and in this instance, if only for a brief moment, the desire for objects, and not just the object itself, is made manifest in the discourse. The rhetorical agency the discourse of the analyst entails is rightly viewed as the midway point between the discourse of the hysteric and the discourse of the master, as in it we can see how rhetorical agency in Pam's discourse takes Jonah's hysterical symptom, signified by the dress, and transforms it into *jouissance* via the discourse structure of the analysts—the result of which, once the dress

is purchased, is the imposition of the signifier that masters the knowledge-system in which the dress is a sign for the culture that answers the question: “Am I a boy, or am I a girl.”

As I have shown in both the GID debate and examples of Tea Party rhetoric I cited, rhetorical agency bears itself in discourse in discrete structures that lend themselves to analysis by rhetorical critics in systematic and distinguishable ways. Lacan’s theory of the four discourses and the concept of rhetorical agency I have extracted, allows us to understand why some audiences are indoctrinated into particular discourses affecting their rhetorical agency. *Jouissance* circulates in predictable and well-worn pathways that can become cultural dogma, as people or individuals in a culture base their relationships with one another in part upon the predictable and previously traveled pathways of culturally permitted *jouissance*. Since the structure of the discourse is caused by the prohibition of *jouissance*, but is also designed to restore access to *jouissance*, Lacan’s posthumanist rhetorical agency is resilient enough to explain both how discourse is structured to arrest cultural change, or facilitate its transformation. It is for this reason above all else that Lacan deserves consideration as a more visible contributor to the discipline as a theoretical resource for our posthumanist critical practices.

---

<sup>232</sup> Dilip Gaonkar, “The Idea of Rhetoric in the Rhetoric of Science,” *The Southern Communication Journal* 58, no. 4 (July 1993): 263.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>235</sup> Marshall W. Jr. Alcorn, “The Subject of Discourse: Reading Lacan Through (and Beyond) Poststructuralist Contexts,” in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society*, ed. Mark Bracher et al. (New York and London: New York University Press, 1994), 28.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

---

<sup>237</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, 1966, translated by Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 755.

<sup>238</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 1991, translated by Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007), 176.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>242</sup> Glenn Beck, Contributor, *Fox News* (Fox Television, June 9, 2010).

<sup>243</sup> Glenn Beck, Host, *The Glenn Beck Program* (Premier Radio Networks, April 20, 2010).

<sup>244</sup> Alix Spiegel, All Things Considered. May 7, 2008, Two Families Grapple with Sons' Gender Preferences (National Public Radio).

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>247</sup> Alix Spiegel, "Q&A: Therapists on Gender Identity Issues in Kids," *News*, Children's Health, Health, May 7, 2008, National Public Radio, 3/4/10

<sup>248</sup> Spiegel, All things Considered

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- American Psychiatric Association. "DSM-IV." In *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Fourth. Washington D.C.: APA, 1994.
- Alcorn, Marshall W. Jr. "The Subject of Discourse: Reading Lacan Through (and Beyond) Post-structuralist Contexts," in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society*, edited by Mark Bracher et al., 19-45. New York and London: New York University Press, 1994.
- André, Serge. "Otherness of the Body." In *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society*, edited by Mark Bracher et al., 88-104. New York and London: New York University Press, 1994.
- Ballew, Charles C. and Todorov, Alexander. "Predicting Political Elections from Rapid and Unreflective Face Judgments," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 104, no. 46 (November 2007): 17952.
- Basso, Bob. "We the People Stimulus Package," speech (San Diego: YouTube, March 16, 2009): [www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeYscnFpEyA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeYscnFpEyA)
- Beck, Glenn. Host, *The Glenn Beck Program*. Premier Radio Networks, April 2, 2007.
- . Host, *The Glenn Beck Program*. Premier Radio Networks, April 21, 2009.
- . Host, *The Glenn Beck Program*. Premier Radio Networks, November 3, 2009.
- . Host, *The Glenn Beck Program*. Premier Radio Networks, June 10, 2009.
- . Host, *The Glenn Beck Program*. Premier Radio Networks, January 7, 2010.
- . Host, *The Glenn Beck Program*. Premier Radio Networks, February 4, 2010.
- . Host, *The Glenn Beck Program*. Premier Radio Networks, April 20, 2010.
- . Host, *The Glenn Beck Program*. Premier Radio Networks, April 21, 2010.
- . Host, *The Glenn Beck Program*. Premier Radio Networks, June 9, 2010.
- . Host, *The Glenn Beck Program*. Premier Radio Networks, August 26, 2010.
- . Host, *The Glenn Beck Program*. Premier Radio Networks, January 20, 2011.



- Biesecker, Barbara A. "Coming to Terms with Recent Attempts to Write Women Into the History of Rhetoric," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 25, no. 2 (Spring 1992).
- Bracher, Mark. *Lacan, Discourse, and Social Change: A Psychoanalytic Cultural Criticism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- . "On the Psychological and Social Functions of Language: Lacan's Theory of the Four Discourses." In *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society*, edited by Mark Bracher et al., 107-28. New York and London: New York University Press, 1994.
- Burke, Kenneth *A Rhetoric of Motives*. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1952.
- Campbell, Karlyn Kohrs. "Agency: Promiscuous and Protean." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (March 2005): 1-19.
- Cloud, Dana L. "The Matrix and Critical Theory's Desertion of the Real." *Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies* 3, no. 4 (December 2006): 329-54.
- Crowley, Sharon "Response to Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "Agency,". September 2003, Rhetoric Society of America, 5-13-2010  
<[www.rhetoricsociety.org/ARS/pdf/campbellonagency.pdf](http://www.rhetoricsociety.org/ARS/pdf/campbellonagency.pdf)>.
- Crowley, Sharon. "Response to Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, 'Agency'." *ARS* (2003).
- Dean, Jodi. *Žižek's Politics*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Eagleton, Terry "Ideology and Its Vicissitudes in Western Marxism," in *Mapping Ideology*, edited by Slavoj Žižek, 179-226. New York: Verso, 1999.
- Evans, Dylan. *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Fink, Bruce. *The Lacanian Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Foucault, Michele. "So Is It Important to Think?" In *The Essential Foucault*, edited by Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose, 170-73. New York: The New Press, 1994.
- . *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France 1981-1982*. New York: Picador, 2001.
- Gaonkar, Dilip. "The Idea of Rhetoric in the Rhetoric of Science." *The Southern Communication Journal* 58, no. 4 (July 1993): 258-95.
- . "The Forum: Publics and Counterpublics," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88, no. 4 (November 2002): 410-12.

- Geisler, Cheryl. "How Ought We to Understand the Concept of Rhetorical Agency? Report from the ARS." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 9-17.
- . "Teaching the Post-Modern Rhetor: Continuing the Conversation on Rhetorical Agency." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (2005): 107-13.
- Greene, Ronald W. "Rhetoric and Capitalism: Rhetorical Agency as Communicative Labor." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 37, no. 314 (2004): 188-206.
- . "The Concept of Global Citizenship in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire*: A Challenge to Three Ideas of Rhetorical Mediation," in *Rhetorical Democracy: Discursive Practices of Civic Engagement*, edited by Gerard A. Hauser and Amy Grim. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004.
- Gronbeck, Bruce E. "Rushing, Frenz, and the Matter of Psychological Rhetorical Criticism," *Southern Communication Journal* 71, no. 2 (June 2006): 159-63.
- Gunn, Joshua, and Christian Lundberg. "'Ouija Board, Are There any Communications?' Agency, Ontotheology, and the Death of the Humanist Subject, or, Continuing the ARS Conversation." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (2005): 83-105.
- Gunn, Joshua "Refiguring Fantasy: Imagination and Its Decline in U.S. Rhetorical Studies," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89, no. 1 (Feb 2003): 41-59.
- . "Refitting Fantasy: Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity, and Talking to the Dead," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90, no. 1 (Feb 2004): 1-23.
- . "On Dead Subjects: A Rejoinder to Lundberg on (a) Psychoanalytic Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90, no. 4 (Nov 2004).
- Herndl, Carl. and Licona, Adela. C. "Shifting Agency: Agency, Kairos, and the Possibilities of Social Action," in *The Cultural Turn: Perspectives on Communicative Practices in Workplaces and Professions*, edited by M. Zachery and C. Thralls, 1-32. New York: Baywood Publishing, 2007.
- Holder, Eric. United States Attorney General, "Remarks as Prepared for Delivery by Attorney General Eric Holder at the Department of Justice African American History Month Program," speech (Washington D.C.: The United States Department of Justice, February 18, 2009).
- Hyde, Michael J. *The Life-Giving Gift of Acknowledgement*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2005.
- . "Jacques Lacan's Psychoanalytic Theory of Speech and Language," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 (1980): 96-118.

- Hudson, Mark. "Understanding Information Media in the Age of Neoliberalism," *Progressive Librarian* 16 (Fall 1999).
- Kilmeade, Brian. Host, *Fox and Friends*, commentary by Glenn Beck (Fox Television, July 28, 2009).
- Lacan, Jacques. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981.
- . *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, 1966, translated by Bruce Fink. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006.
- . *My Teaching*. Translated by David Macey. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2008.
- . *On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*. Translated by Bruce Fink. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999.
- . *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*. 1991. Translated by Russell Grigg. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007.
- . *The Psychoses*, 1981, translated by Russell Grigg, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993.
- Lang, Herman. *Language and the Unconscious: Jacques Lacan's Hermeneutics of Psychoanalysis*. 1973. Translated by Thomas Brockelman. New Jersey: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1977.
- Lundberg, Christian. "The Royal Road Not Taken: Joshua Gunn's "Refitting Fantasy: Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity and Talking to the Dead" and Lacan's Symbolic Order," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90, no. 4 (2004).
- McGraw, Phillip Calvin. Host, *Gender Confused Kids*, with contributions from Joseph Nicolosi, Dan Siegel and Glenn Stanton. Harpo Inc: October 29, 2008.
- McNay, Lois. *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory*. Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 2004.
- Nel, Philip "Explanatory Power and Truth: The Promise of Critical Realism in Theology," in *Theory and Method in South African Human Sciences Research*, ed. Johann Mouton et al. (Human Science Research Council: HSRC Press, 1998), 105-28.
- Pettigrew, Lyod. "Psychoanalytic Theory: A Neglected Rhetorical Dimension," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 10, no. 12 (Winter 1977): 46-59.

- Ragland-Sullivan, Ellie. "Sexual Relation Versus Culture," edited by Karen Ror Malone and Stephen R. Friedlander, 229-63. New York: State University of New York Press, 2000.
- Ragland, Ellie. *Logic of Sexuation*. Albany: State University of New York press, 2004.
- Reid, Tim. "Tea Party Turns Nasty: 'It's Our Country—Let's Take It Back!'" *The Times* February 6 2010, The Sunday Times, 1-8-2011  
<[http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us\\_and\\_americas/article7017218.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us_and_americas/article7017218.ece)>.
- R. V. Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis with Especial Reference to the Antipathic Sexual Instinct*, 1906, translated by F.J. Rebman, 12 revised. Chicago: Login Brothers, 1928.
- Safouan, Moustafa. *Four Lessons of Psychoanalysis*. Edited by Anna Shane. New York: Other Press, LLC, 2004.
- Santelli, Rick, On-air editor. "Santelli's Rant." In *Power Lunch*. Editorial. Chicago/New York: CNBC, February 19, 2009.
- Sloop, John *Disciplining Gender: Rhetorics of Sex Identity in Contemporary U.S. Culture*. Amherst and Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004.
- Spiegel, Alix. All Things Considered. May 7, 2008, Two Families Grapple with Sons' Gender Preferences. (National Public Radio).
- . "Q&A: Therapists on Gender Identity Issues in Kids," *News, Children's Health, Health*, May 7, 2008, National Public Radio, 3/4/10  
<<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=90229789>>.
- Thomas, Douglass. "Burke, Nietzsche, Lacan: Three Perspectives on the Rhetoric of Order," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 79, no. 3 (1993): 336-355.
- Verhaeghe, Paul. "From Impossibility to Inability: Lacan's Theory on the Four Discourses." *The Letter. Lacanian Perspectives on Psychoanalysis* 3 (Spring 1995): 91-108.
- Wajcman, Gérard. "The Hysteric's Discourse," *The Symptom* 4 (Spring 2003): 1-6.
- Weil, Dan "Gingrich: Obama's Socialist Agenda Threatens US," *Newsmax* May 2010, 5-31-2010 <<http://www.newsmax.com/InsideCover/gingrich-obama-socialism-/2010/05/24/id/359972>>.
- Žižek, Slavoj. "Four Discourses, Four Subjects." In *SIC 2*, edited by Slavoj Žižek and Renata Salecl, 74-113. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998.

———. *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Center of Political Ontology*. New York: Verso, 1999.

———. *The Plague of Fantasies*. London and New York: Verso, 2008.

Zucker, Kenneth J. et al. "Is Gender Identity Disorder Coming Out of the Closet?" *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 34, no. 4 (September 2008): 287-91.