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ABSTRACT

Numerous scholars of the social sciences and humanities have analyzed President George W. Bush's rhetorical response to the September 11th terror attacks on the United States. Whereas some have viewed his discourse as participating in the epideictic genre, designed as a non-argumentative attempt to unite Americans and identify enemies, others have noted its overt tendency toward implicit policy advocacy and viewed it as belonging to the deliberative genre. At present, no research has attempted to bridge the gap between these apparently disparate viewpoints. Should the rhetoric be viewed as an epideictic reaction to tragedy, extolling the values of America while condemning those of its enemies? Or should it instead be viewed as a deliberative attempt at advocacy, anticipatorily positing fear-based arguments for soon-to-be-made shifts in American foreign and domestic policy? Indeed, do simplified generic distinctions remain the useful tools of rhetorical classification that they once were, or has their inconsistent application since antiquity rendered them unimportant? Drawing from a number of studies in the humanities and social sciences, as well as from classical rhetorical theory, this study asks: On what rhetorical basis should George W. Bush's post-9/11 discourse be assessed, and to what extent can such an assessment be definitive and useful? The study ultimately concludes that recognition of the potential for multiple generic tendencies to participate within in a single discourse can contribute to more sophisticated and helpful understandings of modern rhetorical hybrids like Bush's speeches.

http://depts.washington.edu/chid/intersections_Spring_2009/Joshua_Hubanks_George_W._Bush_Post_9-11_Discourse.pdf

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Praise, Blame and Advocacy

An Examination of President George W. Bush's Post-9/11 Discourse and the Rhetorical Genres that Define it

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On the morning of September 11th, 2001, 2,974 people lost their lives in the most significant terror attack to have ever occurred on U.S. soil. Not surprisingly, this attack has had a correspondingly significant effect on the way in which our nation and its leaders talk about terrorism. As many have noted,² President George W. Bush's post-9/11 discourse was in many ways coercive, functioning to alter audience opinions, thoughts and actions by means contrary to democratic norms. Kellner, for one, has analyzed Bush's reliance on scare tactics and intimidating language as an argumentative means to influence public opinion.³ Murphy has conducted similar research, although he argues that Bush's discourse relied on topics of praise and blame rather than argumentation to make its case.⁴

While previous studies have explored Bush's less-than-transparent rhetorical practices, a consensus has yet to emerge regarding the discourse's classification. Is the rhetoric representative of the epideictic genre, allowing its audience only to passively observe a situation which should have required critical participation?

¹ I would like to thank Leah Ceccarelli, Associate Professor of Communication at the University of Washington, for her encouragement and critical input that helped make this paper possible.

² See John M. Murphy, "'Our Mission and Our Moment': George W. Bush and September 11th," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 6, no. 4 (2003): 607-632; Douglass Kellner, "Bushspeak and the Politics of Lying: Presidential Rhetoric in the 'War on Terror'," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (2007): 622-645; Robert L. Ivie, "Fighting Terror by Rite of Redemption and Reconciliation," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 10, no. 2 (2007): 221-248; and Denise M. Bostdorff, "George W. Bush's Post-September 11 Rhetoric of Covenant Renewal: Upholding the Faith of the Greatest Generation," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89, no. 4 (2003): 293-319.

³ Kellner, "Bushspeak and the Politics of Lying", 627.

⁴ Murphy, "Our Mission and Our Moment", 614-15, 620.

Or is it representative of the deliberative genre, advocating certain political policies by way of exploiting popular fears?

The research proposed here will seek to better understand the concept of “genre” as it pertains to the Aristotelian tradition. Specifically, it will examine the immediate post-9/11 rhetoric of President George W. Bush. The study will not seek to question the President’s rhetorical intent, but rather the generic basis on which his rhetoric has already been judged. Drawing from a number of studies in the humanities and social sciences, as well as from classical rhetorical theory, it asks: On what rhetorical basis should George W. Bush’s post-9/11 discourse be categorized, and to what extent can such a classification be definitive and useful?

Scholars have ascribed a variety of attributes to George W. Bush’s rhetorical response to 9/11. This, however, should come as no surprise: for decades, academics have attested to the validity of their own interpretations of the rhetorical genres, building upon and tearing down the constituent claims of their colleagues in an effort to reach greater truth. The following review aims to contribute to this effort, highlighting the variety and extent of previous attempts to better understand the concept of “genre.” In revealing the breadth and nature of scholarly contention surrounding Aristotelian forms—particularly as they relate to the post-9/11 Bush discourse—this review will establish a basis for re-examining two key Bush texts. The review will unfold in three parts: firstly, as an introduction to the Aristotelian genres and a look at previous assessments of the Bush rhetoric; secondly, as an examination of how genres can be seen to exist in simultaneity; and thirdly, as an investigation into how an epideictic speech might strive toward a deliberative end.

Genre and George W. Bush

In his article “‘Our Mission and Our Moment’: George W. Bush and September 11th,” Murphy describes Bush’s post-9/11 rhetoric as “almost purely epideictic.”⁵ He holds that it appealed to themes of American unity while “amplifying [the country’s] virtues,” positing further that the discourse did not seek to persuade its audience on matters of policy. Rather, the President’s rhetorical choices allowed him to “dominate public interpretations of the events of September 11” and to enjoy support and popularity in spite of obvious political

⁵ *Ibid.*, 609.

shortcomings.⁶ In crafting this rhetoric, Murphy claims that Bush relieved Americans of the burden of critical thought, making them passive observers rather than active judges.⁷ As the President never asked his audience to ponder the expediency of political moves, Murphy holds that Bush's rhetoric belongs to the "epideictic genre."⁸

Contemporary understandings of epideictic discourse originated in antiquity with Aristotle, who sought "to analyze systematically the 'art' of rhetoric."⁹ His aim in characterizing epideictic discourse was to encapsulate several specialized types of oratory into a single type, unified by three common traits: association with ceremonial occasion, display of oratorical mastery, and a focus on topics of praise or blame.¹⁰ Jasinski states that today, epideictic discourse is most commonly associated with praise and blame speech, which concerns "...virtue and vice and honorable [traits] and shameful [traits]; for these are the points of reference for one praising or blaming."¹¹ Beyond this, scholars have noted epideictic's emphasis on 'performative character.' Unlike the other rhetorical genres (i.e., deliberative and forensic), which seek to comment on the world and social actions within it, epideictic rhetoric seeks to be "a significant social action in itself."¹²

Epideictic rhetoric is rooted in the present.¹³ Jasinski claims that its true function "is to reveal or disclose something—to bring new truths out into the open—rather than...to reinforce existing values."¹⁴ Furthermore, while epideictic rhetoric indeed seeks to comment on things current, it may also remind us "of the past and [project] the course of the future."¹⁵ This fact holds special importance within the post-9/11 scenario, wherein the President's orations frequently referenced past and future alike. It is perhaps unsurprising then that Condit has noted audiences' tendency to "actively seek and invite

⁶ Ibid., 608.

⁷ Ibid., 609.

⁸ Ibid., 612.

⁹ James Jasinski, *Sourcebook on rhetoric: key concepts in contemporary rhetorical studies* (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 2001), 210.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Aristotle and George Alexander Kennedy, *On rhetoric: a theory of civic discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1366a/1366b.

¹² W. H. Beale, "Rhetorical Performative Discourse: A New Theory of Epideictic," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 11, no.4 (1978): 225.

¹³ Aristotle and Kennedy, 1358b/1359a.

¹⁴ Jasinski, 211.

¹⁵ Aristotle and Kennedy, 1358b/1359a.

speech that performs [the] epideictic function when some event, person, group, or object is confusing and troubling.”¹⁶

Given this understanding of the epideictic genre, Murphy's interpretations are reasonable. Referring to Americans' shock in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, he states that, “George Bush felt the need to define the meaning of 9/11 and we felt the need to understand this horrific event.”¹⁷ Citing a speech given at a prayer service on September 14th, 2001, Murphy quotes Bush: “We are here in the middle hour of our grief. So many have suffered so great a loss, and today we express our nation's sorrow.”¹⁸ Murphy notes Bush's reference to time (“here in the middle hour of our grief”) which places both he and his audience in the present (the temporal marker of epideictic speech), and thus in a position to reflect on the past while looking to the future simultaneously. In doing so, the speaker and his audience exist as one, unified in their common experience of 9/11.

To this extent Bush's rhetoric could indeed be seen as epideictic, although Murphy's view leaves little room for less absolute interpretations. Repeatedly, he insists that “President Bush has spoken almost entirely through the medium of epideictic rhetoric when it comes to his war on terror.”¹⁹ Even in acknowledging the hybrid nature of most war rhetoric as both unifying and advocatory, Murphy insists that Bush's is characterized almost entirely by the former.

This interpretation overlooks the implicitly argumentative nature in much of Bush's discourse. Indeed, the Bush Administration's frequent use of “fear rhetoric” in the days, months and years following 9/11 can be seen to constitute an implicit argument made to the American people. We have seen many examples of this, from Bush's assertion that terrorists “are evil and kill without mercy,”²⁰ to his claims that they “have no heart, no conscience,”²¹ and “kill

¹⁶ Celeste Michelle Condit, “The functions of epideictic: The Boston Massacre orations as exemplar,” *Communication Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (1985): 288.

¹⁷ Murphy, 610-11.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 611.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 609.

²⁰ George W. Bush, *President's Address to the Nation*, September 11, 2001. Speech presented at The Oval Office, http://www.cspan.org/executive/bush_terror.asp?Cat=Current_Event&Code=Bush_Admin (accessed June 14, 2009).

²¹ George W. Bush, *President and Mrs. Bush Express Sympathies at Embassy of Jordan*, November 10, 2005, Speech presented at Embassy of Jordan, Washington, D.C., <http://www.jordanembassyus.org/new/pr/pr11102005b.shtml> (accessed June 16, 2009).

innocent men, women and children to achieve political objectives.”²² Insofar as these statements exploited a national sense of grief and desire for retribution, they implied a specific policy: that retribution must be sought. As such, they conflict with a purely epideictic interpretation of the Bush discourse. Before further exploring this friction, however, it will be useful to better understand the deliberative genre, the rhetorical form most associated with policy advocacy.

Deliberative, or public policy discourse is one of three classical rhetorical genres.²³ Argument is the “essential ingredient” of deliberative discourse, wherein advocates or opponents of a cause assert their case for a particular position.²⁴ If, for example, Party A wants to pass Legislation X, Party A would have to argue its case to Party B in an effort to gain Party B’s members’ support. In doing so, Party A would have employed deliberative rhetoric by offering arguments to advocate one policy over another.

In this example, we see that deliberative rhetoric must necessarily contain at least two components: First, it must offer some form of counsel on or advocacy for one decision over another. Second, it must seek to influence an issue of indeterminate outcome. Aristotle states that the subjects of deliberative rhetoric, then, “are whatever, by their nature, are within our power and of which the inception lies with us. [As judges,] we limit our consideration to the point of discovering what is possible or impossible for us to do.”²⁵

As opposed to epideictic rhetoric, the audience for which is friendly and stands to lose nothing, deliberative rhetoric demands audience scrutiny; it involves stake, dispute and the potential for loss. Aristotle wrote that “[the deliberative rhetor][...will be concerned] not with all, but [only] those [things] which can both possibly come to pass and [possibly] not...As to what necessarily exists or will exist or is impossible to be or to have come about, on these matters there is no deliberation.”²⁶ As such, Aristotle equated the role of a deliberative audience with that of a judge: it must hear an argument and make a decision.²⁷ Murphy points to the apparent absence of this criterion continually when supporting his

²² George W. Bush, *President Bush Participates in Joint Press Availability with Prime Minister Gordon Brown of the United Kingdom*, July 30, 2007, Speech presented at Camp David, Maryland, <http://merln.ndu.edu/archivepdf/EUR/WH/20080616-1.pdf> (accessed June 12, 2009).

²³ Jasinski, 160.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 162.

²⁵ Aristotle and Kennedy, 1359b/1360a.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1359a/1359b.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1358b/1359a.

argument that Bush's post-9/11 rhetoric was epideictic rather than deliberative. In reference to Bush's opening remarks at a September 20th, 2001 speech before a joint session of Congress, Murphy writes that "This opening set the genre." Bush, Murphy adds, "did not preview policies for the union's betterment nor did he suggest expediency arguments. Rather, he was representative of the people; he stood as a part for their whole."²⁸

However, to focus on only the epideictic aspects of Bush's rhetoric—and surely they exist—is to overlook other equally important aspects: those instances where implicit arguments are sharply articulated through the use of manipulative, fear-based rhetoric. Kellner, for one, claims that the Bush Administration "manipulated a politics of fear to push through a right-wing agenda that included the Patriot Act, massive changes in our legal system, a dramatic expansion of the U.S. military, and U.S.-led military intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq."²⁹ He contends that Bush constructed an "evil Other," a loosely defined yet easily identifiable enemy against whom Americans could unite and in the interest of defeating would accept open war.³⁰

In explicating this fear-laden rhetoric wherein elusive evil does possess the means and desire to inflict harm upon us at any moment, Kellner exposes the deceptively argumentative nature of Bush's discourse. He insists that the mass media have consistently been the venues through which Administration fear arguments are echoed, "[making] the public look anxiously to the government for protection, rendering the population malleable to manipulation."³¹ So, legitimized by mainstream media and made to resonate in the public psyche, Bush's expedient appeals to fear can be seen to advocate policy by simply reminding Americans of the dangers they face. And yet these same instances can be seen as examples of praise and blame speech; instances not where policy is advocated, but where the evil acts of America's enemies are subjected to the public scorn they deserve.

This dualistic attribute is further revealed in Bush's frequent references to 'good versus evil,' wherein he portrays America as absolutely good and its enemies as the embodiment of evil. By framing 9/11 and the War on Terror in black and white terms, arguments for "redemptive violence," Keller points out, came easily.

²⁸ Murphy, 613.

²⁹ Kellner, 622.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 626.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 627.

But so, too, did narratives of praise and blame, and in the uncertain aftermath of 9/11, it is not hard to imagine how or why these ambiguous tactics might have been used. As Al-Sumait, Lingle and Domke have pointed out, political entities often capitalize on major terror attacks for purposes of rhetorical expediency: “Time and time again, the regime positions the flag...in front of the wreckage and begins preparing citizens for what they must willingly sacrifice to aid the state in its epic battle between good and evil.”³² In this way, we see how a leader’s appeals to a nation’s collective fear in the aftermath of tragedy can be an effective policy maneuver. In lieu of conventional argumentation, appeals to fear can advocate certain political moves over others implicitly. In the post-9/11 example, Kellner holds that Bush was able to effectively translate fear into consent, gaining widespread public support for a flawed war in Iraq, as well as a barrage of civil liberty-rescinding legislation.

Murphy maintains, however, that the reticence of Bush’s audience only cements the discourse as epideictic. As the audience is “mute,” he contends, they cannot (or do not) actively judge any arguments.³³ This view is echoed by Bohman, who holds that “Argumentation is deliberative only when it is dialogical, in the give and take of arguments among speakers.”³⁴ Is it wholly realistic, though, given contemporary political and technical realities, to expect a true dialogical give-and-take between President and public? Can an epideictic discourse be said to have had a deliberative effect if it manages to spark audience consideration or criticism of issues raised? Because the answers to these questions are surely debatable, they suggest doubt as to the usefulness of purely epideictic or purely deliberative rhetorical descriptions.

Generic Simultaneity

Genres seem often to coexist happily within a given discourse. The commonplaceness of this would-be abnormality is made clear when one considers the potential for small-scale, community-level debate to emerge as a result of epideictic oration. As Jasinski points out, “[i]f individuals...produce deliberative discourse, then communities engage in the process of deliberation;

³² Fahed Al-Sumait, Colin Lingle and David Domke, “Terrorism’s cause and cure: the rhetorical regime of democracy in the US and UK,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 2, no. 1 (2009): 22.

³³ Murphy, 613.

³⁴ James Bohman, *Public deliberation pluralism, complexity, and democracy*, Studies in contemporary German social thought (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996), 42.

they make decisions.”³⁵ That is, dealing with epideictic themes does not necessarily preclude a discourse from having a deliberative effect; a discourse is deliberative so long as it induces discrimination. Should, then, an otherwise epideictic discourse be classified in the deliberative group if it manages to inspire debate, however unintentionally? Whereas some have argued that it should,³⁶ others believe that it should not.³⁷ Again we see a rift in scholars' interpretations, calling into question the efficacy and clarity of certain rhetorical classifications.

Poulakos' exploration of narrative in the *Evagoras* is helpful to understanding this questionability. Illustrating Isocrates' use of an epideictic medium—eulogy—to impart civic and moral instruction upon his audience, Poulakos explains that:

Isocrates did not follow the conventions established by the traditions of festival orations. Departing from customary practices, according to which the commonplaces of festival oration had deteriorated into mere vehicles of displaying an orator's virtuosity, Isocrates exalted the deeds of Evagoras in order to lead Nicocles to a moral end.³⁸

Here we see that insofar as civic and moral instruction is argumentative (promoting one public action over another), it is also deliberative. Indeed, epideictic rhetoric has the potential to advocate policy in that, by extension and implication, the policies of the worldview it lauds are themselves lauded.³⁹ As numerous scholars have noted, a discourse can be in this way simultaneously epideictic and deliberative.⁴⁰

In the case of Bush's post-9/11 discourse, frequent appeals to fear and intimidation can be seen as examples of both blame speech and argument by implication. Consider, for instance, the following excerpts:

³⁵ Jasinski, 162.

³⁶ See Bohman.

³⁷ See Jasinski.

³⁸ Chaim Perelam and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The new rhetoric: a treatise on argumentation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 317.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

⁴⁰ See Beale, *op cit.*; Bonnie J. Dow, "The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Presidential Crisis Rhetoric," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 53, no. 3 (1989): 294-310; see also Carolyn R. Miller, "Genre as Social Action," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70, no. 2 (1984): 151-67; and C.R. Smith, "A Reinterpretation of Aristotle's Notion of Rhetorical Form," *The Western Journal of Speech Communication* 43 (1979): 14-25.

The terrorists rejoice in the killing of the innocent, and have promised similar violence against Americans, against all free peoples, and against any Muslims who reject their ideology of murder. Their barbarism cannot be appeased, and their hatred cannot be satisfied.⁴¹

[The terrorists] seek to oppress and persecute women. They seek the death of Jews and Christians, and every Muslim who desires peace over theocratic terror. . . . And they seek weapons of mass destruction, to blackmail and murder on a massive scale.⁴²

Present in each case is the praise and blame rhetoric associated with epideictic discourse, as well as the advocacy-oriented rhetoric of deliberative discourse. Enemies are defined and condemned, and the choices that Americans and others around the world must make are made clear through a false dichotomy, but nevertheless presented as a decision. Campbell's and Jamieson's research pertaining to President Lincoln's first inaugural speech provides a useful analogy to these examples.

Remarking on Lincoln's need to address certain states' threats to secede from the Union, Campbell and Jamieson attest that "Lincoln's speech displays epideictic contemplation as a precursor to deliberative decision," and that, faced with the secessionist crisis, Lincoln "present[ed] a series of questions designed to induce the audience to think deeply about secession, the reasons for it, and the consequences it would bring."⁴³ The speech "subtly invite[d] contemplation of the contrast between the present haste of the secessionists and the timeless truths their hasty action could destroy."⁴⁴ So, by implicating the then-present crisis with con-templation of the "eternal truths" that epideictic rhetoric is rooted in, the speech was able to exist in a ceremonial *time out of time* while still imparting judgments on topical issues.⁴⁵

⁴¹ George W. Bush, *President's Radio Address*, May 15, 2004, Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, Washington, D.C., <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25149> (accessed June 14, 2009).

⁴² George W. Bush, *President Addresses the Nation in Prime Time Press Conference*, April 13, 2004, Press Conference of the President, The East Room, The White House, Washington, D.C., <http://merln.ndu.edu/merln/pfiraq/archive/wh/20040413-20.pdf> (accessed June 16, 2009).

⁴³ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Presidents creating the presidency: deeds done in words* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 48-49.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

There are clear parallels here to the Bush rhetoric, which has already been shown to combine epideictic and deliberative elements. In this example, the potential of praise and blame rhetoric to both sway public opinion and commemorate an event is indication of the oft-ambiguous role genre plays in defining political discourse. Bostdorff has elaborated on this potential at depth as it exists in the rhetoric of Puritan covenant renewal.

Epideictic Means to a Deliberative End

Covenant renewal discourse originated in the late 1600s with Puritan reform ministers, who, “attempted to bring second- and third-generation Puritans into the church and to revitalize the commitments of first-generation members.”⁴⁶ Belonging to the epideictic genre, covenant renewal grew from the Puritan jeremiad, which induced spiritual conformity by “focus[ing] on [younger generations’] sins and how they had failed to measure up to the standards set by their founders.”⁴⁷ In accentuating “impending communal doom,” the jeremiad relied on blaming rather than praising parishioners to accomplish its epideictic function: to affirm or reaffirm the commitment of young, would-be Puritans to the Church.⁴⁸ Covenant renewal, conversely, focused blame on external entities and praised congregants.⁴⁹ In reaching out to youths and deflecting blame for societal ills outward, reformist ministers such as Cotton Mather and Samuel Willard were able to renew upcoming generations’ commitment to Puritanism, thus achieving “covenant renewal.”⁵⁰

What is noteworthy about Bostdorff’s treatment of this epideictic sub-genre, though, is that she equates it with Bush’s post-9/11 discourse:

Bush’s public messages in the months immediately following September 11 urged the younger generations of Americans to uphold the faith of their “elders,” the World War II generation, and encouraged all Americans to recommit themselves to the nation by supporting the war on terrorism.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Bostdorff, “George W. Bush’s Post-September 11 Rhetoric”, 293.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 295.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 293-94.

Conversely, other prominent American voices—like those of the Reverend Jerry Falwell and Susan Sontag—made use of jeremiadic messages in the aftermath of 9/11. Unlike Bush's rhetoric of covenant renewal, however, these jeremiadic discourses were met with disdain by most Americans.

Sontag's assertion that blame for 9/11 lay with the U.S. government, for instance, was seen by many as offensive. So, too, was Falwell's ascription of blame to “the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians.”⁵² In detailing the general failure of jeremiadic-epideictic narratives to resonate with Americans after 9/11, Bostdorff exposes covenant renewal's epideictic potential to influence both belief and behavior. Just as Puritan covenant renewals succeeded at increasing religious adherence by presenting sanitized versions of the jeremiad, Bush's rhetoric increased adherence to Administration political leanings by presenting non-contentious, universally agreeable narratives of the post-9/11 world. In both instances, covenant renewal rhetoric conveyed a politically expedient version of reality which, agreeable to most, served to effectively realign audience perceptions and opinions. Here, an overtly epideictic discourse achieved that which it sought — critical persuasion — the end traditionally sought by deliberative rhetoric.

This suggests a conceptualization of epideictic rhetoric wherein praise and blame can be used to not only define situations, but also to encourage moral or political judgments. Hauser notes that:

[The] occasion for praising or blaming significant public acts and actors also afford[s] the opportunity to address fundamental values and beliefs that [make] collective political action within [a] democracy more than a theoretical possibility.⁵³

Hauser further notes that “rhetorical choices of inclusion and omission [have] inscribed contrasting visions of the polis.”⁵⁴ These remarks expose the potential for “contrasting visions of the polis” to affect public perceptions of the polis and thus deliberations made within the polis. Here we see that, whether intentionally or unintentionally, rhetoric can be simultaneously epideictic and deliberative; speaking not only to what is, but to what should or should not be.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 298.

⁵³ Gerard A. Hauser, “Aristotle on Epideictic: The Formations of Public Morality,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (1999): 5.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Smith's description of a sermon as simultaneously epideictic, deliberative and forensic is effective at illustrating this point: "In essence, a sermon can be epideictic, praising or blaming good and evil; forensic, judging men guilty of sin; and/or deliberative, advising what course leads to salvation."⁵⁵ It is interaction among the three, he contends, that contributes to rhetorical "effectiveness or lack thereof."⁵⁶ Beale, too, has remarked on the potential for generic inconsistency, noting that while an umpire's declaration of "foul ball" may indeed be questionable, such a call is not typically subject to debate.⁵⁷ Here, situational context (a baseball game) denies deliberative exchange to an utterance (a questionable call) that would otherwise demand it.

Hauser continues to highlight the epideictic/deliberative cross-bleed by asserting epideictic's primary function as didactic and, concurrently, deliberative's contribution "to the ongoing political education of the polis." In both cases, he notes, "virtuosity emerges through rhetorical transactions. Esteemed attributes speak eloquently about the polis and the person of the statesman-rhetor, since the prevailing rhetoric is a statement of communal beliefs and commitments as well as a demonstration of the rhetor's practical wisdom."⁵⁸ In this way, he seems to indicate that effective deliberative rhetoric (that which imparts "practical wisdom") must necessarily be epideictic, too, as it must frame arguments eloquently, as statements of communal belief. Bordering on outright conflation, he ultimately concludes that the ideal rhetor functions as both a teacher and a persuader.⁵⁹

This is not to say that epideictic rhetoric is deliberative, nor deliberative epideictic. Yet, there exists a tendency within scholarship to distill discourses into a single genre-type; to induce conformity by accentuating those rhetorical elements which strengthen a given interpretation while casting aside those which do not. Though such generalizations may make rhetorical qualification easier in a theoretical sense, they tend toward oversimplification when applied to instances of actuality. It should come as no surprise, then, that this is especially true of the crisis rhetoric typified by Bush's discourse.

⁵⁵ Smith, "A Reinterpretation of Aristotle's Notion of Rhetorical Form", 16.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Beale, 232.

⁵⁸ Hauser, 14. Emphasis added.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 17.

Dow asserts that “crisis rhetoric cannot be viewed as a homogenous type of discourse; rather, it should be analyzed in relation to the different exigencies it responds to and the different functions it performs.”⁶⁰ Still, examinations of the Bush discourse have often focused not on the exigent situation from which the rhetoric arose (i.e., the attack on the United States), but rather the perceived or purported objective of the rhetor (i.e., to praise Americans and identify enemies, or to posit arguments). The fact that an individual’s ‘true’ intent can never be known with any degree of certainty, however, renders this approach problematic at best. More effective, Dow argues, is a “focus on exigence, which allows the critic to assess the function of rhetoric for an audience [and] goes beyond an intrinsic textual analysis, which can only judge the purposes of the rhetor.”⁶¹

This interpretive discordance — that is, the often unspoken debate as to whether intent, audience, exigence or some combination thereof is the best indicator of genre — further elucidates the inconsistency with which genre is commonly determined. For instance, whereas Campbell and Jamieson insist that genre is the result of situational, stylistic and substantive factors,⁶² Miller holds that genre is determined by function (e.g., celebration, eulogy, etc).⁶³ Indeed, that scholars assign genre based on such radically different criteria would almost seem to preclude the usefulness of a tool already reliant upon broad generalization.⁶⁴ Miller echoes this sentiment, noting that:

[I]f the term “genre” is to mean anything theoretically or critically useful, it cannot refer to just any category or kind of discourse. One concern in rhetorical theory, then, is to make of rhetorical genre a stable classifying concept; another is to ensure that the concept is rhetorically sound.⁶⁵

Indeed, just as the research presented here questions the usefulness of the Aristotelian genres as they have been applied to contemporary discourses, so has Miller’s:

[A] more general failure... is the attempt to use the Aristotelian types to identify contemporary genres. Although developed from recurrent situations in

⁶⁰ Dow, “The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies”, 294.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 306.

⁶² Campbell and Jamieson, 18.

⁶³ Miller, 164.

⁶⁴ See Campbell and Jamieson, 18; Dow, 307; Miller, 164.

⁶⁵ Miller, 151.

ancient Greece, these original genres do not describe complete situation-types that recur today—they are too general.⁶⁶

She goes on to note the hierarchical quality of generic “hybridization,” wherein one genre dominates another subordinated genre.⁶⁷ Certainly, this speaks to the Bush discourse, which some have identified as “primarily” epideictic,⁶⁸ while others have primarily noted its deliberative elements.⁶⁹ Perhaps as it exists today, contemporary political discourse has outgrown the usefulness of such rigid classifications. Smith captures the essence of this possibility perfectly, remarking that, “Certainly [the Aristotelian rhetorical forms] can be conceptualized and thereby discussed as discrete. But can they be discrete in reality?”⁷⁰

This review exposes a rift in the existing literature: On one side is Murphy, who sees George W. Bush's post-9/11 discourse as almost purely epideictic. On the other is Kellner, who views the same rhetoric as advocacy and policy-driven, and thus deliberative. Additionally, in a transcendent middle ground are Miller, Smith and others, who have emphasized genre's potential to gradate and fuse subtle elements of both epideictic and deliberative rhetoric into a single discourse.

In exploring these themes, this review has revealed the depth of scholarly contention surrounding the Aristotelian genres as they are applied to public address. Left at this juncture, one must ask: Can Aristotelian genres be applied beyond theory, into instances of actuality; or has time rendered these tools' practical application naught? Drawing upon two key Bush texts, the following analysis seeks to illuminate this matter. It will demonstrate that while overarching Aristotelian classifications are often insufficient to account for contemporary rhetorical situation-types in their entirety, genre's utility is not lost. Quite the opposite, in recognizing the potential for multiple genres to participate simultaneously in a given discourse, more sophisticated and helpful understandings of modern rhetorical hybrids like Bush's speeches may emerge.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 164.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ See Murphy, *op. cit.*

⁶⁹ Notably Kellner and Al-Sumait, *op. cit.*

⁷⁰ Smith, 14.

Analysis

Much of the post-9/11 Bush discourse eludes simple generic classification. As an in-depth reading reveals, the rhetoric often blends disparate genres together, mixing and matching supposedly contradictory elements to create a discourse that can only be described as hybrid: Instances of outwardly epideictic rhetoric frequently contain subtle or implicit forms of advocacy, appealing to the expediency of a particular policy or course of action. In the strictest sense, such rhetoric can be considered neither fully epideictic nor fully deliberative; attempts to praise or blame are offset by attempts to advocate and vice versa. This is evidence of a classificatory problem, the existence of which is confirmed by the very fact that previous efforts to assign genre to the discourse have been unable to account for the full range of its rhetoric. Framed primarily as a response to Murphy's contention that Bush's rhetoric was "almost purely epideictic,"⁷¹ the following analysis will examine two key Bush texts, establishing their generically opaque nature. It concludes that if the Aristotelian genres are to retain their value in the study of public address, a reconceptualization of their practical application is essential.

I have already explored some of Murphy's broader claims, so they will not be reiterated here. And while this analysis grapples with a number of his assertions, it should be understood that this disagreement is but a small dispute in what is an otherwise overwhelming concurrence between his views and my own. We agree that the Bush rhetoric relied on manipulative tactics to achieve its end; our difference pertains merely to how we characterize the rhetorical means by which that end was sought. In outlining these differences, I proceed in the same manner as Murphy, addressing, chronologically, Bush's remarks on September 14th and September 20th, 2001.⁷²

⁷¹ Murphy, 610.

⁷² See George W. Bush, *President's Remarks at National Day of Prayer and Remembrance*, September 14, 2001, Speech presented at The National Cathedral, Washington, D.C.: <http://www.opm.gov/guidance/09-14-01gwb.htm> (accessed June 18, 2009); *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*, September 20, 2001, Speech presented at United States Capitol, Washington, D.C., <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sept11/president025.asp>. (accessed June 18, 2009).

Remarks at the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance Service

Bush's September 14th speech opens with quintessentially epideictic rhetoric. It utilizes religious topoi ("we come before God to pray") as well as eulogistic themes (suffering loss, feeling sorrow, missing the dead) to define and express the nation's collective anguish. As Murphy points out, "the president shaped our understanding of an inexplicable event, taking as his goal to explain, to express, to comfort."⁷³ Working to this end, Bush evocatively recounts the events of the morning of 9/11, solemnly describing "images of fire and ashes and bent steel." A few paragraphs in, the president nearly acknowledges his own epideictic function in defining the attacks, remarking that, "Just three days removed from these events, Americans do not yet have the distance of history."⁷⁴ Then his tone shifts: "But our responsibility to history is already clear: To answer these attacks and rid the world of evil."⁷⁵ Here, he is no longer defining the situation, nor is he praising Americans or blaming enemies. Rather, he is addressing an issue of American foreign policy (i.e., U.S. response to the terror attacks) and suggesting what course of action we ought to take (i.e., that we must rid the world of the evil responsible for it). This sentence is an explicit deviation from the epideictic themes exemplified in neighboring passages, abandoning praise and blame speech for something much closer to deliberative rhetoric.

It is valid and worthwhile to note that the appeal is not wholly deliberative in the traditional sense. It does not, for instance, address what "ridding the world of evil" would specifically entail, nor does it outwardly invite audience debate; some rhetorical critics would consider these criteria essential to the genre. Still, this does not negate the fact that the statement speaks to an issue of policy debate, suggesting which course among a presumably infinite number of alternatives should be taken. Furthermore, to rule the passage out as deliberative would not be to confirm it as epideictic; indeed, while it may fall short of epitomizing the former it remains a far cry from the latter.

The passage's temporal orientation further confirms its generic tendency. Deliberative rhetoric, as we know, speaks to the expediency of action regarding future events.⁷⁶ That is, it is future-oriented. Epideictic rhetoric, conversely, is

⁷³ Ibid., 611.

⁷⁴ Bush, *President's Remarks at National Day of Prayer and Remembrance*.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Aristotle and Kennedy, 1358b/1359a.

present-oriented, focused on defining and understanding the now. Between these two orientations, this passage is clearly rooted in the former, speaking not to what we are doing, but to what we “must” (or rather should) do in the future: “But our responsibility [that is, an as-yet-unfulfilled obligation] to history is clear: To answer these attacks [which have not yet been answered] and rid the world of evil [which we have yet to rid it of].”

What’s more, the epideictic rhetoric preceding and following this passage constitute significant appeals to pathos, functioning to simultaneously inflame communal grief and justify retributive action. Consider the following passage:

They are the names of men and women who began their day at a desk or in an airport, busy with life. They are the names of people who faced death and in their last moments called home to say, "Be brave," and, "I love you." They are the names of passengers who defied their murderers and prevented the murder of others on the ground. They are the names of men and women who wore the uniform of the United States and died at their posts. They are the names of rescuers, the ones whom death found running up the stairs and into the fires to help others. We will read all these names. We will linger over them and learn their stories, and many Americans will weep.⁷⁷

Each story, each reference to a life lost on 9/11 stands as an argument for action; an appeal articulated through eulogy to build and defend a mounting case for war. By combining these pathos-heavy, eulogistic anecdotes with subtle policy proposals, Bush was able to assert the expediency of his desired course of action without being overly obvious.

Concluding the first section of the speech, the discourse then transitions back to what might be considered classically epideictic rhetoric, expounding the virtues of dead Americans while steering clear of deliberative matters. It is not until the end that policy is hinted at again, this time taking the form of Puritan covenant renewal:

America is a nation full of good fortune, with so much to be grateful for. But we are not spared from suffering. In every generation, the world has produced enemies of human freedom. They have attacked America because we are freedom's home and defender. And the commitment of our fathers is now the calling of our time.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Bush, *President's Remarks at National Day of Prayer and Remembrance*.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Here, the appeal to action is subtly implied, alluding to the distant past to inform what course of action we ought now to take: Like our parents and grandparents who in their lifetimes confronted enemies of freedom, the passage suggests, so too must we. Quite cleverly, it circumvents policy argumentation by instead urging Americans to follow in the righteous footsteps of their elders by upholding the “commitment of our fathers” in presumably the same way past generations have: by meeting our enemies on the field of battle. And why shouldn't we? The speech has to this point conveyed an eloquent epideictic narrative in which America is supremely good and her enemies are unassailably evil. In defining the situation, the President has provided the audience with no information which might contradict his case for war. Indeed, it is no coincidence that his orations are absent any sense of moral ambiguity—what better way for him to frame his argument?

By challenging his audience's ideological leanings and portraying a pitch-perfectly expedient version of reality, Bush effectively borrows from his Puritan antecedents. One key difference between the two, though, is that while the Puritan tradition increased adherence to pre-existing values, Bush aimed to create adherence outright. That is, he advocated for, justified and defended, however subtly, events which had yet to come to pass, events which he had yet to even establish a rhetorical precedent for (e.g., U.S. military action in Afghanistan). His discourse cannot thusly be viewed as an attempt to bolster extant public sentiment. Rather, it created and shaped sentiments preemptively by means of an epideictic narrative fused inconspicuously with anticipatory arguments. As such, the rhetoric is hybrid, consisting of both epideictic and deliberative elements fused nearly to the point of indistinction.

Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the U.S Response to 9/11

Bush's speech before a Joint Session of Congress on September 20 is interesting as well. The first several paragraphs focus primarily on national praise (“We have seen the State of our Union in the endurance of rescuers, working past exhaustion”), thanking individuals for their help and leadership (“Speaker Hastert...and Senator Lott, I thank you for your friendship, for your leadership, and for your service to our country”), and acknowledging the support of our foreign allies (“America will never forget the sounds of our national

anthem playing at Buckingham Palace”).⁷⁹ Moving beyond this extended introduction, enemies are defined, just as they were on September 14. So too is the present state of affairs, which is compared to Pearl Harbor: “Americans have known wars, but...they have been wars on foreign soil, except for one Sunday in 1941.”⁸⁰

This comparison is significant, alluding by extension to the United States’ intervention in the Second World War—a move many Americans believe was wholly justified. In comparing the post-9/11 scenario to this moment of relative moral clarity in American history, it is likely that Bush’s goal was to confer his own assertions (e.g., that “Our war on terror begins with Al Qaida”) with the same clarity; to make the case that the evil of our enemies absolutely necessitated American redress through military action. By aligning our current national juncture with the moments following Pearl Harbor, the President succeeded tremendously at both defining the situation and imparting his take on a deliberative matter. Making an argument by example, he claimed that, just as the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor necessitated military retribution, so did the attacks on New York and Washington, D.C. He strove in this way toward simultaneously epideictic and deliberative ends, offering arguments for courses of action while —and by — defining the situation at hand.

Despite this frame, though, military action was not America’s only available means of response. Previous terror acts on U.S. soil had resulted in criminal prosecution rather than armed conflict. Much like the 1995 Oklahoma City Bombing, perpetrated by American citizen Timothy McVeigh, responsibility for 9/11 did not lay with a foreign state. Indeed, Al Qaida and other “terror groups,” just like the extremist militias with whom McVeigh acted in ideological accord, are largely indefinite entities. They are stateless and infrastructurally ambiguous, incapable of being waged war against in a traditional sense. As such, to conclude that war was America’s only conceivable response to 9/11 would be not only to abandon logic, but to contradict precedent.⁸¹ In this way, to acknowledge Bush’s rhetorical propensity toward military action given the then-potentiality of either a) reacting militarily, or b) not reacting militarily to 9/11, is to accept that the President served to advocate for one choice over another. This is not to categorically equate Bush’s rhetoric with the deliberative genre, but rather to highlight his discourse’s generically compounded nature.

⁷⁹ Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Noam Chomsky, *9-11*, An Open Media book (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001), 24, 26.

This echoes back to Perelman's and Olbrechts-Tyteca's assertion that to praise or blame can be to advocate or to urge.⁸² Indeed, while it is true that the traditional audience of epideictic rhetoric is not asked or expected to judge expediency arguments, this in no way precludes such arguments from being implicitly imparted upon them. Consider the following example:

Every nation in every region now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.⁸³

While policy is not addressed here in an explicit sense, it is difficult to ignore the passage's overtly deliberative undertones: Quite plainly, it suggests that those who refuse support for Administration policy will be regarded as enemies, terrorists even. Considering the largely epideictic context in which the passage was spoken, it comes as little surprise that some might overlook its advocatory nature. What motive other than advocacy can be attributed to the passage though, a passage that clearly calls for a deliberative decision? *Join us, or pay the price*, it suggests, making a narrative statement while subtly offering a proposition and supporting argument at the same time. Indeed, the President seems adept at fusing epideictic and deliberative elements, and he does not stop here.

When he declares that "Our war on terror begins with Al Qaida," he appears to make a purely definitional statement. So too when he continues, saying, "[The terrorists] want to overthrow existing governments in many Muslim countries... They want to drive Israel out of the Middle East. They want to drive Christians and Jews out of vast regions of Asia and Africa."⁸⁴ However, by simply detailing this barrage of threats, he implicitly strengthens arguments for action against Al Qaida. In this way, his first statement ("Our war on terror begins with Al Qaida") can be seen to function as a proposition, while the succeeding blame statements function as expediency arguments supportive of that proposition.

Still, it could be argued that Bush's declaration ("Our war on terror begins with Al Qaida") was merely intended to highlight inevitability; to define the situation at hand by calling attention to the inalterability of our course toward war with Al Qaida. If true, this would preclude a textual interpretation in which both epideictic and deliberative tactics were at work. After all, when "[concerning]

⁸² Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 49-50.

⁸³ Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

what necessarily exists or will exist or is impossible to be or to have come about...there is no deliberation.”⁸⁵ This position would be difficult to defend, though. Indeed, as hindsight has revealed, the Bush Administration had plans to invade Afghanistan as early as September 9th, 2001.⁸⁶ Military action could not then have been an inevitability set into motion by 9/11; it was a decision which Bush made before the terror attacks even happened. By accentuating our enemies’ evil, the President sought not only to define the situation at hand, but also to justify the potentiality of war and argue preemptively a case for its necessity. This goal, largely deliberative in nature, his rhetoric is perfectly suited to accomplish.

Certain anaphoric markers and the presence of prolepsis within the speech strengthen this interpretation. Repeatedly, the President takes it upon himself to “answer” questions which, as he would have us believe, the American people “are asking.” For instance:

Americans are asking, how will we fight and win this war? We will direct every resource at our command, every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war, to the disruption and to the defeat of the global terror network .⁸⁷

In this example, as well as others like it, Bush assumes an epideictic role (i.e., defining the situation) to achieve a deliberative effect. Specifically, he poses a question regarding a matter of policy (“...how will we fight and win this war?”). Then, taking advantage of the opportunity he has just afforded himself, he answers the question by providing a detailed list of tactics and strategies for winning the war. Quite creatively, he has engaged the public in a preemptive bout of deliberation, assuming both sides of the debate and thus controlling its outcome.

Some would likely argue that this sort of debate is contrived and thus not genuinely deliberative. While defensible, this position does not diminish the probability that debate would have been encouraged in actuality. Indeed, in having merely addressed the topic of how “we will fight and win this war,” the

⁸⁵ Aristotle and Kennedy, 1359a/1359b.

⁸⁶ D. Johnson, “Wealthy Saudi exile is a terrorist mastermind,” *Information Please Database*, <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/osamabinladen.html> (accessed May 30, 2009).

⁸⁷ Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*.

President undoubtedly makes public deliberation on the matter more likely. This is yet another example of the epideictic-deliberative tightrope that is walked so effectively in this speech: The President has in the same breath made his case for war and amplified the collective voice of the nation who, unbeknownst to them, have been either swayed or unswayed by his arguments.

At this point, it deserves mention that Murphy did in fact allow that one of Bush's questions—"how will we fight and win this war?"—concerned policy and had the potential to utilize deliberative rhetoric. However, he holds that, "None [of the reasons given were] justified in the traditional sense. No arguments were presented as to their practicality."⁸⁸ In short, because Bush did not present arguments as to the practicality of war, Murphy contends that the rhetoric was not deliberative. In the strictest sense, it is quite true that Bush's arguments lacked details about the strategies he proposed. But still, while the rhetoric cannot rightfully be said to belong exclusively and unambiguously to the deliberative genre, this does not disqualify its generic participation, nor negate its capacity to influence deliberation.

Murphy acknowledges the potential for deliberative rhetoric in another instance, as well:

Bush returned quickly to an attack on al-Qaeda. The audience then received the only hint of pragmatism to color al-Qaeda's motivation: "They stand against us because we stand in their way."⁸⁹

Murphy quickly follows this by arguing that the "extravagant descriptions of their aims" preceding the statement under question killed its pragmatic potential: "Any idea that Al-Qaeda acted out of expediency died under this framing barrage: They were crazed murderers," and, "Terrorists did what they did because character...drove them. They could not be reasoned with or rehabilitated. They attacked us because that was what rabid murderers did."⁹⁰ Indeed, Bush's description was extreme: "These terrorists kill not merely to end lives but to disrupt and end a way of life. With every atrocity, they hope that America grows fearful, retreating from the world and forsaking our friends."⁹¹ Could it not be just as easily said, though, that these exaggerated descriptions of our enemies'

⁸⁸ Murphy, 616.

⁸⁹ Murphy, 615.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 615-16.

⁹¹ Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*.

inherent evil made the deliberative case for military action against them seem all the more compelling?

Certainly, it would be far more advantageous—necessary, even—for us to act with immediacy and force against an enemy as diabolical and bloodthirsty as the one Bush describes. As Murphy notes, Bush compares Al Qaida to “all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century”: they are “heirs” who “follow in the path of fascism and Nazism and totalitarianism.”⁹² Would Murphy argue then that depiction of the inherent evil of Adolf Hitler would preclude arguments for the expediency of action against him, too? This is highly doubtful. In truth, Bush never espouses outright the inherence of Al Qaida’s evil; he merely lists their deeds and aims, presumably as justifications for action against them.

This creates a significant problem for Murphy’s explanation, which in this instance seems to deemphasize the President’s actual words, focusing instead on what might be inferred from them. A more defensible position would arise from contemplation of the language itself, which quite plainly establishes a precedent for war by alluding to Nazism. Functioning toward this end, then, the statement, “They stand against us, because we stand in their way,” can further illustrate the way in which a question-and-answer formula might be used to establish a framework for advocacy. Here, just as before, the President imparts his take on why “they stand against us” as part of the answer to a previously-posed question (“why do they hate us?”). Specifically, he outlines and defends his position by way of parrying a public concern—one which he himself has raised and which he himself will now assuage. In so doing, he builds a case for action against “they” by detailing why, specifically, “they” hate us. While not framed as one side of a deliberation with an equal and fair-minded citizen adversary, this maneuver is deliberative insofar as it serves to confuse the boundary between definition and argumentation: while Bush’s appeals to expediency are not presented in a simple list, they are present in both the wording and architecture of his discourse.

This tactic is recurrent, such as when Bush later says, “Americans are asking, what is expected of us?”⁹³ While this “seemed likely to address policy,” it did not, really, according to Murphy: Instead, it asked citizens to remain passive—“an epideictic act because it solicited performance of national principles.”⁹⁴ While

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Murphy, 616.

true unto itself, this view dismisses the policy relevance implicit to post-9/11 citizen inaction—a behavior the President evidently desired:

Americans are asking, what is expected of us? I ask you to live your lives and hug your children. I know many citizens have fears tonight, and I ask you to be calm and resolute, even in the face of a continuing threat.⁹⁵

While these requests did indeed involve the performance of national principles (e.g., resoluteness, courage), they can still be seen as calls to action: specifically, to inaction.

At this pivotal moment in history, most Americans wanted to do something, anything to help their county; they wanted to transform conviction into action and to demonstrate their collective “can-do” American spirit. That the President called for them to do nothing, then, is entirely curious. Surely, the public could have been asked to take some sort of direct role in the situation: to volunteer in recovery efforts, to donate money to relief funds, or simply to join the military. These are indeed the sorts of things previous generations of Americans had been asked to do in times of crisis, so why were these requests not made anew?

Representing such a notable deviation from precedent, Bush's call for domestic disengagement automatically became a position that he needed to rebrand. By tying this performance to certain national values (e.g., family), he was able to divert attention away from the fact that he was ignoring certain other values (e.g., political engagement)—values which, far more relevant to the situation at hand, would have served to undermine his ideal policy. So, made to appear basically non-argumentative, the passage instead utilized epideictic language (e.g., “...I ask you to be calm and resolute, even in the face of a continuing threat.”) to acknowledge a deliberative crossroads (i.e., the role of the U.S. citizenry, post-9/11), quickly identifying and promoting a preferred path.

Bush's preference for citizen inaction is made clear in his unusual decision to portray political disengagement (an otherwise undemocratic attribute, here pitched as “hugging your children”) as somehow part of American quintessence. The unlikelihood of this bit's actual stake in epideictic participation suggests that it, like so much else of what Bush said in the early Fall of 2001, might be better understood as an attempt at subtle advocacy: The world is changed, the

⁹⁵ Bush, September 20, 2001.

President seemed to say, and the American people can most expediently deal with it by sitting back and letting the government handle matters.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to better understand the concept of “genre” as a means of rhetorical classification. Moreover, it has sought to scrutinize two of President George W. Bush’s most important rhetorical artifacts, questioning the extent to which each participated in the epideictic and deliberative genres. In striving toward this end, my supreme ambition has been to contribute in some small way to the vast body of enlightened research that has preceded this study.

In reviewing Bush’s speeches, I have observed tendencies toward generic hybridization similar to those noted in previous studies.⁹⁶ In particular, I have expounded upon Bush’s tendency to employ supposedly contradictory generic elements in simultaneity. George W. Bush’s rhetoric frequently utilized epideictic language as a means toward deliberative ends, such as advocacy, rather than as a vehicle for praise or blame speech. As such, I have determined that overarching generic descriptions are often incomplete to account for rhetorical situation-types in their totality. Thusly, as Bush’s discourse appears to display both epideictic and deliberative characteristics, I believe that it might be best understood as a two-pronged effort to both impart subtle arguments for future action and to provide understanding in a troubling situation.

Does, then, genre remain the useful means of categorization that is has been regarded as since antiquity? I believe that it does. While the categorical application of a single genre to an entire text may not be entirely efficacious, I do not believe that this diminishes genre’s capacity to meaningfully describe elements within a discourse, nor negate its ability to influence academic thought. Not withstanding its limitations, these reasons alone certify genre’s enduring worth.

There should be no question as to the usefulness of generic classifications: they are indeed useful. Whether or not these distinctions can or should be used definitively, though, seems a far more dubious question. The debate surrounding Bush’s rhetorical intentions would indicate that they cannot. Indeed, this study seems supportive of the notion that contemporary political rhetoric has

⁹⁶ See, for example, Smith, “A Reinterpretation of Aristotle’s Notion of Rhetorical Form”.

transcended generic distinctions so comprehensive as “epideictic” or “deliberative.” But perhaps definitive categorization is not the prize best suited to genre’s application; on the contrary, perhaps genre’s greatest use lies in accenting nuance and promoting contemplation, rather than urging decisiveness. In this manner of recon-ceptualization, I believe that genre’s practical relevance is not only retained, but invigorated anew. If rhetorical critics are accepting of this adjustment, perhaps more sophisticated understandings of the potential for generic collaboration will follow.

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