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Normativity and Nonsense in Baker and Hacker

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Late in the 1950s, Noam Chomsky inaugurated the methodology of the field of linguistics as we know it today with his theory of the universal grammar. Chomsky argued that deep below the kinds of grammatical rules one might find in elementary school textbooks, all languages are structurally organized by elegant formal rules of an almost mathematical nature. He hypothesized that, if we investigated the grammars of all of the thousands of natural languages that have ever been spoken or signed natively by humans, digging down deep past differences of vocabulary and higher-order organizational features, we would find a single pattern of rules. These logically arbitrary rules are universal to all human languages because all of us are born with them genetically hard-wired into our brains. Chomsky described the linguist's project as an investigation into the structure of these universal rules, which constitute what he called the *universal grammar*: the neural operating system which makes it possible for human infants to learn their native languages.

In a response titled *Language, Sense and Nonsense*, Gordon Baker and Peter Hacker undertake to dismantle this Chomskian project, ultimately dismissing it as “futile because pointless and misconceived.” Baker and Hacker propose a conceptual analysis of rules and rule-following that is meant to render nonsensical the notion of universal grammar, and more generally, of “rules” built in on the neurological level. In this paper, I argue that Baker and Hacker's criticism of Chomskian linguistics is unsuccessful. Their criterion for rule-following behavior is susceptible to two plausible interpretations—one which is more stringent, and one which is less stringent. I will show that the less-stringent understanding of Baker and Hacker's criterion renders it too weak to do the theoretical work that their argument requires. But the more-stringent

interpretation, which I believe is the one that the authors intended, commits Baker and Hacker to the politically-unacceptable claim that undocumented languages and nonstandard dialects do not qualify as rule-governed activities, either because they flout the rules of standard dialects or because they are simply unresponsive to rules. I explain why this conception of rule-following is as appealing and powerful as it is theoretically mistaken and politically dangerous.

Action at a Distance

Baker and Hacker's main objection to Chomskian universal grammar is that it violates the principle that "there is no action at a distance in grammar" (275). By that phrase they mean that one cannot be normatively guided by rules that one is not aware of. The practitioners of all normative practices "*use* rules as guides to conduct, *cite* rules as justifications of conduct, act in accord with (or, indeed, in violation of) a rule *for the reason that* such-and-such is the rule, etc" (256).

This description of rule-following seems innocuous enough in principle, but turns out to be pernicious when applied to natural languages. What rule would count as a grammatical rule of English, which we native speakers use to guide our conduct and cite as justification when challenged? Is there any such thing? As far as Baker and Hacker are concerned, the answers are at our fingertips:

... the way to "discover" the rules of a normative practice is to *ask* the practitioners. For if their activities are rule-governed, then they must *use* the rules, consult them, guide their actions by them, and explain what they are doing, and why it is right, by reference to them. (313)

Yet despite the fact that I am indisputably a fluent speaker of English, I am at a loss to explain what exactly makes that this ungrammatical sentence. The best I could do is to search through *Elements of Style* or ask an English professor to tell me what rule that sentence violated. Would Baker and Hacker conclude that I am like a child, whose speech's normativity "lies with the adult who trains (and the linguistic community to which he belongs)" (256) since I cannot justify my own language use without help from experts?

Even in that case, I would fare better than some less-fortunate language users! A speaker of the Powhatan language would have had no grammar books or professors of Powhatan to turn to for help in justifying his linguistic behavior. Closer to home, speakers of African American Vernacular English (AAVE, sometimes called “ebonics”) have always had to ignore their teachers’ and textbooks’ well-meaning advice in order to acquire and correctly use the dialect spoken in their communities. Today, AAVE speakers might cite famous papers by famous linguists to help them explain the use of “been” as a remote phrase marker (using “she been told me that” to mean “she told me that a long time ago”). What rule guided this norm before a couple of white guys showed up with notepads in 1970 and labeled it?

Baker and Hacker are unequivocal in classifying linguistic behavior as a rule-governed activity (243). According to them, this logically implies that every speaker is an expert on the rules of his language:

... only if a person justifies, explains and identifies his conduct (directly or obliquely) by reference to an appropriate rule (or would do so if challenged) is his behavior even a *candidate* for normative conduct. (297)

Now, this statement of their argument makes apparent an ambiguity that I have glossed over until now. If their theory permits a speaker to justify, explain and identify his conduct by *oblique* reference to a rule, then perhaps they may escape the line of criticism lodged above.

Consider that AAVE speaker again. Let’s say he’s a seventeen year old, whose high school English teacher challenges him after he says, “she been told me that.” “Why did you say ‘been’ just then?” she asks him. He might say that he chose that word because she told him a long time ago. “But why didn’t you say, ‘she told me that a long time ago?’” his teacher insists. “That’s just how we talk where I’m from,” the student answers. According to one understanding of Baker and Hacker’s conception of oblique justification, this might count as a sufficient justification of his usage. But under this interpretation, Baker and Hacker’s theory of normativity fails to fulfill its own promises. Remember, Baker and Hacker hold that linguistics is a misguided project in part because the best way to find out the rules of a practice is to ask the practitioners. Yet an answer

like “that’s how we do it where I’m from” should not count as giving us the rules of a language. Just like any high-schooler, our AAVE speaker would find himself at a loss to list and explain the rules that guide his linguistic practice. The rules that regulate remote phrase markers are not something you learn about in high school.

On a stricter interpretation, Baker and Hacker’s criterion for normative activity would require a speaker to either name or vaguely describe the rule in question when justifying his linguistic practice. So our AAVE speaker may not give any more oblique an answer than, “I used ‘been’ because of, you know, that the Remote Phrase Marker thingie.” This understanding of Baker and Hacker’s criterion of normativity fulfils the promise discussed above. But given the facts of what language-users are actually able to do to justify their linguistic behavior, it has the absurd result of categorizing most adults’ language use as non-rule-governed. It is degrading to speakers of the many languages of the world that don’t have grammar books, and to speakers of dialects that are considered to be deformations of standard usage by textbook writers and grade school teachers.

Tacit Knowledge?

Baker and Hacker are right in observing that, *typically*, practitioners of rule-guided practices can cite the rules. We can justify our behavior by reference to the rules of Monopoly or soccer, of logic or geometry; we can identify US laws and college policies and use those rules to make decisions and explain them later. Among norm-guided behaviors, speech sticks out as an exceptional case. Language is a normative practice whose practitioners require no explicit instruction in its norms, and seem to use its norms without explicit knowledge of them. Why shouldn’t these puzzling properties of language motivate a search for an account of the mechanisms that enable us to store the informational content of rules that we can’t consciously access?

Consider another normative activity whose practitioners are typically unaware of its norms. A tennis player can serve either to her opponent’s forehand or to her backhand. If she is a good strategist, she will randomize her serves between the two sides, so that she plays to each side some particular probability (determined by estimating how likely it is that her opponent will hit the ball if it is served to one side or another, and

then doing some fairly complicated algebra on those numbers). It turns out that professional tennis players are quite good at determining the probabilities with which they should play to each side, despite having no training in game theory and being unable to describe or justify their behavior in algebraic terms (Dixit and Skeath 214). One could insist that tennis players are not guided by game theory when they choose which way to serve. There is a certain sense in which that would be true — they aren't *doing* calculations. But by sticking to that hard line, one would miss something important about tennis players' behavior. It seems to me that professional tennis players' probabilistic mixing of serving strategies *is* norm-governed, albeit in a different way than the choices they make, say, to play in accordance with the rules of tennis.

This observation also has interesting psychological consequences. Since we know that tennis players do comply with game-theoretic norms, we can formulate scientific hypotheses about the neural machinery that makes it possible for them to do so. Since the pro tennis players in question have not studied game theory, something other than conscious calculation must be going on between their ears as they decide how to hit the ball. We may or may not want to say that tennis players have "tacit knowledge" of game theory, but either way we ought to feel that there is some capacity to be accounted for here. And even Bennett and Hacker concede that "neuroscientific explanations can typically explain how it is possible for creatures with such-and-such a brain to do the kinds of things they do" (364).

Normativity and the Universal Grammar

Baker and Hacker might answer that, insofar as I have to resort to a neural explanation for the tennis player's (or language-user's) ability, I am giving a causal explanation for a physical phenomenon, and not a normative explanation for an act of rule-following. Fair enough. But a neural account would still not be irrelevant to the task of normative explanation.

It turns out that children who are learning their first languages have such strong learning biases (to put the issue in neutral terms) that they are unable to acquire some languages, even ones which adults *can* acquire through explicit training. If we grant that those limitations have something to do with the hardware that babies start out with, then that

hardware has plenty to do with linguistic norms. Because parents generally speak with their children either in their native language or in the language spoken in their community (or both), the grammars of languages that are used and passed along from generation to generation are constrained to that range of grammars that babies are able to acquire. If we found out what those constraints were, it would be a discovery, not an invention. Furthermore, it would be a discovery that would be highly informative about the norms of language. At least in these trivial senses, then, neurological facts can have interesting normative consequences.

Nothing is Concealed?

One of the most striking features of Baker and Hacker's critique is their insistence that there is nothing to be explained about the human capacity to speak language. They cite examples of syntactically ambiguous sentences that are disambiguated by context and exclaim, "I do not need any deep structures to enable me to understand" (293). Nor do they need any neurons to do math, I suppose! They continue,

Are there really any genuine *problems* for the theoretical linguist to explain, as opposed to materials for the descriptive linguist to itemize and anatomize? ... Nothing is concealed, and no crypto-science is necessary to reveal hidden depths. The 'workings of language' do not need to be laid bare by *theories*; they are already open to view. (310)

No one disputes the fact that the meanings of English sentences are obvious to English-speakers. But that does not mean that the sentence's meaning is just open to view, and that's all there is to say about it. It means that the English speaker is equipped to understand it—a fact needing explanation. As far as I'm concerned, the meaning of מדבר אתה אם תעבוד לא הזות הדוגמא, עברית is right there, open to view. For you, it is not. The linguist is responsible for explaining what it is that makes it possible for me to understand that sentence. The theory he constructs will not help you read that sentence any more than studying the equations of projectile motion will help you shoot a basketball. The linguist's role is not like that of the lexicographer or the grammar-textbook author, and he does not claim that it is. But it is preposterous to argue that the linguist has no

important problems to solve on the grounds that his work does not facilitate language comprehension! In the aftermath of Baker and Hacker's polemic, there remains a serious and interesting theoretical problem of articulating the norms of interpretation—a problem which remains in the hands of the linguists, and which must not be passed along to the native speaker.

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*Beyond 'Signification':
The Conflicting Nature of Contemporary Responses
to the Lacanian Conception of the Phallus*

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Not simply a philosopher, but, artfully, a performer, he is no mere father figure out to purvey the truth of his authority; he also comes out seeking his pleasure in a relation that the phallogentric universe does not circumscribe. To designate Lacan at his most stimulating and forceful is to call him something more than just phallogentric. He is also phallo-eccentric. Or, in more pointed language, he is a prick.¹

In the wake of Freud and the psychoanalytic foundation of the unconscious, in 1958, Jacques Lacan presented a conference entitled 'The Signification of the Phallus', explaining how and why the phallus as 'privileged signifier' functions as it does within the Symbolic order.² In this metaphoric and metonymic rereading of Freud, Lacan advances his theory of the development of the subject and of the consequent relations constructed between the two sexes as they, in turn, relate to the phallic function. Sexual identity constitutes a game of roles, the masquerade par excellence. From the Lacanian point of view, without castration, there would be no identification to the ideal type of one's sex (which, in any case, can never be actualised in the Real since castration only exists or 'signifies' in the Symbolic). After all, sexual difference can be summed up

¹ Jane Gallop, 'The Ladies Man', *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1982, p. 36.

² Jacques Lacan, 'La signification du phallus', *Écrits II*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1966, p. 170.

as the difference between ‘having’ and ‘being’. While the man has the phallus, the woman (primordially the mother) *is* the phallus. However, according to Lacan, the phallus signifies the lack of both sexes, a lack which comes from the lost object, that is to say, the mother’s body, the so-called total object. This object is the very source of desire which, by definition, can never be satisfied, what Lacan terms the ‘object little-a’. The subject disappears as it lacks being. On the one hand, from the moment it speaks, this being-without-being is subjected to the order of language, thereby inscribing it as a subject. On the other hand, the signifier possesses being in all its plenitude. Therefore, the Other (with a capital ‘O’) is necessarily realised in a manner relative to the phallic signifier.

From the 1970s, deconstructionists and feminists alike began to treat a phenomenon derived from the Derridean logocentrism: phallogocentrism, effectively reviving Welsh psychoanalyst Ernst Jones’s initial criticism of a Freudian phallogocentrism as early as 1916. And in doing so, two politico-theoretical camps formed around this alleged Lacanian phallogocentrism—one which recognises phallogocentrism as characteristic of the Lacanian conception of the phallus and ardently opposes this framework, and the other which entirely denies the presence of such a Lacanian phallogocentrism. It seems to me that at least part of the question at hand is manifestly an ethical one: is ‘phallogocentrism’ a justified or at least justifiable term by which to define Lacanian theory? Is phallogocentrism, acting as a feminist hermeneutic, a fair reading of Lacan or not?

Returning to the ideological positions of the two camps, the first camp might claim, for example, that the woman is defined uniquely by the negative within Lacan’s phallogocentric thinking, while the second camp might argue that since the phallus is the very process of signification in the Other, the woman is nevertheless found intact through the Hegelian *Aufhebung*—sublation, or perhaps more precisely, the negation of negation. Lacan states, ‘The phallus is the signifier of this very *Aufhebung*, which it inaugurates (initiates) by its disappearance.’³ And it was indeed Hegel who suggested that the *Aufhebung* is the motor by

³ Lacan, ‘The Signification of the Phallus’, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, Translated by Bruce Fink, New York, W.W. Norton, 2006, p. 581.

which dialectic functions. Within the Hegelian dialectic, the subject desires to pass by the other. In short, one must pass by the negative to return to oneself. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel explains, 'It is just through the *absolute character* of the Thing and its opposition that it *relates* itself to *others*, and is essentially only this relating. The relation, however, is the negation of its self-subsistence, and it is really the essential property of the Thing that is its undoing.'⁴ Hegel submits that contradiction and negation possess a singular, dynamic quality in the sense that each point of each domain in reality leads to the most profound development until rational unity is achieved, which preserves contradictions as phases and subparts by raising them (the action of the *Aufhebung*) to a higher unity. In order to respond to the questions raised above relating to the use of the term 'phallogocentrism' in the context of a critique against Lacan's alleged position, I will first compare the disparate dynamics between Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* and Jane Gallop's *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* as they each treat the Lacanian system structured around and through language. Next, I intend to examine the contemporary theories of Slavoj Žižek and Judith Butler, who find themselves addressing each other's specific points regarding language and the politico-theoretical consequences of the enunciation of the phallus. Finally, I will conclude that if one applies a rigorous reading of the Hegelian dialectic to Lacan's discourse on the phallus, one must set aside the notion of phallogocentrism insofar as it misreads the complex nature of Lacan's Symbolic order. In the end, accusations of an alleged Lacanian phallogocentrism do not withstand the metaphysics of the concrete universal—the idea of life in a metaphorical system.

*

At the heart of Mitchell's analysis of the Lacanian schema is the importance of the symbolic father, the phallus, and *difference* (a term that Mitchell herself puts in italics) within the formation of the human subject. However, she intentionally avoids treating the role of language, one of the fundamental elements of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. Mitchell excuses such an oversight, saying that she would rather concentrate on

⁴ Hegel, 'Perception: or the Thing and Deception', *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Translated by A.V. Miller, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 75-76.

the psychology of women under patriarchy.⁵ While this proves to be an altogether different goal from that of Lacan, Mitchell nevertheless accepts the notion of Saussure's signifier/signified adopted by Lacan. It is worth noting, however, that she modifies Lacan's formulation of the inherently linguistic nature of desire. Lacan remarks, 'They [the effects of the phallus's presence] include, first, a deviation of man's needs due to the fact that he speaks: to the extent that his needs are subjected to demand, they come back to him in an alienated form.'⁶ This primal repression or *Urverdrängung* is the effect of the signifier—essentially language—which leads to the splitting or *Spaltung* in which the subject is subsequently divided and, hence, through which the subject experiences desire. On the other hand, it seems that Mitchell erroneously attempts to support the foundation of Lacanian theory through the symbolic father and the phallus because, in her framework, these unities are in fact devoid of power since, according to Mitchell, language plays the second fiddle. She nevertheless makes an effort to reconcile this divergence by insisting that the phallus is not the penis and it is ultimately what the phallus signifies which counts. Incidentally, it is Gallop who points out this serious negligence on Mitchell's part, saying, 'Her confusion in the chapter 'The Different Self...' indicates that her formulations are inadequate for avoiding contingent explanations. An inclusion of language, especially Lacan's brand of structural linguistics, might have evaded some of those pitfalls of domestication.'⁷ From this conclusion, implying the necessity of reflecting Lacan's fidelity to structuralism, Gallop dismisses the validity of Mitchell's methodology. However, we see that Mitchell is still able to make use of one last remaining explanation in order to demonstrate what Lacan sets forth—indeed, why the phallus holds such a privileged position in the Symbolic order.

Mitchell's theoretical formulation of the signifier must, therefore, count on the importance of dynamic *difference*. In other words, the issue at

⁵ Juliet Mitchell, 'The Different Self, the Phallus and the Father', *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, New York, Penguin Books, 1974, p. 398.

⁶ Lacan, 'The Signification of the Phallus', *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, Translated by Bruce Fink, New York, W.W. Norton, 2006, p. 579.

⁷ Gallop, 'Psychoanalysis and Feminism', *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1982, pp. 8-9.

stake here is that of the dialectic as described by Hegel. It is clear that Mitchell realises the relevance of this phenomenological apparatus in her analysis of Freud's death drive, making a reference to a citation from Engels's *Dialectics of Nature*. She notes that he writes, 'The dialectical conception of life is nothing more than this [...] Living means dying.'⁸ These apparently opposing terms are in fact strongly linked through their dependence on the meaning of one another, just as signifier and signified are linked in the structuralist schema. In fact, the conceptual contingency between 'living' and 'dying' constitute an even stronger linguistic correspondence since they are in no way arbitrarily linked. And through Hegelian sublation, we see that being and nothingness, just as living and dying, are at once preserved and radically transformed through sublation-mediation. After all, for one to have, one must also *not* have; effectively, one must lack. Mitchell crystallises such an illumination, writing: 'Once again the most important aspect of any object relationship makes itself felt—the *lack* of the object.'⁹ Moreover, one must not think of the phallus in the literal sense of the term, nor in the concrete sense. Of course, it is indeed about what the phallus signifies, but also beyond this. The signification of the phallus concerns the ripple effect that it, as the *Aufhebung*, produces. Mitchell postulates:

Lacan suggests that it [the phallus] represents the very notion of exchange itself—it is not a value in or of itself, but represents the actual value of exchange or the absent object of exchange, obviously symbolic exchange. The phallus is the very mark of human desire; it is the expression of the wish for what is absent, for reunion (initially with the mother).¹⁰

Herewith, one could say that all of our concepts, at any given moment, lead back to exchange, to the phallus. Mitchell means to say that the phallus is not at all static. The phallus is metaphorical by nature, as we tend to process information as it relates to the Real. However, in the

⁸ Mitchell, 'The Different Self, the Phallus and the Father', *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, New York, Penguin Books, 1974, p. 389.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 395.

Symbolic, the phallus stops signifying before it reaches a kind of phantasmagorical metaphysics. We see here the dynamic Hegelian exchange in which the *Aufhebung* takes place. According to Hegel, *aufheben* is a denying and a conserving at the same time, creating universal immediacy.¹¹ The universal is found, for example, in the unconscious and in the primordial myth of the phallic mother. A propos of Lacan's triangular schema, with each angle representing a plane of existence—the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic, it is essential not to underestimate the importance of the Oedipus complex as the basis of desire. If one interprets the Lacanian conception of the phallus as some sort of phallogocentrism, one does not take into account the lack and the melancholy which necessarily constitute the nature of the subject, and as a result, this subject is constituted through the phallic signifier as well as the 'non-phallus', if you like, which disappears in the Other.

Positioning herself in the second camp, Gallop is sensitive to the importance of language in Lacan's work. However, despite this sensitivity, she provides us with an overly literal reading of the signification of the phallus. For example, she makes reference to a certain usage of metonymy on Lacan's part in relation to the phallus's status. Gallop claims, 'The substitution of the phallus (one sexual part) for the whole of sexuality is an example of metonymy, not what it should be (metonymy properly should have a varied definition with many sorts of relations), but what it stubbornly insists upon being (continually misconstrued as the part for the whole).'¹² It seems as though Gallop reads the phallus as if it were an arbitrary signifier, chosen to designate the totality of effects of signification in the Other. On the contrary, it is the *Aufhebung* operating here. It is not simply the phallus at hand here, but also its negative, both of which affect such a signification in order for the subject to realise its being in the Real. Moreover, it appears that Gallop erroneously supposes that the phallus signifies the male sexual organ. She uses the term 'sexuality' as if Lacan were speaking about the penis or clitoris in the Real. She likewise characterises the phallus as an object which

¹¹ Hegel, 'Die Wahrnehmung; oder das Ding, und die Täuschung', *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Paderborn, Voltmedia, 2005, p. 97.

¹² Gallop, 'Of Phallic Proportions: Lacanian Conceit', *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1982, p. 20.

‘stubbornly insists’. Lacan would refute such an overly simplistic, almost caricatured description, saying that the phallus’s will is not in question here, but rather the logic of the Other, which is entirely seized by the signifier. Gallop makes the error of momentarily confounding the Symbolic and the Real in Lacan’s theory. Through a Hegelian reading, it appears that Lacan does not mean to say what Gallop understands by the attributes and the effects of the phallus. Lacan presents the phallus as a form of symbolisation. Short of being an impertinent aporia, it takes on the very process of the *Aufhebung* itself.

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In *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’*, Butler attempts to reformulate the limits of language, otherwise situated in the structuralist schema of Lacan, and to rethink the sexed nature of the mind and body, in part through a rigorous and exhaustive study of the Lacanian phallus. It is apparent that Butler intends to recreate the discursive limits of the imaginary, thereby creating a sort of feminine-lesbian hybrid phantasmagoria. And at the same time, she aims at dismantling the fixed structures of her male predecessors, escaping the so-called normative space of Lacan. However, what Butler neglects to recognise is the stubborn fact that escaping this space proves rather difficult in the end, as it is the very order of language itself from which one must escape. In the chapter entitled ‘The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary’, Butler questions the privileged status that the phallus enjoys, thus establishing a cornerstone of her argument. She says:

To claim for the phallus the status of a privileged signifier performatively produces and effects this privilege. The announcement of that privileged signifier is its performance. That performative assertion produces and enacts the very process of privileged signification, one whose privilege is potentially contested by the very list of alternatives it discounts and the negation of which constitutes and precipitates that phallus.¹³

¹³ Judith Butler, ‘The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary’, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’*, New York, Routledge, 1993, p. 83.

By saying this, Butler effectively maintains that the supposedly exaggerated importance of the phallus is false precisely because Lacanian discourse operates according to a circular logic. In other words, she claims that the only thing privileging the phallus is the utterance which states that the phallus is privileged, which strikes the phallus with this mark. This artificial trace, in turn, elevates the phallus to the position of privileged signifier. Butler suggests that the phallus amounts to nothing apart from this phallogocentric formulation. From the moment one says that the phallus is privileged, the phallus manifests as such. In the Introduction to *Bodies That Matter*, Butler notes that this theory of performativity originally stems from the Derridean notion of iterability, which she apprehends, interpolates, and sets in motion in order to explain that a performance of gender is not simply a singular act, but rather a fluctuating and fluid production. Nevertheless, despite this coherent counterargument, Butler falls into the same trap as Gallop in the sense that she ignores what Lacan means by the Symbolic. This breed of citationality should, in fact, follow a far more conscientious theoretical trajectory relative to the limits of what does and does not constitute performativity in this context. What does Butler mean by the term 'process'? Moreover, what exactly is 'the very process of privileged signification'? If Butler is indeed referring to the utterance which declares that the phallus is the 'privileged signifier' and not the *Aufhebung*, for example, then we can clearly see how her position lacks an understanding of the Symbolic order's scope.

On the other hand, Žižek, who faithfully maintains Lacanian concepts in a great number of his works, undertakes a meticulous reading of 'The Signification of the Phallus' in a self-interview found in *The Metastases of Enjoyment: On Women and Causality*. Through the Hegelian lens, Žižek concludes, 'The phallic signifier is none other than [a] purely negative signifier, a 'signifier without signified'. Consequently, the feminist critique of the 'phallogocentric' logic of castration [...] tends to obscure the fact that this paradoxical function of the signifier that stands for its own lack is constitutive of symbolic order.'¹⁴ Therefore, the phallus and the subsequently produced lack take root in the Other. Žižek implies that the

¹⁴ Žižek, 'Phallogocentrism', *The Metastases of Enjoyment: On Women and Causality*, London, Verso, 1994, pp. 201-202.

opposition at work here is not that of 'having' versus 'being', but rather the opposition of 'having' versus 'appearing'. The woman is not the phallus; she *appears* to be the phallus. And it is precisely this form of appearance (which is incidentally closely related to the idea of masquerade) which leads to a false logic. The phallus can only realise its function when veiled. That is to say, the phallus no longer operates at the very moment when it is unveiled. Hence, the mask of femininity does not hide the phallus, but rather the fact that there is nothing behind the mask. To put this scene in Hegelian terms, the phallus does not represent an immediate being but a being which only exists insofar as it is for the other, for pure appearance. Furthermore, Žižek questions Butler's argument which submits that the phallus and the penis are one and the same unity. While Butler claims that 'the phallus has no existence separable from the occasions of its symbolisation [...] Hence, the lesbian phallus offers the occasion (a set of occasions) for the phallus to signify differently'¹⁵, Žižek rebuts:

I think Judith Butler is the victim of a non-dialectical obsession with content, which is why she leaves out of consideration what is always critical for Hegel, the 'formal aspect'. When Lacan claims, in 'The Signification of Phallus', that phallus is the signifier of the very gesture of *Aufhebung*, one has to take this literally: 'phallus' is the form of mediation-sublation as such.¹⁶

Here, it is clear that Žižek treats the *Aufhebung* in literal fashion as it encompasses the *process* of the phallus's signification and not simply the phallus as it is imagined by Butler and Gallop as a static and concrete morphology. This clarification on Žižek's part reminds us of the Hegelian idea that the Beyond is not a kind of positive content but an empty space—the subject.

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¹⁵ Butler, 'The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary', *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, New York, Routledge, 1993, p. 90.

¹⁶ Žižek, 'Phallogentrism', *The Metastases of Enjoyment: On Women and Causality*, London, Verso, 1994, p. 202.

We now see that if one intends to attribute the term ‘phallogocentrism’ to the Lacanian conception of the phallus, which privileges the phallus in order to understand the signification of human relations through a psychoanalytic lens, one must cast aside the fundamental Hegelian notion which takes into account the implicit dialectic in an object where the bedrock of the negative is situated—the *Aufhebung*. Hegel reminds us: ‘The Thing is posited as being *for itself*, or as the absolute negation of all otherness, therefore as purely *self*-related negation; but the negation that is self-related is the suspension of *itself*; in other words, the Thing has its essential being in another Thing.’¹⁷ It is precisely from this negation that one must approach the signification of the phallus. It is at once a unity in itself and an antenna, in the process of reaching the other, which incidentally reflects the properties of the initial object through difference and dialectic. In short, the phallus is nothing more and nothing less than the *Aufhebung*. By distinguishing the phallus from the penis, Lacan not only frees psychoanalysis to operate according to its own domain, that of the psyche and not of anatomical and biological ‘reality’, but he also emancipates psychoanalysis from a reductive literalism. Lacan liberates this field from the sexism founded on such politico-theoretical literalism evoked in the notion which maintains that destiny is ultimately determined by anatomy. Psychoanalysis has nothing to do with anatomy. On the contrary, signification relative to anatomy shapes the psyches of human subjects. One must think beyond the phallus and not merely insofar as one perceives it ‘at first sight’. It is certainly the phallus’s dialectical nature which obliges one to do so.

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Terrorism and Strategy:
Morality Separated by Word and Point of View

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Human beings are given the option to participate in both good and evil by their own choice; this is the belief that humans have free will. With this free will they are able to choose how they wish to live their lives, whether they are driven to live pious good lives, or they are driven to live lives of decadence and sin and care only for their own outcome. But this leads to the dilemma of is there a universal Good and a universal Evil? Point of view is the greatest moral compass of all judgments. Human beings in their basic nature are also believed to be mean and vile creatures that are only out for their own gain, and it is reason and free will that causes them to be kind creatures and give them the ability to coexist with each other. But when presented with a goal they wish to achieve, they revert back to their earliest, most primal drives and the lines between right and wrong become blurred.

But whatsoever is the object of any man's Appetite or Desire; that is it, which he for his part calleth *Good*: And the object of his Hate, and Aversion, *Evill*; And of his contempt, *Vile*, and *Inconsiderable*. For these words of Good, Evil, and Contemptible are ever used in relation to the person that useth them. (*Leviathan*, 120)

Hobbes believes that to justify the end that a man wants to reach, he will do anything to reach it, even if it involves twisting the truth just enough to make his goals and ways of achieving them look like they are just and the Good. The global political spectrum is no different from the individual man. And independent state will twist their words and point of view to make their way of achieving an end seem like it is good while making the

opposition seem like they are evil. Terrorism is one of the fastest growing problems in the world in recent decades. During no other time period in the history of man had terrorism ever been so present in the minds of the world's population. But the act can be found in all facets, whether fundamental religious groups, or even sponsored by different independent states. September 11th, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, two example of different form of sponsored terrorism; no matter who uses terrorism as a way to gain what they desire on the global scale, and no matter what name they give it, it is still the bringing of death and destruction against the innocent, and simply changing the word used to describe it does not justify the act.

Terrorism is a tool of both radical underground groups as well organized governments who have reached a point where conventional warfare no longer works or they never had the means to fight a large scale war and have to rely on hidden tactics of random destruction and murder to achieve victory.

The systematic terrorizing of whole populations is a strategy of both conventional and guerrilla war, and of established governments as well as radical movements. Its purpose is to destroy the moral of a nation or class, to undercut its solidarity; its method is the random murder of innocent people. Randomness is the crucial feature of terrorist activity. (*Just and Unjust Wars*, 197)

By definition, any group that is using random acts of murder or destruction for any reason is a terrorist organization. This is not limited to only radical groups but also state sponsored terrorism, acts that may even be glorified on the country's news or media outlets. While the act of terrorism is innately evil because it is the random and systematic ending of innocent human life, the words used to describe it can be twisted to make the terrorist group seem like they are performing good acts to win over the population they might be a part of or just to justify their actions to themselves and others. "Military Strategy" and "Terrorism" are two such interchangeable words. What is called Brilliant Military Strategy by generals of a state who are signing the order for mass endings of innocent is very easily terrorism simply be spun in a way so that when the general public of a nation hears about the nations actions they do not find it

immoral and wrong causing them to lose faith in their government. But then this same government can be attacked by a small radical group in a completely random fashion, just as how they did against another foreign nation and immediately call it terrorism and condone it. It is the language that the nation uses, as well as their point of view to the situations that causes them to call it a military action or an act of terrorism. Just as September 11th and the use of Atomic Bombs on Japanese civilians during World War II, they were both acts of terrorism simply labeled differently and seen from different points of view.

September 11th, 2001 was the worst terrorist attack against the United States in the nation's history. It was a random attack on innocent people that instilled fear into an entire nation, completely stopped everyday life for days and launched a war that led from Afghanistan to Iraq. No person in the United States saw this as anything other than it was, a blatant terrorist attack against the west which had achieved. However, on the other side of the playing field, Al-Qaeda believed it was divine justice against an evil nation and decadent lifestyle that had to be destroyed. While they understood that by definition it was a terrorist attack because it was a random unseen attack on human lives, they did not see it as evil and immoral. Because they do not have the funding or numbers to wage an open war against a nation, they turn to more secretive measures such as massive one time strikes or smaller incidents like when they use suicide bombers. These guerilla tactics to them are conventional warfare and they are in the right for using them because they are fighting what they see as an evil enemy that has to be stopped no matter what the cost. This radical group calls it warfare and believes that they are bringing divine justice to the unbelievers that need to be stopped. Terrorism versus Divine Justice, calling any military action the will of God will immediately gain supporters for a cause, whether they are Muslim, Catholic, Christian or Jewish. So while the act that destroyed so many lives is frowned upon, simply by what it is called can completely change the nature of the beast. The two different points of view, as well as the two different words used to describe that horrific day can on one had, seem like it was one of the most disgusting disregards for human life in recent years, or can be seen as a fair use of force in an unconventional war against an evil nation that had to be stopped. To these radicals it was

also viewed as the will of God, whom only knows good, so by his judgment the attacks were not evil.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki were the largest instantaneous losses of life to occur in all of human history. In no other moment did over 100,000 lives become extinguished within single moments. These were the closing days of World War II, the final strategy that could be used to save American lives and to shorten the war so that no more life on either side would be lost. While the use of the bomb is controversial and there are numerous people who believe that its use was completely uncalled for because of all of the civilian life lost, there are even more who call the use of the bomb the best course of action in that it saved countless lives by bringing a swift and sudden end to the war. But by the definition of terrorism, it was also the single greatest act of it in history. While the United States was in fact at war with Japan, that does not give it a right to use such deadly force on a target that they know is almost completely made up of civilians and combatants make up an almost minuscule amount of the population of the targets. Many military generals called the use of the atomic bomb a great strategic victory, that the Japanese would have continued to fight until every one of them had been killed in battle. But this begs the question why was the bomb dropped on civilian targets instead of military targets that could have caused the same destruction, and possibly forced the Japanese government into a situation where they would not risk continuing the war. On the other side of the argument though, seeing a completely different point of view are the military minds who believe that the use of the Atomic bombs at all were completely uncalled for.

In war, terrorism is a way of avoiding engagement with the enemy army. It represents an extreme form of the strategy of the “indirect approach.” It is so indirect that many soldiers have refused to call it war at all. This is as much a matter of professional pride as of moral judgment. (*Just and Unjust Wars*, 197)

State sponsored terrorism is considered an accepted military strategy to some, as long as a minimal amount of their own troops are killed with maximum efficiency in completing the mission; they see nothing wrong with using such underhanded tactics. If these attacks succeed, the

generals who were in charge of the missions are praised and considered military geniuses. The generals who do not believe in these attacks, and the idea of just warfare are usually pushed to the side because their strategies are more costly in times, money and lives. To the public that saw these attacks on the Japanese homeland, their point of view was that it was an amazing strategy to bomb their civilians so that they would lose their will to fight because so many of them had died. However, when looked upon on the outside it seems like a complete and total disregard for human life. It was a random choice of cities that contained almost no military presence. Again language comes into to decipher whether or not this was an act of terrorism, to the American victors, it was military genius that saved countless lives, to the Japanese it was a blatant disregard for human life and an evil act to end a war.

Free will gives us the choice to determine if an act is good or evil, it also gives us the ability to decide whether or not we actually want to call an act good or evil. Humans naturally desire to gain that which they don't have, and they use their free will to decide how they can claim it in both good and not good ways. Whether it is to end a belief that is separate from their own or it is to bring a quick end to a war, they are always attempting to reach their goal by whatever means they can. Terrorism can be a quick way to reach the goal that any group or nation acquires. Both independent rouge groups with little funding, as well as international superpowers have the ability to use terrorism to reach their goals. And because terrorism is random "continuall feare, and danger of violent death; [makes] the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short" (*Leviathan*, 186). This constant fear drives people to be afraid of their death, making them more likely to lash out and attack their fellow man for fear of him killing them as well. This causes a vicious cycle in which terrorism can grow in the world and can be used by many different groups to justify their own wars, whether they are between nations, groups or ideas and beliefs. And as long as these groups continue getting their followers to believe that they are right in using these acts of random violence against innocent people, then their point of view will not change, and the vicious circle of terror and violence will continue. Whether it is called military strategy, divine justice, cleansing, revolution, freedom fighting or any other name that gives the act a positive sound, it does not change the otherwise innately evil act that completely embodies that act

of terrorism. By giving an evil act a different name many people believe that they can change the coadunation of it, and even get their followers to support what they are doing. However, simply changing the language of the world does not change the act, just because blowing up innocent people can be called “God’s Work” does not make it good, innocent people were still killed. Calling it strategy does not change it either, if it is a random killing of innocent people to cause fear it is terrorism and no matter what name is given to the act it is still evil, that meaning of the word, no matter how it is said can never be changed.

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Real Time Democracy

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What is more essential for an effective democratic government than effective forms of communication among the participants in the system? Governments are largely built upon the foundations that society and language lay out for them, and are enabled by the capabilities of the communication methods of their time. The Greek democracies were effective because they were controlled by the relatively small aristocratic elite who made up the “citizenry” of the state. These rich, landowning men would meet in person together in the courthouses to engage in discussion on affairs of state. The socio-geographical constructs of the time allowed this to be an well-accepted form of government: there was a limit on the amount of freedom given to the agrarian workers in the state, who did not expect to have a large amount of input in the affairs of the city, and the large inability for quick communication among the various Greek city-states led to an increase in nationalistic pride and isolationism. Years later, when the socio-political landscape had been shifted by the Roman Empire, roads allowed for faster travel between various cities and provinces, and the plebian classes (the working class) cried out for more say in governmental affairs. This led to the Roman Senate system, a combination of aristocratic birthright and elected representatives who would legislate on behalf of the Roman people. This system was effective until the Empire became too large for the communications network (messengers on horseback) to handle, which led to a split in the Empire, allowing for invasion by barbarian tribes.

The United States government, a product of the Enlightenment era, adopted a democratic representation system, where the populations of states and cities elect representatives to legislate on their behalf. This representative system was made possible largely due to the printing

press, which allowed for the mass distribution of information to the general public across the large geographic boundaries of the states, which would have been impossible otherwise. This was later augmented by radio, television, and mass media, which helped to further elevate the powers of the elected representatives by giving them a platform to preach their views. While this may have enabled the common people to gain a greater understanding and involvement in their politicians, the one-way communication style of mass media began to polarize parties and platforms, essentially forcing citizens to merely add votes to one of two platforms which may or may not completely align with their personal wishes. Individuals become lost in the ensuing flood of votes to one side or the other, and political power can run unchecked, bolstered by the megaphone of mass media.

However, there has been a large push in Western societies towards New Media communications since the late 1980s. Contemporary new media technologies, such as the World Wide Web, are opening doors to new forms of communication. Instead of messages being filtered through the lens of television networks, newspapers, and radio stations, individuals are able to post text, images, sounds, and video to the web for anyone to view. Sites such as Wikipedia show how users are able to interact with one another by collaboratively editing informational articles, and Massively Multiplayer Online Games show the ability for users to form kinships and bonds online, despite national, cultural, or geographical boundaries.

While representative democracy was useful at a time when communication among people across vast distances took substantially longer, New Media technologies can allow for individual citizens to participate in a multilogue discussion of issues, events, and problems that may be facing society at large, and in their own communities. Individual messages can be heard and discussed, rather than drowned out by mass media. Through this large-scale multilogue, citizens of the state can take an active role in shaping the future of their nation, without the need to elect legislating representatives who make decisions for them. This kind of system can be referred to as a “real-time” democracy, as all issues and discussions will be formed and enacted upon immediately.

The Real-Time Democracy will use the web and other New Media tools in order to facilitate a multilogue among citizens of the state.

Strong, centralized governments have become staples of representative democracies in the contemporary era. Particularly in the United States, there is the notion that “the government” is a separate entity from civil society, which may be designed as a “night watchman” style government, which only exists to maintain order and the laws in the society, typically referred to as a “libertarian” view. In a more socialist world, government may be designed to work closely with civil society, having a hand in the economic realm and in social works. Both the libertarian and socialist views argue that a government is required to be separate from civil society in order to enforce a kind of “social contract” among the citizens of the state.

In a Real-Time Democracy, however, the enforcer of the “contract” *is* the civil society. Even “strict” laws and legislation aren’t written in stone, but rather are constantly evolving and self-evaluating agreements and compromises among the members of the society. Citizens of the state are in charge of entering into mutually beneficial and agreeable terms, which they themselves will want to enforce, not feel as if they could have something to gain should they back out of or try to cheat the system. Civil society, however, will have certain responsibilities to its members, just as a government has responsibilities to the citizens it is designed to protect. In order for the Real-Time Democracy to work, it is necessary that every member of the society have the ability to access an internet-capable computer or mobile device, and that sufficient education is given to all of the citizenry on how to operate and work within the online democracy. Anything less than that could devolve into a type of virtual aristocracy, where only those who are able to buy their way into the online market and have sufficient web presence are involved in the decision making. In order to grant the ability to participate in the online democracy to all citizens, the civil society will have to provide for computers and online access for the entire citizenry. This may be done in a variety of ways, including the organization of civilly-funded agencies to provide free internet access sites to the public, or the use of volunteer or other NGOs (Non-Government Organizations) and NPOs (Non-Profit Organizations) to supply individuals with internet-capable machines or computer hubs. Included with these computer centers must be some form of education and help with using the online system, in addition to the system being designed for easy usability. Pierre Levy comments in “Collective Intelligence” that

democratic representation works because Western society is able to read and write, and that an online true democracy can work because being internet savvy, like being literate, will eventually become ubiquitous. However, Levy fails to note that even in our day and age, a sizeable amount of the population of the United States is still not literate. The Real-Time Democracy will not be able to survive if the participants in the system do not make an effort to extend online access to everybody.

Issues of anonymity and privacy in an online environment are always important to a discussion of this nature, so how will the Real-Time Democracy deal with the incredible wealth of information which may or may not be made available via the online multilogue? Anonymity is typically encouraged on your average message board or forum, which can create a “split” between the user of the board and their online “persona.” It is quite normal for one user to have several different online handles across various (and sometimes even in the same) websites, often with individual “personality traits” as varied as the handles. Multiple handles and anonymity would not be conducive to an honest, open discussion of issues and affairs involving the state. First, citizens would be restricted to having one account each for the purposes of civil discussion, to prevent users from having multiple online personas, and trying to use multiple inputs to their advantage in the civil multilogue. By the same token, certain information linked to the online handle and viewable to all participants in the multilogue, such as the user’s full name and general regional location will be accessible to the public. Users will be encouraged to use their real names as their online handles in order to foster a more open environment for serious discussion, and will hopefully cut down on the inevitable attempts to “abuse” or “attack” the multilogue (e.g., board flaming, advertising, spamming, etc.). The organization of such a system will be another element either the minimalist civil government or NGOs/NPOs must be present to implement. Security measures will have to be taken to minimize the risk of hacking and online fraud. While extremely personal information, such as income information, exact location, and other secure data will not be made public, it is essential to the civil multilogue to encourage its citizens to operate without hiding behind the anonymity an online handle can provide; the citizens should feel comfortable in expressing their views and opinions in this open

environment. If people feel they must hide their real identities in order to “safely” express their views, the online multilogue has already failed.

The concept of “free agreement” was first introduced by Russian philosopher Peter Kropotkin in the late 19th century. A key component to the real-time democracy, free agreement is the idea that individuals, organizations, and corporations can come together to form agreements and deals with one another, which aren’t enforceable by law or a set of legal standards, which are kept because of the mutual benefit the agreement gives to both dealers. When people come to compromises and agreements on fair and equal terms, and when they are both satisfied with the results of the agreement, they will be inclined to keep the agreement, and will not rely on a system of enforcement to ensure that the other party keeps their end of the deal. Such agreements give way to a reduction in the power of government and leave much more in the hands of the citizenry.

Kropotkin himself uses the example of non-legislated corporate agreement among companies as an example of the success of free agreement. For example, companies send delegates from each party to negotiate deals which are beneficial to both sides. “Delegates” is an important distinction from “representatives,” as representatives are tasked with making laws and given the power to come to final decisions themselves, whereas delegates are simply emissaries of the greater will of the company. After delegates discuss terms and agreements, they then report back to their respective companies, who then confer amongst themselves upon the intended stipulations of the deal. The delegates then return to one another with updated term and agreements to relay the decisions of their companies. This discussion-evaluation-discussion model is precisely what the real-time democracy wishes to model itself after, where decisions aren’t made by the ideas and arguments of a few appointed representatives, but rather by the entire community in a deliberative and self-evaluating process. Only when all parties are satisfied and happy with the terms and agreements they have arrived at does a deal go through. New media technology can help facilitate these types of discussions on a much larger and more far-reaching scale than can be found on the corporate level. In addition, the ability for online discussion to lead to agreements on policy and services by all can enable a

greater sense of willingness to uphold the agreements, leading to a lessening for the need of a legislative body and for judicial services.

There will be those who feel they can make greater advances by entering into agreements with others, and once their own personal needs are satisfied, break these deals without fulfilling their end of the bargain. Without a definite legislative binding contract, and without a strong judicial enforcer to come down on them, they may be inclined to think that they will be able to repeatedly get away with these breaches of contract. There are two major pitfalls which will minimize this kind of person from taking advantage of the system. First, there is the ability of the victim of the broken deal to present their problem to the community, who may choose to enforce a penalty upon the deal-breaker. In this way, a civil justice system may replace the centralized legislative justice system in place in our representational democracy. The tracking and back-up of information allows easy ways of tracking the agreements made between parties. Second is the ability to make known that the party which breaks agreements freely entered upon has done so in the public sphere. While it is possible that no immediate action may be taken against the party, it will be more difficult for them to repeat their dishonesty in the future, for the simple reason that less individuals and organizations will want to interact with people they know to be unreliable. A person who tries to take advantage of the system may find themselves forced out of it, essentially dooming their abilities to function well in civil society. We find examples of this already in sites that allow for the public rating of users based upon their reliability, such as the eBay feedback system, which allows users to leave positive or negative reviews of their dealings with other users. Users with large amount of negative feedback will find it increasingly difficult to buy and sell their way through eBay, whereas users who are given large amounts of positive feedback are sought out by others. While eBay users with negative feedback may be able to new accounts, the single-account setup of the real-time democracy will ensure that any breaches in agreement are publically and permanently attached to the offending party, permanently damaging their reputation and value in the state.

It is important to note that this change in political structures cannot occur without a change in socio-cultural attitudes. Western society is currently in the middle “future shock”, meaning that culture hasn’t yet

caught up to the technological advances made over the last 20 years. Evidence of this can be found by looking at the massive tomes of digital copyright law that have appeared in the past decade. Current copyright law is unfit for dealing with questions of original ownership, infinite replication, and modular modification which are inherent in digital content. Video games, social networking sites, and online forums are treated with the same skepticism and disdain and photography, film, and rock and roll were at their inceptions. New media communications technologies are growing much the same way they have been for the past 10 years: the organic growth and exploration of volunteers who are making strides both in the types of media available and in the ways it can be delivered. Because of this future shock, the real-time democracy will be looked on with skepticism by a society who still lives in the realm of mass media, and who are unused to the possibilities of direct, individual participation and discussion on a national level. However, through the convergence of various new media forms of communication, it is possible to facilitate an effective online multilogue that can be used by the members of society to usher in a new age of democracy.

The Language of Terror: Euphemism, Shock Hyperbole and their Cooperative Coerciveness in Contemporary Political Discourse

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Euphemism and hyperbole have forever been a part of political rhetoric. The strategic dilution and exaggeration of language pertinent to specific political issues catalyzes, even coerces public support for policy.

Administrations, when unable to ignore certain issues, will address them obtusely, disguising their full import with euphemized language which calculatedly diverts publics' collective attention from informed efficacy to perpetual hesitation.

Conversely, administrations frequently resort to hyperbolic language with the full intention of shocking citizens into compliance through traumatic language or negative association.

Euphemism and shock hyperbole are not separate concerns. Rather, they work in concert, cooperatively drawing the American public and the international community at large away from objective truth and rational action.

Never has this reality been more apparent than in the language of the so-called "war on terror." From the justification for the Iraq War, to the torture regime, to post-9/11 legislation and media, the two-headed monster of euphemism and shock hyperbole dominates our politics.

What is the difference between "sectarian conflict" and "civil war"? What distinguishes "enhanced interrogation techniques" from "acts of torture," or "genocide" from "ethnic cleansing"?

We live in a time where "imminent threat" is justification enough to wage war, even a preemptive war. It is time to go beyond the dizzying mess of empty speechifying and overcharged language symptomatic of

contemporary political discourse, and uncover just how significant an effect this cooperative rhetorical manipulation has in shaping the politics of the war on terror.

The *threat* of terrorism became the *war* on terrorism following the attacks of September 11, 2001. And ever since, the painful memory of that day has been woefully abused in political discourse to shock the American public into compliance with post-9/11 legislation like the Patriot Act and Protect America Act.

The Patriot Act was signed into law on October 26, 2001. Its provisions are widely understood and include: authorization for the FBI, CIA or other agency to search citizens' telephone, financial or e-mail records without first obtaining a court order, the physical search of the home or office of a suspect by law enforcement officials without a warrant, the seizure and indefinite detention of immigrants and suspected terrorists, and the suspension of habeas corpus to extract information from these individuals.

Many of the stipulations of the Patriot Act have since been ruled unconstitutional by Federal courts. So how is it that an act which is today considered to be in large part unconstitutional was so resoundingly accepted by the American public immediately following 9/11?

It is easy to see that the Bush administration took advantage of the timing of this legislation—it passed a mere forty-seven days after the attacks. It is harder, however, to see how the administration took advantage of the American people in a second way: through language.

The "Patriot" Act. "Patriot" sounds good, does it not? We all call ourselves patriots. September 11th is now nationally recognized as "Patriot Day." By calculatedly labeling the legislation with a universally-recognized, positively-associated term like "Patriot," the Bush administration and its numerous supporters, both Republican and Democrat, deliberately targeted the American public's sympathies and fears following the attacks through the subconscious rhetorical association of the new legislation with the events of September 11th. And it worked.

Or how about the *Protect America* Act, which seeks to grant retroactive immunity to telecommunications companies for the unwarranted surveillance of domestic and international correspondence? In other words, the act would allow private companies to wiretap phone

calls and catalogue e-mails based solely on “probable cause,” because obtaining a legal warrant would take too long.

Maybe Orwell was right.

A week ago, I attended a debate on retroactive immunity between Villanova’s College Republicans and College Democrats. When discussing the Protect America Act, a young woman challenged one Democratic debater saying, “How can you not support the Protect America Act? Don’t you want to protect America?”

This is precisely the effect desired by terming legislation with positively-associated language. The Patriot Act *must* be patriotic. The Protect America Act *must* protect America.

Legislators understand that by labeling laws “Patriot” or “Protect America,” the American public is far more likely to accept them without any sort of investigation.

This strategic “piggybacking,” if you will, of legislative rhetoric with September 11th achieves a twofold effect: it appeals to the public’s collective paranoia of terrorism, and it subconsciously forces people to positively associate the legislation with national security.

This dual effect is possibly the single most coercive tactic operative in the language of the war on terror today. And it is a prime example of the ability of shock hyperbole and subconscious rhetorical association to pull citizens away from an objective center and towards a fearful extreme, engendering blind subscription to policymaking which would otherwise fall under closer scrutiny.

The positive rhetorical association of the Patriot and Protect America Acts works conjointly with *negative* rhetorical association such as the Bush administration’s labeling of certain terrorist-harboring states the “Axis of Evil.”

It is well-known that historically the word “axis” has a decidedly negative connotation. During World War II, the “axis powers” included the triple-threat of Mussolini’s Italy, imperial Japan and Nazi Germany. The new “axis” label is no coincidence.

By terming these countries the “Axis of Evil,” the Bush administration not only parallels the original axis powers, but *improves upon* the intensity of the association by adding that these countries are “evil.”

The “new axis,” as it were, includes Iraq, Iran and North Korea. Former UN ambassador John Bolton unofficially added to this list Libya, Syria and Cuba. Cuba?

So, Nazi Germany is simply an “axis power,” but the Cubans are “axis” *and* “evil?” That is what the administration’s hyperbolic rhetoric would have us believe.

How can we have sympathy for people termed the “Axis of Evil?” How can we learn diplomacy and spread democracy when we use such ridiculous, anti-diplomatic rhetoric? I am not at all suggesting the aforementioned countries do not pose a threat. The danger of an armed North Korea, which has the world’s fourth largest army, and the proven-effective terrorist cells in Syria, Libya and Iran are undeniably a reason for concern.

But what good does it do to label these countries “evil?” It is a disrespect to diplomacy. It agitates the extremists in those countries, even creates new ones. Equally disturbing, it cultivates misunderstanding, hatred and xenophobia in the American people.

On March 20th of this year, we reached the five-year anniversary of the war in Iraq. In the months, and now years, following President Bush’s notorious “Mission Accomplished” declaration, a debate has been raging over how to term the violence between ethnic Kurds and Shi’ite and Sunni Muslims within Iraq.

Many would call the organized violence between factions in a single country a “civil war.” The Bush administration says this is not the case, instead terming the violence “sectarian conflict.” What is the distinction, and why make it?

Well, for starters, how can the mission be “accomplished” if the country you have supposedly just liberated has descended into a “civil war?” Admitting such a thing would suggest a disorganized, uncontrollable and perpetual mess that has and will cause hundreds, even thousands of coalition soldiers, Iraqi police and innocent civilians alike their lives in a “liberated” Iraq. The Bush administration could not possibly admit to that.

Unable to avoid the facts completely, the Bush administration consistently refers to the violence as “sectarian conflict.” Well, a “conflict” is much better than a “war.” And the word “sectarian” is more erudite

than the word “civil.” By diluting one word and obscuring the other, the result is confusion, as intended.

“Sectarian conflict” is a watered-down, euphemized term, which has not a parallel, but *identical* definition to “civil war” and is used by the Bush administration to evade the reality of the situation in Iraq and confuse the American people’s own understanding of the war.

The war itself began less than two months after George W. Bush delivered his now infamous 2003 State of the Union Address. In this speech, he famously stated, “The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein has recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa” and that “thousands of Iraqi security personnel are at work hiding documents and materials from the UN inspectors.”

Evidence now shows that these claims were completely false. Hussein did not seek or obtain enriched uranium from Niger. And, in fact, the UN inspectors begged President Bush for more time before he declared war on Iraq. Bush, knowing full-well that the inspectors would find nothing, and that subsequently his principal justification for the war would be unsubstantiated, decided to embellish the facts, using hyperbolized language and redirecting the onus of the UN inspectors’ reservations about his impending strike from his administration to Hussein.

One of the most disturbing consequences of the war on terror is the proliferation of the torture regime in American foreign policy: namely the Extraordinary Rendition program. Extraordinary Rendition refers to the United States’ program of extrajudicial transportation and detention of suspected terrorists or collaborators from one country to another, often for the purpose of employing traumatic interrogation methods, which many believe qualify as torture.

The title “Extraordinary Rendition” itself is a euphemism. It is a deliberately confusing term. Without investigation into the provisions of the program, “Extraordinary Rendition” sounds more like Hallmark Channel original movie than what it really is: a U.S.-sponsored program of unlawful kidnapping and imprisonment of *suspected* terrorists denied the right to trial and subject to cruel and unusual punishments like sleep deprivation, exposure to extreme temperatures, dog attacks, and “waterboarding.”

Unable to deny the use of waterboarding (an interrogation method which simulates drowning), the Bush administration has avoided labeling

the practice “torture,” and instead has synthesized a new euphemistic term: “enhanced interrogation technique.”

Administration officials are on the record terming the objective of these “enhanced interrogation techniques” as “shocking the conscience.” How does one go about “shocking the conscience?” How does one even define “shocking the conscience?” It is an empty, meaningless term. And this is the point; obscure the truth, and prevent repercussion.

The United States government cannot possibly admit to committing acts of torture. That would violate the Geneva Convention and severely injure our pristine global reputation. Not to mention we put Japanese officers on trial for war crimes for waterboarding our own soldiers during World War II.

But, with the facts pouring in about our use of waterboarding, the United States government cannot simply deny what it has done.

The answer is to simply *redefine* interrogation methods like waterboarding. We cannot torture. But we sure can “enhancedly interrogate.” The government can simultaneously acknowledge the practice of these methods while evading the accurate labeling of “torture.” And so we see how a simple blurring of language can achieve something so calamitous as the perpetuation of torture in American foreign policy.

Although many of those detained by the Extraordinary Rendition program are, in fact, terrorists and enemies of America, the information elicited from them has proven to be unreliable and ineffective. The fact of the matter is the Extraordinary Rendition program has led to the unlawful detention, degradation, mutilation and execution of innocent people.

On this topic, the Washington Post’s official transcript of the aforementioned 2003 State of the Union Address shows President Bush ominously celebrating, “All told, more than 3,000 suspected terrorists have been arrested in many countries.” The next line of the transcript reads “(applause).”

Often we forget another form of terrorism. We forget the sort of terrorism that does not have a government or ideology as its target, but rather seeks to eliminate a race of people. We call this genocide. The horrific reality of the genocide raging in Sudan is a painful echo of a similar conflict suffered by the people of Rwanda not fifteen years ago—a

conflict the United States neglected simply by redefining it as “ethnic cleansing.”

According to the United Nations “ethnic cleansing” is officially defined as “rendering an area ethnically homogeneous by using force or intimidation to remove from a given area persons of another ethnic or religious group.”

But since we are examining the *usage* of the term “ethnic cleansing,” we must ask the question: where does the term “ethnic cleansing,” *as it is defined today*, originate?

The answer: early-90s Yugoslavia. Although the term itself dates back to post-war Germany and the Soviet Union, it only became blurred-together with the term “genocide” during the Serbo-Bosnian conflict of the early 90s, as Yugoslavia President Slobodan Milošević officially announced to the world in 1992 that the *expulsion* and *execution* of ethnic Bosnians and Albanians from the Kosovo province was not genocide, but rather “etničko čišćenje” or “ethnic cleansing.”

In self-defining the conflict “ethnic cleansing,” Milošević cleverly blurred the line between it and “genocide,” emphasizing the *expulsion* of non-Serbs, and downplaying their *execution*. This expulsion-execution distinction is the crux of the difficulty in separating “ethnic cleansing” from “genocide”; and it is here where American administrations have found safe haven from unwanted involvement in genocide prevention—namely the Rwandan genocide of 1994.

Before we can discuss the Rwandan debacle, we must briefly explore America’s history with genocide, laws passed on it and the term itself.

In 1948, with the atrocities of World War II still fresh in the world’s memory, the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was created. The convention adopted Raphael Lemkin’s definition of genocide:

Any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group as such:

- a. Killing members of the group;*
- b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to the group;*
- c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;*
- d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;*
- e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.*

The convention nearly unanimously legalized this definition of genocide; the treaty went into effect in January of 1951. There were, however, ten countries which demanded provisos granting immunity from future prosecution for past genocides. Nine of these countries were: Bahrain, Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam, Yemen and Yugoslavia. All have histories of severe human rights violations.

But which is the tenth country not to ratify the treaty in 1951? Which country held-out for a full thirty-five years, before signing the treaty in 1986? The United States of America. But why? Why not ratify? The answer is all too clear. The United States feared the same thing the aforesaid countries feared: prosecution for past violations. Our long history of slavery and the eradication of Native Americans during our expansion could qualify as genocide.

And so it is that America's relationship with the international community on the subject of genocide has always been one of hesitation and inaction.

The Rwandan holocaust is no exception. When Hutu extremists shot-down the plane carrying Rwandan president Juvénal Habyarimana and Burundian president Cyprien Ntaryamira and began to exterminate Rwanda of minority Tutsis, the international community was called-upon to respond. The United States' position was to avoid involvement.

How could America, the unipolar leader of the free world, not intervene and prevent a genocide? It would be unimaginable. More importantly, it would damage our reputation, the image of unbridled justice we have synthesized for ourselves.

Domestically, the President's approval ratings would plummet. The country would lose credibility in the international community; the world would rightly challenge America's commitment to preventing genocide.

But how to avoid such backlash, and still not act? Surely the Clinton administration could not ignore the facts; not a month after Hutu extremists took over, thousands had already been murdered. And of course the administration was reluctant, if not unwilling, to stop it. How did the Clinton administration avoid both intervention and worldwide uproar at the same time?

The answer is disconcertedly simple; it *re-termed* the extermination. The administration's new term of choice was "ethnic cleansing." The Clinton administration consistently termed the Rwandan extermination "ethnic cleansing" as its very strategy for avoiding intervention.

People were not being "displaced," as would be the case in a justly-defined case of ethnic cleansing. There was no "intimidation" or "forced expulsion." Hundreds of thousands of Tutsis and moderate Hutus, innocent people, were being ripped from their homes, thrown to the dirt and hacked to pieces with machetes. Hutus systematically executing Tutsis; one ethnic group exterminating another; this *is* genocide.

Clinton even went so far as to call the extermination "local conflict."

Whether it was called "local conflict" or "ethnic cleansing," the painful reality remains that to avoid labeling the Rwandan extermination a "genocide," the Clinton administration hid from the truth and rationalized its apathy by doing little more than disguising "genocide" with a similar-but-exclusive term. This is rhetorical coerciveness at its zenith.

In 1999, in an interview for PBS news magazine *Frontline*, President Clinton addressed his unwillingness intervene in the Rwandan extermination and his refusal to term it a "genocide," saying that if he had sent "5,000 US peacekeepers [to Rwanda], over 500,000 lives could have been saved."

We can see how we are coerced into support of legislation by the abuse of the memory of September 11th.

We can see how the amplified labeling of our assumed enemies as the "Axis of Evil" breeds in Americans a blind contempt for those countries and their citizens—not to mention the reciprocal contempt and extremism created in those countries as a result.

We can see how the cowardly redefining of what constitutes "torture" perpetuates the cruel and unusual treatment of human beings, terrorist or not.

We can see how evasive language justifies an administration's apathy towards the methodical slaughter of over half a million people.

If we can understand how the strategic and cooperative use of euphemism and shock hyperbole defines today's politics, and thus shapes people's lives, we can understand how it coerces us away from objectivity, away from truth, away from the standards for which this country is so respected.

