Finitude After After Finitude

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ABSTRACT

This work represents my efforts to rethink the conspicuous relationship between

philosophical materialism and contemporary rhetorical studies along the lines of the

speculative materialism outlined (primarily) in Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude*.

Such an effort represents, for me, an engagement with an institutional problematic on

both practical and historical-theoretical levels. With that in mind, I have constructed my

argument in two parts. Cast as an allegory to Michael Calvin McGee's influential essay

"A Materialist's Conception of Rhetoric," the first portion of this work examines the

historical evolution of theories of materialist rhetoric as a response to an antecedent turn

towards hermeneutics in rhetorical criticism. I claim that, although they represent

complex institutional responses to the contemporary hermeneutic tradition in rhetoric,

what have been called "materialist" theories of rhetoric do not fundamentally escape that

tradition, and therefore have very little to do with materialism. In part two, I examine

Slavoj Zizek's speech at Occupy Wall Street on October 9, 2011. In doing so I uncover

some analytical difficulties that the "human microphone" poses for both "hermeneutic"

and "materialist" rhetoric, and offer alternative connections to philosophy as new ways

for rhetoricians to discuss proletarian organization.

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PART ONE: A (SPECULATIVE) MATERIALIST'S CONCEPTION OF RHETORIC

The contemporary history of "materialist rhetoric" is the opposite of the broader history of rhetoric. The broader history of rhetoric, for example, is saturated by the gravity of a history which dates back to pre-Socratic Greece.[1] Even "modernist" iterations of this history are bound up in reading more "contemporary" thought *through* its relation to this tradition.[2] What *does* exist of the scant history of a *materialist* rhetoric is itself questionable, given an inconclusive conception of the term. As Michael Calvin McGee puts it, "[w]ith the possible exception of Kenneth Burke, no one I know of has attempted to formally advance a material theory of rhetoric."[3] Certainly it is the case that such a history has expanded since McGee's seminal essay.[4] Materialist rhetoricians, however, still battle a very different problem: overwhelmed by the multiplicity of the human practice of rhetoric, the search for rhetorical theory has turned to an attempt to

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[1] Michael Calvin McGee, "A Materialist's Conception of Rhetoric," in *Rhetoric, Materiality and Politics*, eds. Barbara Biesecker and John Lucaites (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 17.

[2] Some notable examples include: John Bender and David Wellbery, "Rhetoricality: On the Modernist Rhetoric of Rhetoric," in *The Ends of Rhetoric: History, Theory, Practice*, eds. John Bender and David Wellbery (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1990), 3-39. ; Edwin Black, "Excerpts from Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method," in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Carl Burgchardt (State College: Strata Publishing, 2010), 55-67.; Hans Georg Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of Hemenuetical Reflection," in *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Bruce Wachterhauser (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986), 277-299.

[3] McGee, "A Materialist's Conception of Rhetoric," 19.

[4] Some notable examples include: Carole Blair, "Reflections on Criticism and Bodies: Parables from Public Places," *Western Journal of Communication* 65, no. 3 (2001): 271-294.; Dana Cloud, "Materiality of Discourse as Oxymoron: A Challenge to Critical Rhetoric," *Western Journal of Communication* 58, no. 3 (1994): 141-163. Ronald Walter Greene, "Another Materialist Rhetoric," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 15, no. 1 (1998): 21-41.; Ronald Walter Greene, "Rhetorical Materialism: The Rhetorical Subject and the General Intellect," in *Rhetoric, Materiality and Politics*, eds. Barbara Biesecker and John Lucaites (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 43-66.; Christian Lundberg, *Lacan in Public: Psychoanalysis and the Science of Rhetoric* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012).

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"formally account for what seems to be an essential part of the human social condition."[5] To that end, materialist rhetoricians are in search of a theory that "thinks of rhetoric as an object, just as material and as omnipresent as air and water."[6] Such a theory is only formal, however, if it can adequately describe the materiality of rhetoric; its status as embodied "rather than merely representational of mental and empirical phenomena."[7] But what is this so called "material" in the new materialist rhetoric?

Today, the typical theoretical concern with daily rhetorical practice stems in one way or another from a Marxist notion of historical materialism, and the cutting edge of rhetorical criticism entails a description of the body as a materialization of rhetorical practice. The terms "Marxist… historical" and "body as" presume common knowledge of "materialism."[8] The knowledge which is presumed, I think, is of a "materialism" which is not worthy of the name, since it does not insist on a philosophical absolute which is "at once external to thought and in itself devoid of all subjectivity."[9] This phenomenon is not a new one, though until now it has been associated with an inseparability of the social from the material. So when Matthew May wrote that the practice of soapbox oratory is a "material staging ground through which the repetition of certain bodily practices holds together in a kind of dynamism that lasts at least long enough to mark an impression, not

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[5] McGee, "A Materialist's Conception of Rhetoric," 18.

[6] Ibid., 19.

[7] Ibid., 19.

[8] The latter of these, at the very least, also appears to presume a particular definition of rhetoric. I am hesitant to implicate this assumption, however, since it is my intent to demonstrate the way in which the presumed definition of materialism here constitutes a parallel definition of rhetoric.

[9] Quentin Meillassoux, "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition: A Speculative Analysis of the Meaningless Sign," trans. Robin Mackay (presentation, Freie Universitat, Berlin, Germany, April 20, 2012), 2.

only in its own present but also in its potential for spreading out in concentric circles of time and space from its immediate point of application," he simultaneously made the argument that the repetitive act of *discoursing-in-a-body* is the condition of possibility for once-and-future activation of some trans-historical revolutionary spirit.[10] The *body* becomes rhetoric as object. It is the nexus point through which the "material" is held together as impression. It is not enough, however, to conceive of rhetoric as object for rhetoric to accede to materialism. One must also be able to conceive of objects without rhetoric in order to assert the historical capacity of objects to be rhetorical. When the content of a "reading of class struggle into rhetorical history" asserts the trans-historicity of that struggle, and when the practical implication of that reading is "a performative enactment in which the potential of a new world becomes imaginable in the ashes of the old," then the implicit claim is that the capacity of laborers to control the means of their own production is dependent on the occurrence of rhetorical production though which the new world can be typified: it isn't a revolution until its composition can be retroactively identified by the ashes of its historical diffusion.[11] What has been called "object" through much of this tradition is thus not about objects at all, but rather a way of seeing objects as inseparable from the process of their becoming-rhetorical.

What appears, in materialist rhetoric, to be the obvious alternative is to believe that relations "come first," that the essential characteristic of a "materialist" ontology of rhetoric does *not* treat *rhetoric* as an object but instead locates the reality of the

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[10] Matthew May, *Soapbox Rebellion: The Hobo Orator Union and the Free Speech Fights of the Industrial Workers of the World, 1909-1916* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013), 10.

[11] May, Soapbox Rebellion, 1-5.

becoming-rhetorical of this or that body assemblage in the very moment of its enunciation. The problem posed by such an alternative is the classic confrontation between philosophical logics of difference and identity. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's re-reading of Bergson in *A Thousand Plateaus* puts the question vividly:

> Becomings-animal are neither dreams nor phantasies. They are perfectly real. But which reality is at issue here? For if becoming animal does not consist in playing animal or imitating an animal, it is clear that the human being does not "really" become an animal any more than the animal "really" becomes something else. Becoming produces nothing other than itself. We fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are. What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes. Becoming can and should be qualified as becoming-animal even in the absence of a term that would be the animal become. The becoming-animal of the human being is real, even if the animal the human being becomes is not; and the becoming-other of the animal is real, even if that something other it becomes is not. This is the point to clarify: that a becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself; but also that it has no term, since its term in turn exists only as taken up in another becoming of which it is the subject, and which coexists, forms a block, with the first. This is the principle according to which there is a reality specific to becoming (the Bergsonian idea of a coexistence of very different "durations," superior or inferior to "ours," all of them in communication).[12]

We might begin the construction of "materialist" rhetorical theories with "real speeches," but if we then aim at the "description, explanation, perhaps even prediction of the formation of consciousness itself," we have lost the ability to say that rhetoric is an object.[13] May's "materialist" theory of rhetoric therefore relies on the notion of rhetorical practice as a limiting apparatus, since it solidifies the virtual into the actual. It is never an object, but rather the way in which objects come to be as such through the collective assembly of enunciation. A speculative materialist theory of rhetoric, in contrast, begins with the ontological plurality of objects which are necessarily subject to contingency. Such an approach to rhetorical theory would not aim at making enunciation into a theory

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[12] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 238.

[13] McGee, "A Materialist's Conception of Rhetoric," 18-19.

of limitation or of the severing of the virtual and actual, but rather into a theory of generation which folds the actual onto the potential.[14]

With the possible exception of Quentin Meillassoux, no one I know of has attempted to formally advance a speculative theory of materialism. The task is imposing, for in many ways the whole world of rhetorical theory would have to be turned upside-down to resolve a host of complicated philosophical issues. The "kenotypical" capacity of rhetoric will become a cornerstone of theory-building rather than an interesting alternative approach to criticism. Rhetorical experience, even thought itself, will have to be characterized as a historical phenomenon which was preceded by a world which bore no resemblance to it. Such difficult and controversial concepts as "consciousness" and "ideology," "ancestrality" and "necessity" will have to be explored. Various methods of rhetorical research and theory building will have to be examined, and the mystifications of "context" and "hermeneutics" resolved and eliminated. Since none of this could occur without asserting the necessity of contingency, it also will be necessary at every point to justify similarities between a "materialist" and "hermeneutic" rhetoric on the basis of a persistent correlation between thinking and Being. Finally, since no rhetoricians have been essentially concerned with a definition of material which is itself not rhetorical, apparently heretical rhetorical adaptations of such concepts as "necessity" and "ideology"

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[14] Here I exchange the word "virtual" with the word "potential," for a particular reason, which I will return to later on: when "materialist" rhetoricians (such as May or Greene), they often refer to the virtual as an unassailable plain of differences, which are not yet "assembled" in this or that way (as this or that text). The identity of objects under such an interpretation, borrowing from Deleuze, depends on the ontological priority of difference. In other words, difference precedes identity. For Meillassoux, speculative materialism provokes an understanding of identity/difference as existing in an endlessly oscillating binary which progresses alongside the finitude of objects.

will have to be justified against methodological purists from both of rhetoric's "traditions."[15]

Because it is the most direct strategy, I do not blush to advertise this essay as an exercise in fundamental conceptualization: I want to define the term "rhetoric" from a speculative materialist perspective. My concern is with the creation and application of rhetorical theories. I do not ask the question *What is rhetoric*? so much as the question *What makes rhetoric possible*? The alternative to a rhetorical *correlationism* (whether it be of the hermeneutic or "materialist" variety), I argue, is to think of rhetoric as a capacity derived from the materiality of language.[16] Just as the hard sciences and theoretical mathematics are controlled by the capacity of matter to be other, so a theory of rhetoric can be materialist only when derived from the role of the kenotype in the functioning of language.

(Hermeneutic) Correlationism in Rhetoric Defined

John Bender and David Wellbery give a detailed account of what they believe to be the genesis of a modern rhetorical tradition after the destruction of (what had hitherto been) the study of rhetoric at the hands of Romantic and Enlightenment thought. In evolving from the oratorical tradition of antiquity, rhetoric had, by the time of Kant, expanded into a role that could not contain the conceptual frameworks of both "science"

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[15] My reference to "materialist" and "hermeneutic" rhetorical practices is largely a gesture towards terms which have been used to describe an institutional history that bears a particular orientation to the relationship between text and context.

[16] Although this phrase alone is worth a great deal of discussion, such a discussion might not be productive (at least as far as I am concerned) without laying some substantial groundwork. I will have occasion to return to the phrase "materiality of discourse" (albeit in very specific way), though, and what I have to say until then is merely the "groundwork" to which I am referring.

and "art." Moreover, Kant's "Copernican revolution" had generated the "conditions of impossibility" for the continuation of such a rhetorical tradition. Among these were: "'transparency' and 'neutrality' as leading values of theoretical and practical discourse," and that "imaginative discourse became anchored in 'subjectivity.'"[17] Insofar as rhetoric has "returned," it has undergone a modernization wherein "transparency" and "neutrality" are impossible from within the confines of a subjectivity that does not "come from" the world, but is rather "thrown into it."[18] While Bender and Wellbery are content to explain rhetoric's need to modernize as a result of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, this picture is somewhat incomplete insofar as it does not implicate Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in such a modernization. Specifically, Bender and Wellbery's claim is that it became impossible to square the "originating power of subjectivity with rhetorical doctrine."[19] The modern recuperation of rhetoric has therefore depended on destabilizing rhetoric as a "specialized technique of instrumental communication" and its rebirth as a "general condition of human experience and action" (or as Bender and Wellbery call it, the "rhetoricality" of the world). Gadamer makes the argument in *Truth and Method*, for example, that the basis for this "originating power" can be read as the *teleological* shift between the destruction of the physico-teleological argument for the existence of God (in the *Critique of Pure Reason*) and the "purposiveness of nature for our cognitive faculties" (in the *Critique of Judgment*).[20] In other words, Bender and Wellbery's modernization is

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[17] Bender and David, "Rhetoricality," 22.

[18] Ibid., 23-24.

[19] Ibid., 19.

[20] Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 48.

not merely the result of some "originating power of subjectivity," but also the notion that aesthetic judgment is dependent on nature's being-for-us in lieu of its being-from-God.

If one is to take seriously this account of the evolution of rhetoric—that Kantian thought can be said to have ushered forth the historical development that would become the "modernization" of rhetoric—then the focus of a theoretical account of the notion of "rhetoricality" would have to begin with the presuppositions that made possible the proliferation of rhetoric into the *substance* of the world. In other words, one would have to generate an account of the relationship between rhetoric and hermeneutics after Kant. Although I *could* write a causal history of the coming of "modern" rhetorical hermeneutics, in doing so I would invoke the very tradition I intend to upset.[21] It is therefore more accurate to say that my intent is merely to bring together a collection of thoughts and thinkers which have a stake in this relationship. To the extent that such a survey of the hermeneutic tradition as it has manifested at what appears to be its (quite recent) zenith within the study of rhetoric might reveal some common trends, I will have happened upon what might be called the institutional zeitgeist of Bender and Wellbery's "rhetoricality."

By the time the notion of something *like* a "rhetoricality" had emerged, scholars of rhetoric had begun to understand themselves as engaging in a project that studies a *rhetorical Being*, or as Ed Schiappa puts it, "the theoretical position that everything, or

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[21] Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008), 25.

virtually everything, can be described as 'rhetorical.'"[22] In other words, rhetoric had become the name for the correlation between human description of the world and the world itself.[23] Many scholars of rhetoric understood the rhetorical as moving beyond the confines of persuasive interaction and into the realm in which consciousness *interacts* with the world. For example, Hans Gadamer puts the expansion of rhetoric beyond oratorical persuasion in just those terms.

> Where, indeed, but to rhetoric, should the theoretical examination of interpretation turn? Rhetoric from oldest tradition has been the only advocate of a claim to truth that defends the probable, the *eikos* (verisimile), and that which is convincing to the ordinary reason, against the claim of science to accept as true only what can be demonstrated and tested! Convincing and persuading, without being able to prove—these are obviously as much the aim and measure of understanding and interpretation as they are the aim and measure of the art of oration and persuasion.[24]

It became increasingly difficult to consider any type of human action or understanding that was not *by nature* rhetorical (at least in the minds of scholars of rhetoric), since, as Karlyn Kohrs Campbell puts it, "all rhetorical theories make the ontological assumption that man is, by nature, subject to and capable of persuasion."[25] Moreover, the core understanding of the "rhetoricality" of Being as a *correlation* situated rhetoric as the limit function of human understanding. Kenneth Burke, for example, made such a claim about the capacity of human thought to comprehend anything outside of language.

> Take away our books, and what little do we know about history, biography, even something so "down to earth" as the relative position of seas and continents? What is our

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[22] Edward Schiappa, "Second Thoughts on the Critiques of Big Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 34, no. 3 (2001): 260.

[23] Broadly speaking, I (borrowing from Meillassoux) call correlationism any philosophy which attempts to disprove the existence of absolutes by insisting on a correlation between thought and Being. Correlationism can thus be defined by the phrase "thought cannot think the outside of thought, since the outside of thought merely *appears* to be outside *to thought*."

[24] Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of Hemenuetical Reflection," 282.

[25] Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "The Ontological Foundations of Rhetorical Theory," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 3, no. 2 (1970): 97.

> "reality" for today (beyond the paper-thin line of our own particular lives) but all this clutter of symbols about the past combined with whatever things we know mainly through maps, magazines, newspapers, and the like about the present?[26]

This concept, however, can hardly be said to have originated within such a contemporary institutional context. As Hyde and Smith point out, the "relationship between hermeneutics and rhetoric, ontological in nature, evolves from the 'basic mode' of human 'understanding.'"[27] The argument is thus quite simple: if the correlation between thought and Being is inextricable, then it makes no sense to consider as either accessible or valuable the world absent the *finitude* of human thought because human thought encounters the world via experience and does not access the world-in-itself.[28] What this meant is that "since the 'certain' or 'absolute' side of binaries such as certain/contigent, absolute/probable are unavailable, we are left to dwell in the historicized land of contingency and probability, which means that cultural knowledge is the product of rhetorical activity."[29]

This "hermeneutic turn" was not a mere philosophical shift in the study of rhetoric, as it has largely motivated a methodological trend that has pushed rhetorical criticism and practice towards the analysis and composition of texts as the central figures of the present institutional discourse.[30] Dilip Gaonkar's essay on the arrival of the text

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[26] Kenneth Burke, "The Human Actor: Definition of Man," in *Kenneth Burke on Symbols and Society*, ed. Joseph Gusfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966): 58.

[27] Michael Hyde and Craig Smith, "Hermeneutics and Rhetoric: A Seen but Unobserved Relationship," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 65, no. 4 (1979): 347.

[28] Robert Scott, "On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic," *Central States Communication Journal* 18, no. 1 (1967): 9-17.

[29] Schiappa, "Second Thoughts," 262.

[30] Dilip Gaonkar, "Epilogue on the Oratorical Text: The Enigma of Arrival," in *Texts in Context: Critical Dialogues on Significant Episodes in American Political Rhetoric*, eds. Michael Leff and Fred Kauffeld (Davis: Hermagoras Press, 1989), 255-276.

within the rhetorical tradition is particularly important in understanding this realization

insofar as one might say that Gaonkar was considering how the text had become the

object of rhetorical studies *while* it was becoming the object of rhetorical studies. For

Gaonkar, rhetoric's turn toward the text had forced a shift away from the study of public

address as a rhetorical act which left remainders of *Truth*-in-the-world and toward the

study of public address as the rhetorical *disclosure*-of the world. Gaonkar makes two

important arguments which might be called evidence of this claim. First, the necessity of

a turn toward the text is part and parcel with a turn away from theory.

> [A] marked indifference, if not hostility, towards theory… invites a putative rhetorical
> critic to operate from within the rich and somewhat inconsistent rhetorical tradition that is
> "well over two thousand years old" rather than from within the narrow confines of a
> single theory… [T]he term "theory" evokes (even in its "rather common and benign
> uses") negative associations: the aura of a formula, the algorithmic lust, Cicero's idle,
> talkative Greeklings, cooptation into the "knowledge industry," and mechanical
> reproduction. In contrast, the "tradition" evokes all the right associations and even its
> inconsistency is viewed as its "glory": "What we may call the tradition of rhetoric is
> many-voiced, many-valued, and directed towards many ends." Thus, Scott recommends
> that we draw upon this richly pluralistic tradition while negotiating our critical objects
> rather than subject them to alien and reductive theories.[31]

The impetus for a "pluralist" methodology of rhetorical criticism thus entailed a move

away from Truth by way of rhetorical *practice*: to *do* good rhetorical criticism was to

reject the "theoretical" notion of some sort of absolute truth or guiding principle (all the

while assuming that those are the same thing) in the name of a "plurality" which could be

justified on the basis of our inability to know the in-itself. Second, rhetorical criticism (in

the form of the turn to the text) entails a knowing of the non-discursive *via* the discursive;

of the context in terms of the text. As Gaonkar puts it, "[t]he pressing task, for which

'textual studies' are ideally suited, is to offer an understanding of 'contexts' (non-

discursive formations) through a reading of texts (discursive formations) while allowing

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[31] Ibid., 268.

the text to retain its integrity as a field of action."[32] These two arguments move in lock step: the basis on which rhetorical practice is able to nullify the notion of a methodological absolute (necessitating a methodological shift toward a concern with world-disclosure) is itself an act of world disclosure.[33] This destabilization of Truth in the name of world-disclosure, itself done on the basis of an intellectual move which mirrors the philosophical commitment to the correlation between thought and Being, is the defining feature of the departure of the rhetorical into the land of the text. If the world can be *said to exist* only in its rhetorical relation to human perception, then all rhetorical study must approach the composition and analysis of communication via its *textual* positions in the relation of thought to Being.

The shift in interpretive methodology, however, presented rhetoric's hermeneutic manifestation with a problem. Although the empirical existence of texts could be verified inter-subjectively, the meaningfulness of any given interpretive treatment was bounded contextually. The unfathomability of the in-itself, or the hermeneutic notion that Being-in-the-world can only be described linguistically through the structures of experience (called rhetoric under this intellectual tradition), demanded that, as Steven Mailloux points out, "communities of interpreters neither discover nor create meaningful texts. Such communities are actually synonymous with the conditions in which acts of

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[32] Ibid., 275.

[33] This two-part movement is indicative of a shift in idealist thought which Meillassoux has, at various points likened to the "strong correlationism" of Heidegger's "co-propriation" or *Ereignis*. Where Heidegger (according to Meillassoux) asserts "that neither being nor man can be posited as subsisting 'in-themselves,'" Gaonkar (or at least his "textual critic") might assert the relation between text and context, since the non-discursive is defined via a relation to the discursive. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 12.

persuasion about texts take place."[34] In other words, the turn towards the text demanded that rhetorical critics make a simultaneous turn towards the context which surrounded rhetorical action in the construction and interpretation of texts (hence the prominent phrase "texts in context"). Much like the text, though, there was no *essential* context to which interpretive work could refer.[35] What this hermeneutic rhetoric does, then, is not at all the analysis of texts, but rather the analysis of contexts, which function as the historical given-ness of particular *correlations* between texts, and as the conditions of possibility for meaningful interpretation (since nothing *meaningful* exists outside of the correlation). The texts themselves are merely markers of the correlation for hermeneutic rhetoric.

This implicit undercurrent in rhetoric's hermeneutic tradition resulted in the notion (or at the very least, the practice) that the correlation *itself*, rather than its mere correlates, is outside of the scope of rhetorical analysis. Put differently: I critique, therefore there is speech.[36] This outside-ness, however, meant that hermeneutic rhetoric could *work around* its inability to establish the Truth of a given text.[37] Many of the critics

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[34] Steven Mailloux, "Rhetorical Hermeneutics," *Critical Inquiry* 11, no. 4 (1985): 632.

[35] Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, eds. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 248-249.

[36] Although this assertion points to the "I" as the subject that escapes critique, there is substantial literature which has, for the better part of the last century, found new and interesting ways to critique the "subject." This body of literature, however, is insufficient to furnish a critique of *subjectivity* in the way that I am trying to get at (and will have ample cause to return to later on). For now it will have to suffice to say that much of the literature to which I am referring critiques either the way in which subjects come into being or the necessity of a *given* subject (or both), and therefore has *no bearing* on the following syllogism (which I take to be indicative of the aforementioned statement): nothing can exist outside of its relation to thought; there are speech texts; there is thought.

[37] The move toward the contingency of context produced a contingency of *this or that* context; this or that interpretive community. Despite this, a fundamentally human contextual element remained "outside" of

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within this tradition, particularly the more contemporary among them, would therefore

refrain from situating Truth as a merit of their analysis.[38] Although context was not so

concrete as to be accessible enough to analyze text with perfect accuracy, interpretative

leg work was able to stand the test of time by way of the historical situation of the

correlation between texts, or the contemporaneousness of potential context and the

generation of new text in time. That solution, it seems, has been one those engaged in the

study of rhetoric from the hermeneutic tradition seem willing to accept. Rhetoric's

aforementioned "limit function" within the structures of human understanding has built a

historically evolving world that had (supposedly) already guaranteed its own institutional

necessity by way of a double movement in interpretive practice. Hermeneutic rhetorical

criticism would make claims that it *conceded* were unable to grasp the Truth of a given

rhetorical artifact-situation, yet since Truth was beyond its grasp these interpretations

were crystalized as *meaningful* via the knowledge that the rhetorical artifact-situation

would never stop becoming. After all, there is always reason to consider and re-consider

the text if the interpretive circle can never be completed.[39]

Herein lays the rub between (the hermeneutic iteration of) rhetoric and its

intellectual others: the disciplinary notion that a rhetorical subject is *outside* of the scope

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rhetorical analysis. Michael Leff's "tradition," for example, always exists (and is dependent on the
existence of *rhetoricians*), even if "tradition *as such*" is a contingent coordinate upon a historical plane.
Michael Leff, "Tradition and Agency in Humanistic Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 36, no. 2 (2003):
144.

[38] Robert Scott, for example, would argue that the beauty of the rhetorical "tradition" was that it was so
complex and tangled, producing a methodological alternative to "pure truth." Robert Scott, "Against
Rhetorical Theory: Tripping to Serendip," in *Texts in Context: Critical Dialogues on Significant Episodes
in American Political Rhetoric*, eds. Michael Leff and Fred Kauffeld (Davis: Hermagoras Press, 1989), 3-4.

[39] Black, "Excerpts from Rhetorical Criticism," 65-66.

of analysis creates a static referent whereby the world might be understood rhetorically and *only* rhetorically.[40] This means that hermeneutic rhetoric has created a rather serious problem for itself: the rhetorical tradition (so construed) is unable to conceive of a world *absent rhetoric* in a *meaningful* way (because *every relation* is rhetorical), and thus unable to think a course for its future that deviates from its present (humanist) trajectory. The implications of such a problem are two-fold: hermeneutic rhetoric anthropomorphizes the world on the basis of an outmoded humanism, thereby maintaining the (academic and cultural) exclusion of those modes of knowledge production which fall outside of its borders. The latter point—that the turn towards the innate "rhetoricality" of the world has proliferated rhetoric into the domains of all other modes intellectual progress, re-introducing "(post)modern" rhetoric to the anti-sophist critique of it ancient past—is thus a result of the former.

This particular variety of humanism is of such great peculiarity precisely *because* of its role in the philosophical *critique* of anthropocentrism.[41] The (hermeneutic) definition of rhetoric as a sort of contextual *process* which is itself the mode of experiencing the world involves either the conflation of epistemology and ontology or the prioritization of the former over the latter (since thinking and Being are inseparable correlates). In either case, the Being of the world has been considered to be *correlated* with some aspect of *subjectivity*. Here is where the (supposed) turn from the subject was to have taken place: subjectivity, since it had moved beyond the need for *actual*

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[40] Ray Brassier, "Concepts and Objects," in *The Speculative Turn*, eds. Levi Bryant., Graham Harman, and Nick Srnicek (Victoria: re.press, 2011), 53.

[41] Meillassoux, "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition," 4-5.

(coherent) subjects of a specific type, was merely the *minimal condition* for the human. It was therefore no longer the case that *only humans* were capable of the experience of rhetoric. Instead, one merely had to *experience rhetorically* in order to be subject. This, of course, is not a critique of the subject or of anthropocentrism, but rather a projection of subjectivity *of the human type* onto the world. As Quentin Meillassoux puts it, "this refusal of anthropocentrism in fact only leads to an *anthropomorphism* that consists in the illusion of seeing in every reality (even inorganic reality) subjective traits the experience of which is in fact entirely human, merely varying in their degree (an equally human act of imagination)."[42]

The key to unpacking this problem, at least for me, is that insofar hermeneutic rhetoric has committed to the notion of Being-as-correlate, it has walled itself off from Time altogether. It has become *impossible* for rhetorical inquiry (under such an interpretation) to contend with the notion that there are modes of inquiry which consider the world *anterior* to human thought in a way which is not at all rhetorical.[43] The task of understanding such an anteriority presents rhetoric with an inescapable aporia: how did rhetoric *come into being*? Put differently, what were the minimal conditions for the beginning of rhetorical experience? Engaging the question requires, at a minimum, that one acknowledge that there would have to be a *break* in the ability to know the world rhetorically, pointing to the historical situation of consciousness. In other words, if one is to consider the becoming-rhetoric of rhetoric, then one must begin from the notion that human thought (or even thought writ large) is a historically contingent phenomenon. To

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[42] Ibid., 5.

[43] Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 14.

not begin from such a position would be to assert that the rhetorical subject is the eternal

center of *all things*, since it would assert that rhetorical Being is *outside* of history, yet

within (and simultaneously the conditions of possibility of) experience. This is why I say

that the hermeneutic interpretation of rhetoric is a humanist one: even if it does not

essentially define the human, it essentially defines *Being* along lines which take rhetoric

to be the condition of possibility of human experience. In other words, hermeneutic

rhetoric might be said to replace the old humanism with a *metaphysics* of the human. In

accepting that this break *merely exists*, however, one has thus fundamentally called into

question the rhetoricality of Being. These two questions are thus inseparable from one

another: to ask how one would explain the world *anterior* to human subjectivity in terms

of a subjectivity that is not *given as such* to humans is to ask what replaces the

rhetoricality of Being as the ontological assumption of rhetorical critics.

There are, of course, several ways to answer the question. My focus *here*,

however, is on the treatment of such a question by way of a rhetorical hermeneutics.

Although hermeneutic rhetoric might assert the *possibility* of the aforementioned break, it

does not assert its *actual* existence. The hermeneutic rhetorician thus approaches the

problem of ancestrality in the following way:[44] since human knowledge is a

fundamentally rhetorical experience, it is impossible to know that such a break exists,

though it is also impossible to assert that it does not exist. In either case, the assertion

merely *appears* as such to a rhetorical subject. Hermeneutic rhetoric thus *refuses* to assert

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[44] The term "ancestrality" is of particular importance for Meillassoux, as it refers to an aporia which I take
to be difficult for contemporary rhetoricians to grapple with. Namely, it is difficult for rhetoricians (among
others) to think the world as it was before it was inhabited by thought of any kind, let alone human thought.
The "ancestral," then, refers to the world as it was before it was correlated to thinking or to thinking beings.

the existence of such a break, since it insists on the rhetorical nature of such an assertion.

As Michael Leff puts it, "there is no categorical distinction between the scientific and the

rhetorical.[45] Rhetoric enters into every kind of discourse, even the most scientific."[46] This

is why I say that the humanism of hermeneutic rhetoric is the condition for the

functioning of the new sophism: it presents the scientist with a choice between the

analysis of a world anterior to thought *as if it were rhetorical* and the analysis of a world

anterior to thought *by way* of rhetorical experience. The latter is how hermeneutic

rhetoricians have understood the work of scientists (and by extension the relationship

between rhetoric and those sciences), since the former would presume that the world

anterior to human thought *resembles* the world of human thought.[47] Such a presumption,

of course, would be premised on the capacity of thought to get outside itself, and hence

would be antithetical to rhetorical hermeneutics. The implication, as far as rhetoric's

relationship to the sciences is concerned, is grave: if rhetoric is unable to *consider the*

consideration of Being in absence of any rhetoricality, then rhetoric has opposed, in

ideological fashion, thought which considers valuable the study of the world anterior to

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[45] Although Leff does not insist on a categorical distinction between the scientific and the rhetorical, he does insist on a *contextual* distinction between the two. For Leff, the rhetorical is public, while the scientific is not. This distinction, which I will return to by unpacking Meillassoux's work, appears to me to be reliant on both the "outside-ness" of context and on a shallow understanding of the language of mathematized science. Meillassoux's work, I argue, ultimately situates this distinction as categorical, which allows the non-rhetorical establishment of mathematized science and impedes the globalization of rhetoric.

[46] Michael Leff, "Modern Sophistic and the Unity of Rhetoric," in *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences: Language and Argument in Scholarship and Public Affairs*, eds. John Nelson, Allan Megill, and Donald McCloskey (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 31.

[47] Several examples come to mind, but the most explicit claim that mathematized science is a rhetorical project comes from Philip J. Davis and Reuben Hersh's "Rhetoric and Mathematics." Their conclusion offers a prime case in point, as they claim that, "The myth of totally rigorous, totally formalized mathematics is indeed a myth." Philip J. Davis and Reuben Hersh, "Rhetoric and Mathematics," in *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences: Language and Argument in Scholarship and Public Affairs*, eds. John Nelson, Allan Megill, and Donald McCloskey (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 68.

thought (scientific inquiry into the nature of the prehistoric past)[48] or thought which

considers the possibility of a post-thinking existence (scientific inquiry which attempts to

navigate the ecological).

This opposition points to the institutional significance of the hermeneutic turn in

rhetoric, and is the basis upon which rhetoric has opened itself to the critique of sophism.

The contemporary criticism of sophistic rhetoric finds its basis in rhetoricality's capacity

to simultaneously efface both the legitimacy of rhetorical studies and those disciplines

which rhetoric claims to penetrate. In other words, the new sophist is no longer content

with insisting on the capacity of ornamental speech to craft persuasion in all other

disciplines, and has instead insisted on the capacity of all other disciplines to be

conducted rhetorically. In this sense, Dilip Gaonkar's prediction of a false renaissance of

rhetoric, itself legitimized by a turn towards "rhetoricality," does not seem terribly

inaccurate.

> [T]he rhetorical turn sets up an expectation that there would be a renaissance in rhetoric
> in the near future—that rhetoric would regain its lost glory as the 'queen of the human
> sciences' in our time, and that it would preside over other disciplines as the metascience
> of culture in the Isocratean sense. The anticipation of a rhetorical turn could, thus, revive
> and set in motion the dormant and foundational aspirations characteristic of formal, hence
> empty, disciplines like rhetoric, dialectic, and hermeneutics.[49]

This is not altogether different from the practice undertaken by hermeneutic rhetoricians.

The expansion of rhetoric into "rhetoricality" has resulted in the simultaneous

proliferation of rhetorical inquiry into object domains which formerly had nothing to do

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[48] Meillassoux, "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition," 18-19.

[49] Dilip Gaonkar, "Rhetoric and Its Double: Reflections on the Rhetorical Turn in the Human Sciences," in
The Rhetorical Turn: Invention and Persuasion in the Conduct of Inquiry, ed. Herbert Simons, (Chicago:
University of Chicago Press, 1990), 361.

with rhetoric as such.[50] There are now countless "rhetoric(s) of," or investigations of particular objects *as rhetorical*.[51] What we have now is thus the appearance of rhetoric ad infinitum: an endlessness of objects which lend themselves equally well to methods of "rhetorical" inquiry. The concept can therefore be said to dominate the object. Gaonkar's warning of a false renaissance of the rhetorical appears, by now, to be present in great force.

But what is so bad about a renaissance of the rhetorical? Put differently, why should rhetoricians care if the problem of ancestrality presents them with the notion that scientists might be doing work that is not rhetorical in nature? Even Meillassoux would agree that the production of such work, insofar as it becomes subject to persuasive discourses in the practical sense (qua its transition from theoretical to applied science), is subject to the rhetorical.[52] It seems to me that the problem, at least for rhetoricians, is not one of anteriority, but rather one of *posteriority*. If rhetoric is to sustain its global proliferation into other modes of inquiry, it will do so by way of the fundamental assumptions of rhetoricality, or of hermeneutic rhetoric. To that end, the rejection of the problem of Being ancestral to thought *also* entails a rejection of Being posterior to thought. In other words, the marriage of hermeneutics and rhetoric results in the notion that rhetoric, and by extension rhetoricians, are always going to be in the world. Moreover, this claim necessitates that rhetoric *forego* its capacity to make *normative* evaluations about the existence of the world after thought: how could such a world be

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[50] Lloyd Bitzer, "Rhetoric's Prospects: Past and Future," in *Making and Unmaking the Prospects of Rhetoric*, ed. Theresa Enos (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997), 20.

[51] Schiappa, "Second Thoughts," p. 260.

[52] Meillassoux, "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition," 12.

judged if rhetoricians are always *only* inhabiting its predecessor? This is why I claim that

rhetorical inquiry (so construed) has an ideological opposition to ecological concerns:

when presented with the question "does the World matter?" rhetoric can *only* answer "as

long as it's rhetorical."

The "Material" Turn in Rhetoric

The alternative to the hermeneutic model of rhetoric was to turn towards a

"process-model" of rhetorical practice.[53] Michael Calvin McGee, for example developed

a model of rhetoric which eschewed understanding rhetoric as a product (i.e. speech text)

in favor of a model which treats rhetoric as "'speaker/speech/audience/occasion/change'

operating in society through time."[54] For McGee,

speaker/speech/audience/occasion/change are *partial objects* of a molecular model of

rhetoric insofar as none can be understood outside of their place in a particular relation.

At first glance, such a relation (or set of relations) appears to be the set of connections

that each one of McGee's elements bears to each of the four others. This relation,

however, is sufficiently explicit as to obscure a secondary relation which carries far more

serious implications. This second (implicit) relation is one which situates the molecular

model *as material only insofar as it relates to human experience*.

> Though it is the only residue of rhetoric one can hold like a rock, it is wrong to think that
> this sheaf of papers, this recording of "speech," *is* rhetoric in and of itself. It is surely
> "object," and the paper and ink scratches are "material." But the whole of rhetoric is
> "material" by measure of human *experiencing* of it, not by virtue of our ability to
> continue touching it after it is gone. Rhetoric is "object" because of its pragmatic
> *presence*, our inability safely to ignore it at the moment of its impact.[55]

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[53] McGee, "A Materialist's Conception of Rhetoric," 22.

[54] Ibid., 23.

[55] Ibid., 23.

For McGee, the implication for materialism is the assertion that marks themselves are (presumably) material objects. Rhetoric, however, is viewed as a system of immaterial relations or partial objects which are held together *as a material object* only insofar as there is a *lived* instantiation. In other words, the status of rhetoric as matter/object is mediated by the rhetorical experience of a given confluence of part-objects. The mode of confluence is thus perspectival: the way that rhetoric materializes depends on how it "hits" you (but it *does* always "hit" you). The catch, qua materialism, is that there is no assertion of the materiality of objects *absent* its relation to "us." The confluence of relations remains part object or relation. It is never here nor there, but always in between. The status of objects, for McGee, is thus hermeneutic. Rhetoric is the embodiment of experience as a confluence of events. But then rhetoric really is no less material than the rock or the sheaf of papers in McGee's example, since those, too, are part objects until the confluence of relations which constitutes our experiencing of them assembles *as rock or sheaf*. This appears, to me, to be quite a strange way of asserting a theory of rhetoric which is committed to materialism, since it only asserts the nature of objects as real material in their relation to thought.

Materialist Rhetoric as Traversing a Governing Apparatus

I am not the only one to have left a critical engagement with McGee's seminal essay under the impression that his conception of materialism was peculiar. It is unsurprising that others who have had this reaction have done so on theoretical terms which beg examination in their own right. Ron Greene, for example, has criticized McGee's conception of materialism on the basis of its complicity with a "logic of

representation."[56] Borrowing from Foucault (among others), Greene proposes another

materialist rhetoric, which claims that "[t]he materiality of rhetorical practices exist in

how they occupy a position in different institutional structures historicizing those

institutions at the same time as those institutions put rhetoric to work for the purpose of

governing."[57] Although I am in many ways sympathetic to this argument, it seems to me

that Greene's conception of a materialist rhetoric might have more in common with

McGee's conception of a materialist rhetoric than the former would care to afford.

Greene claims, in response to McGee's "fragmentation thesis" (the notion that

there are no texts in a mass mediated world because persuasion contains neither a

"beginning" nor an "end"), that the collapse of the text/context distinction brings with it a

de-materialization of "institutions which rely on rhetoric in order to make judgments

about how to govern a particular population."[58] Greene situates the importance of this

distinction in both methodological and ontological terms.

> "[T]he problem with the implosion of the text/context distinction is that it elides an
> important implication of the Althusserian moment. McGee's fragmentation thesis is
> guilty of an expressive causality. An expressive causality describes "the effect of the
> whole on the parts, but only by making the latter an 'expression' of the former, a
> phenomenon of its essence… The need to create an object of analysis displaces the
> politics of representation because the meaning of the fragment is not located in how the
> fragment represents reality or a subject or culture but in the articulation of the fragment to
> a structure of signification. As Grossberg (1992) writes: 'articulation is the production of
> identity on top of differences, of unities out of fragments, of structures across practices.
> Articulation links this practice to that effect, this text to that meaning, this meaning to
> that reality, this experience to those politics' (1992, p. 54). Since from the standpoint of
> articulation theory, meaning is an 'effect' produced by linking a fragment to a structure
> of signification, then a materialist rhetoric can escape a politics of representation by
> abandoning an expressive causality. A 'logic of articulation' displaces an expressive

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[56] Greene, "Another Materialist Rhetoric," 24.

[57] Ibid., 35.

[58] Ibid., 21. For more information on McGee's fragmentation thesis, see: Michael Calvin McGee, "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture," *Western Journal of Communication* 54, no. 3 (1990): 274-289.

causality because there is no necessary correspondence between the fragment as representation and the meaning of the fragment. Thus the significance of a particular rhetorical fragment has little to do with its epistemic, political and/or aesthetic forms of representation, but how it attaches itself to a structure of signification."[59]

Greene thus claims that context is not reducible to a text (or fragment). McGee, however, would claim (at least according to Greene) that con text is the expressive causality of a text. Greene therefore resituates the "attachment of a fragment to a structure of signification" as the object of study (although not in the same way McGee does) by situating texts (fragments) as articulations of governing apparatuses of this or that institution. As Greene puts it, "an emphasis on the logics of articulation prevents the rush to de-materialize the space between the text and the context." What is interesting here is that it is the space between the text and context, not the context itself, which is in danger of being de-materialized. The quote from Grossberg is particularly telling in that regard: in situating articulation as the imposition of identity over an innumerable field of differences, Greene is here gesturing to Grossberg's application of Deleuze and Guattari's argument that difference precedes identity.[60] This reference is important insofar as it (roughly) equates Greene's "context" with Deleuze and Guattari's "becoming." Context, in other words, is *simultaneously* "real" and "immaterial." This argument makes even more sense in context of Greene's "mapping" metaphor.[61] Articulations are material insofar as they *enact* the assembly of the identity of a text/fragment given a context. But this is why Greene's materialism is just as peculiar as McGee's: articulations are not material *per se*, but rather are material (for Greene) insofar

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[59] Greene, "Another Materialist Rhetoric," 34-35.

[60] Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* (London: Routledge, 1992), 53-54.

[61] Greene, "Another Materialist Rhetoric," 35.

as they are the apparatus which *materializes* the text/context relation. What Greene is

proposing when he suggests transforming the "interpretive" project into a "geographical"

one is thus a literal *drawing* of a map of rhetorical activity. What is peculiar, then, is the

"outside" position of context in this process of mapping. A landscape itself would exist as

a sort of unassailable field of differences which are sensible only in their articulation as a

map. It is as if, in the act of drawing a map, a landscape *comes to be as such* in its

"coming alive" *for us*. From this perspective, studying the mode of articulation is

perfectly reasonable: of course one could pay attention to the various apparatuses which

allow the construction of a particular map. Greene's argument is thus a way of shifting

interests: he wants to figure out what kind of tools were used to draw the map rather than

figure out how the map describes the world. I call this a peculiarity, however, precisely

because it is this "outside-ness" which was the basis for my argument that McGee's

materialism was itself committed to a correlationist hermeneutics. For Greene, the

similarity is manifest in the very analysis of McGee's materialism. As Greene puts it, "In

an effort to account for the limitations and possibilities of a materialist rhetoric I will

perform a close reading of a series of germinal essays beginning with McGee's (1982)

first attempt to outline the contours of a materialist rhetoric."[62] How else would one

determine the apparatus used in the construction of a given articulation if not by a *close*

reading of the articulation itself? What would one do, if not read the map?

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[62] Ibid., 22.

Materialist Rhetoric as Communicative Labor

Although it represented a conspicuous and influential (particularly in its application of the work of Michel Foucault) attempt to engage the problem of the relationship between materialism and rhetorical criticism, "Another Materialist Rhetoric" was not Greene's only attempt at such a theorization.[63] While that first attempt (as I have read it) functioned on the implicit assumption that an element of the rhetorical (context) was itself immaterial, Greene's position would evolve (subsequent primarily to a turn to the works of Hardt and Negri) to function on the explicit assumption that the materiality of rhetoric could be described by the production of a subject through communicative labor.[64] Communicative labor is thus also understood as the rhetorical process of composing this or that class formation. These two claims seem to me to be at least superficially incommensurate, since the latter appears to assert context (specifically class composition) as a sort of retroactive constitution of rhetorical practice. In other words, communicative labor appears to both presume and instantiate a subject. My concern is therefore as follows: to what extent (if any) does a theorization of communicative labor differ from a theorization of articulation as the traversal of a governing apparatus?[65]

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[63] Some of Greene's other notable approaches to this problem include: Ronald Walter Greene, *Malthusian Worlds: US Leadership and the Governing of the Population Crisis* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999).; Ronald Walter Greene, "John Dewey's Eloquent Citizen: Communication, Judgment and Postmodern Capitalism," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 39, no. 3 (2003): 189-200.; Ronald Walter Greene, "Rhetoric and Capitalism: Rhetorical Agency as Communicative Labor," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 37, no. 3 (2004): 188-206.; Ronald Walter Greene, "Orator Communist," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 39, no. 1 (2006): 85-95.

[64] Greene, "Rhetorical Materialism," 61.

[65] Although I have chosen to center this discussion on Greene's later work, it is worth mentioning that his theorization of a materialist rhetoric after "Another Materialist Rhetoric" has contributed to a much broader discussion of the role of rhetorical practice in the composition of class. Some notable examples include: Jack Bratich, "From Embedded to Machinic Intellectuals: Communication Studies and General Intellect," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 5, no. 1 (2008): 24-45.; Catherine Chaput, "Rhetorical Circulation in Late Capitalism: Neoliberalism and the Overdetermination of Affective Energy," *Philosophy*

Further, to what extent does the nexus between the presumption and instantiation of subjects in the theorization of communicative labor borrow from rhetorical hermeneutics.

Since the problem of object domains has formed the core of my analysis to this point, it seems that a fitting point of departure (or rather lack thereof) is to reconsider that very question as regards Greene's re-theorization of materialist rhetoric. To wit, Greene's turn to communicative labor entailed a simultaneous limitation of rhetoric's object domain.[66] But what does such a limitation entail?

> [A] rhetorical materialism should partake in a materialist ontology that configures the rhetorical subject as a particular kind of being invented by and for specific apparatuses of production. Like a material rhetoric, rhetorical materialism understands the rhetorical as material; that is, it rejects a dualist ontology that separates speech from materiality. A materialist rhetoric does so by positing materiality as an immanent process of production in which rhetoric and communication are integral elements of any mode of production. However, we will need to abandon an understanding of rhetorical subjectivity as a generalized ideological effect of discursive and signifying processes. In other words, we need to place limits on rhetorical subjectivity as a general consequence of how language constitutes subjectivity. In turn, we need a more specific and concrete concept of the rhetorical subject. As a beginning, I suggest that a rhetorical subject refers to a subject that speaks and is spoken to. The history of being able to claim the 'right' to speak and be spoken to is a story of cultural value and political struggle. The question that should guide rhetorical scholars concerning the production of subjectivity is how concrete individuals come to understand themselves as subjects who communicate rhetorically. As such, the rhetorical subject has a specific history, whose value has been subject to intense problematization, beginning with Plato, and one that requires a set of institutions, techniques, rituals, and knowledge to inculcate in the subject the requisite 'rhetorical sensitivity.' Rhetorical subjectivity, therefore, should not be approached as any form of subjectivity that appears as a 'meaning effect' and/or psychological effect of discursive processes inherent to 'texts,' but a specific kind of subjectivity ethically, politically, economically, and culturally produced and valued for the work it can and cannot accomplish."[67]

and Rhetoric 43, no. 1 (2010): 1-25.; Catherine Chaput, "Affect and Belonging in Late Capitalism: A Speculative Narrative on Reality TV," *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011): 1-20.; Matthew May, "Spinoza and Class Struggle," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 6, no. 2 (2009): 204-208.; Matthew May, "Orator-Machine: Autonomist Marxism and William D. "Big Bill" Haywood's Cooper Union Address," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 45, no. 4 (2012): 429-451.

[66] Greene, "Rhetorical Materialism," 44.

[67] Ibid., 49.

The interest here, at least as it pertains to the discussion about the limitation of objects of analysis (and therefore also the discussion about the role of context in "Another Materialist Rhetoric"), is about how the entirety of the quote relates to the last sentence: namely, what are the "ethical, political, economic, and cultural" if not context? These are, after all, the defining features of a "specific kind" of subjectivity. My critiques of McGee's "A Materialist's Conception of Rhetoric" and Greene's "Another Materialist Rhetoric" were premised upon the implicit assumptions that each made about the non-finite nature of context (which I earlier characterized as a hermeneutic operation which insists on a correlation between thought and Being). I'll assume, for argument's sake, that context is *not* treated as "outside" in Greene's conception of rhetorical labor. This would mean that context itself is rhetorical. Such an argument cannot be held to for long, however, since in holding to the notion that context is both rhetorical and presumes rhetoric, what one has done is precisely the *opposite* of telling a history of the subject (regardless of how subjectivity is defined). Here is what I mean: if the context in which rhetorical subjects come to be is *also rhetorical*, then rhetoric must be thought as the condition of possibility for rhetoric. But this is neither a revelation of the historicity of the rhetorical subject nor an overcoming of the inside/outside duality of context. It is merely another way of saying what McGee and Greene have *already implied*: the constitution of a materialist rhetoric is dependent not on a historical model of rhetorical *subjects*, but rather a de-historicizing of rhetorical subjectivity as such. In other words, materialist rhetoric is a casualty of the same problematic as hermeneutic rhetoric: how do we think the coming of rhetoric subjects in light of an ancestrality which bore no resemblance to anything rhetorical?

Materialist Rhetoric as Collective Assembly of Enunciation

Although there are certainly a great many other articulations of materialist rhetoric that are worthy of analysis, I will limit my conclusion on the matter to Matthew May's conception of the materiality of rhetoric as the substance of a collective assembly of enunciation. I do so not only because May's thinking on the subject is fascinating in its own right, but because it might be seen as a bridge between my sympathies for Greene's work and my own conclusions about the relationship between materialism and rhetorical studies. It seems a return to my earlier claims about May's work now require greater detail.

May makes two arguments which seem, to me, to break rather starkly with Greene's materialist rhetoric(s). First, May claims that material is a substance, not a process. The latter, it seems, is more closely aligned with what May means by rhetoric. To return to a quote I have already borrowed from May, there is a sort of "material staging ground" which is enunciated as such through "the repetition of certain bodily practices" in order to "mark an impression."[68] Where Greene thinks the materiality of rhetoric as labor (and by extension rhetorical criticism via a sort of "cartography in reverse"), May thinks material as a set of unlimited potentials which are actualized (as rhetorical) via the act of enunciation. In other words, the materiality of rhetoric stands *under* the latter, lending rhetoric body and gravity as rhetoric actualizes the limitlessness of materiality in order to contour that body.

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[68] May, *Soapbox Rebellion*, 10.

Second, May enjoins us to think the constitutive movement of history

(specifically the trans-historical possibility of a world beyond capitalism) as held together

by a "virtual plane of consistency," which May claims entails "a performative enactment

in which the potential of a new world becomes imaginable in the ashes of the old."[69] The

difference, for May, is subtle, but important: rather than the implicit assumption that the

context is "outside" of rhetoric, May's move is to claim that rhetoric *actualizes*

contextual substance. As May (in his analysis of Big Bill Hayward's Cooper Union

address) puts it, "insofar as this address is addressed to a people in the process of their

own transformation and constitution and it affirms the surplus potential of an otherness

within, it instantiates class struggle in a concrete act of demonstration."[70] Context (this

surplus potential) still exists as material for May (since it is substantive), but it is *illegible*

outside of its rhetorical-performative enactment, which itself draws lines of flight which

span outward in many directions to recuperate this or that movement *as constitutive*. Put

differently, May has forwarded a conception of context which neither inside nor outside

an articulation, but which spans across articulations as a complex set of relations which

retroactively configure their consistency.

When I say, then, that the implicit claim in May's explanation of the "virtual

plane of consistency" is that the capacity of laborers to control the means of their own

production is dependent on the occurrence of rhetorical production though which the new

world can be typified, I am referring to the way that the claim about context implicates

the claim about substance. May is caught between the assertion of the materiality of

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[69] Ibid., 5.

[70] May, "Orator-Machine," 441.

context and the actual existence of context. In other words, since the plane of consistency which materially stages the constitutive movements of history (and by extension making possible such a "new world") does so *because it is virtual*, the materiality of that plane cannot be *said to exist* outside of its instantiation as a particular assemblage of enunciation. In order to assert the world-making power of rhetoric, May asserts that the material substance of a given assemblage is *not an assemblage*. In other words, May's materiality is not at all about *objects*, since this or that object is merely the assemblage of differences which exist materially in the virtual. But this rhetoric would not be a materialist one, since it asserts that the substance of the material plane of history which conditions the possibility of history *as history* is unknowable in-itself and only exists as such qua rhetoric.

A Speculative Definition of Materialism

Although philosophy appears to be entirely relevant to the institutional life of rhetoric, the discussion which I intend to undertake here might be called a digression insofar as it emerges from philosophies which do not intend to impinge on rhetorical practice and which insist that rhetoric, as an intellectual institution, consider itself of its own accord.[71] While I do not intend to "make rhetorical" (to situate within rhetorical studies) the practice of such philosophies, I do intend to demonstrate the problem that they pose to contemporary rhetorical critics. To wit, I am concerned with the way in which scholars of rhetoric encounter the coming of the age of human consciousness. *This*

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[71] Meillassoux, "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition," 11-12

is why I must begin with such a digression: in order to demonstrate the difficulty that such an event presents, I must begin from the beginning.

What was there (if there was anything at all) when there was no thought? If there was, in fact, a beginning of thinking, then how are we to describe the aporia between the two worlds (presuming that one accepts that such a distinction is tenable in the first place)—one filled with life and language, and one barren of all but extra-sensible substance—which are so very out of joint (particularly from within our "side" of the gulf, or from within the thinking world)? I should say now that it is not my intention that rhetoric, as either general practice or in its institutional life, take on the study of the world without thought. I do think, however, that the philosophical resolution to this problem has serious implications for how rhetoric understands what it *does* intend to study. I am therefore hesitant at this juncture to define rhetoric, as it is that definition which is altogether put into question, for me, by the problem which I have already presented. The great majority of this project will comprise explanations and criticisms of what I take to be rhetoric's existing approaches to this problem (evoked by rhetoric's quite recent attempts at defining its conceptual and methodological boundaries). I do not think that these approaches are sufficient. That appears, to me, to be the case not because of some lack of intellectual rigor, but rather because of difficulty in acknowledging that such a problem is even a problem at all.

It is precisely this acknowledgement of a "beginning of thought" which has been unthinkable for contemporary philosophy because of its return to a *source* (to metaphysics, essence, existence, substance, or subject), which philosophers have spent a great deal of time and effort dismissing as the product of dogmatisms of a great many

varieties. It should be noted, however, that the end of beginnings in philosophy (better

known as the philosophical critique of metaphysics) was contemporaneous with the de-

historicizing of human consciousness (or even of consciousness as such). This is because

the refusal of the problem of what there was before there was thought effectively *takes

thought off of a timeline*. It is therefore the coming of consciousness *in time*, or the

distinction between the time of the consciousness and the time of ancestrality (or the

world before consciousness), which here I intend to give a renewed discussion.[72] The

former poses no challenge, as it is without much trouble that human beings are able to

think the time of the subject, for immediately we realize that the very act of thinking

guarantees our place within such a time.[73] The latter, however, poses for us a much

greater challenge. This is because thinking the time of ancestrality asks us to think a

world that is not correlated to human thought from *within* human thought. In other words,

we must be able to *think* about a world that is radically uninhabited by thought—a world

where there is no thought, yet still Being.

The problem of ancestrality thus demands a search for the terms of what Quentin

Meillassoux calls a new materialism. Here is why: if there is no reality that is totally

independent of thought, then the *Being* of reality is *ideal* (since thought would be the

substance from which objects are made); it is also the case that not all "realisms" are

materialist insofar as not all "realisms" require that thought acquires *knowledge of

beings-in-themselves*, or of beings as they are separate from thought in order to affirm

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[72] Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 21.

[73] Jacques Lacan, "Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: A New Sophism," *Newsletter of the Freudian Field*, 2, no. 2 (1988): 17.

that Being is not derived from thought (for example, there are conceptions of realism which affirm the independence of Being from thought by logically deducing the limits of thought itself, thereby defining Being in absentia). This latter point bears further explanation, as it is perhaps the most crucial. If thought cannot *absolutely* verify the existence of Being's primacy over thought, then thought is trapped affirming only itself as the substance of Being. It can thus be said that all realisms which are not *materialist* (so defined) lapse immediately back into idealism. If it is the inextricable correlation between thought and Being which defines a philosophical moment that treats the problem of ancestrality as unsurpassable, then it can be said that there are two formulations of "correlationism" which have attempted to render it obsolete, though in radically different ways.[74]

The first of these begins with Berkeley, who can be said to have introduced continental philosophy to the circular nature of correlationism.[75] For Berkeley, thought cannot be said to escape itself insofar as every appearance of the "outside of thought" is merely *given* to thought as outside. The "outside," then is inextricable from the thought which thinks it, leading Berkeley to question the notion of an outside altogether (a concept which he termed "immaterialism"). All at once a slew of philosophical endeavors appear to fall in this camp, although the vast majority of these appear to be simultaneously critical of Berkeley.[76] The tie that binds them, given their dependence on

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[74] Meillassoux, "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition," 3.

[75] Although Meillassoux isolates Hume as the founder of the correlational circle, he concedes that its relevance in the inception of an "era of correlation" begins first with Berkeley's subjective idealism, which instantiated the importance of the correlational question in the first instance.

[76] Although Meillassoux has already done so for me (and on a repeated basis), it seems helpful to list a few here. Schopenhauer, Hegel, Nietzsche, Bergson, and Deleuze are among those that Meillassoux frequently

such a seismic philosophical upheaval, is that each commits to the metaphysics (the

treatment of the Ideal as the source of Being) of Berkeley's subjective idealism despite

the more resolutely anti-metaphysical moves within this camp (Hegel, Nietzsche, etc.).[77]

For Meillassoux, the anti-metaphysical bent of philosophy after Berkeley responded to

the metaphysics of the *subject* (base solipsism) with the metaphysics of *subjectivity* (Will,

Mind, Life, etc.). The shift in question thus merely took philosophy from a particular

(solipsist) subject to a *world* which bore *traits* that were also inherent in each individual

subject. This has produced a philosophical trajectory that sees subjectivity *everywhere*

and in everything. Although it had initially seemed that such a move would allow

philosophy to defeat the dogmatism of metaphysics—this time by shifting from a

determinate absolute to an absolute of quality, or of qualities inherent in beings (from the

subject to subjectivity, or from metaphysics to speculation)—it did so on the terms of

metaphysical dogmatism as such (for subjectivity can only exist in a *certain type* of

being, namely subjects, meaning that this speculation was also of the metaphysical

variety). Those philosophies which understand the correlation between thought and Being

to be absolute thus confront the problem of ancestrality by denying the very existence of

its constituent parts: there was never a time before consciousness (a time without

subjectivity, Mind, Will, Life, etc.), but only a time where the intensity of consciousness

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cites as members of this Berkeleyan tradition. Although it is not the purpose of this essay to explain how
each of them fits within this characterization, it is worth mentioning that the elaboration of two poles, one
vitalist (which treats the correlation between thought and Being as absolute, and thus the one true substance
of reality) and one idealist (which treats thought itself as absolute not by positing that it is indissoluble from
Being, but rather by eliminating the distinction between thought and Being altogether), mimics the
structure of Meillassoux's philosophy by positing an absolute and by claiming thought's access to that
absolute (speculation).

[77] Ibid., 4.

as such did not exist in the way it does now. It therefore makes no sense to pose the question of ancestrality to this type of philosopher, because the basic premise of the problem is not even *thinkable*.

The second form of correlationism, first explored by Kant, attempts to disqualify *any* notion of thought's ability to access an absolute. Despite taking the idea that thought cannot surpass itself to think what there is when there is no thought as its starting point, the Kantian rejoinder to those philosophies which consider as absolute the subject (absolute idealism) or subjectivity (subjectalism), does not speak of the correlation between thought and Being in precisely the same terms. This change in terms, however, is crucial in that it adds the following caveat to the circle of correlation: the indissolubility of the correlation between thought and Being merely *gives itself* as indissoluble *to thought*.[78] It merely appears *to thinking beings* that there is nothing which is not correlated to thought. If it was the mission of philosophy after Berkeley to disqualify "naïve" materialism (which asserted the materiality of objects on the basis of observation) by way of the correlationist circle, it is the mission of philosophy after Kant to disqualify every absolute by way of the *factual* derivation of the correlationist circle. In affirming *both* the *indissolubility* of the circle and the *factual* nature of the circle as such, Kantian thought constitutes a double movement which simultaneously brings thought both closer to and farther from its access to a reality independent of thought. One certainly cannot think such a reality in the Kantian mode, but one can hardly be capable of *denying* it either. This is so because one cannot find any *reason* for the *necessity* of the correlation between thought and Being from *inside* the correlation itself because thinking

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[78] Ibid., 7-9.

cannot produce the ontological necessity of thought. The correlationist philosopher of the Kantian type, then, confronts the problem of ancestrality by submitting the time of ancestrality to the transcendental nature of the aforementioned correlation, which forces ancestrality's opacity to thought. We can never know the contents of the ancestral realm (or even that it exists), the argument goes, but we cannot deny the possibility of its existence. This answer thus relies on the *teleological* bracketing of inquiry to the realm of inter-subjectivity while grounding that teleology transcendentally.[79]

The difference between these two varieties of correlationism is therefore the conclusion they draw from the inescapability of thought. The former draws, from thought's inescapability, an *absolute Truth*: it is *absolutely true* (independent of thought's conception as such) that Being cannot be independent of the thought which thinks it. This logic, however, is contradictory in the immediate sense:[80] there cannot be an absolute (something which is true independent of the thought that thinks it) in a philosophical system which treats thought as intrinsic to Being unless that absolute is metaphysical because metaphysics insists on the necessity of a determinate being. The realization that such a contradiction exists is therefore sufficient to furnish the Kantian critique of metaphysics insofar as it de-absolutizes the contemporaneousness of the *source* of thought and thought itself. The latter variety of correlationism, then, debunks the metaphysical nature of the former by insisting on a distinction between the bodies of and

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[79] To refer back to Gadamer's argument in *Truth and Method*, the world is for-us rather than from-God. In the wake of Kantian thought, then, the ancestral is *never* the ancestral-itself, but only the ancestral-for-us.

[80] The logic that I am here referencing is Meillassoux's explanation of the Kantian rejoinder to Descartes in the First Critique. Given the metaphysical nature of both (post-)Berkeleyan idealism and Descartes' "ontological argument," the extension of the argument to Berkeley also requires merely a refutation of the "nub" of the argument. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 47-50.

conditions for knowledge. In other words, *Kant's* correlationism appeals to the

transcendental in order to historicize determinate beings, thereby critiquing metaphysics

writ large. While it is true, for Kant, that the existence of this or that determinate body is

empirical, the knowledge of those bodies is *still subject to the rules of the correlation*

between thought and Being because the correlation is the condition of possibility of

knowledge. It is here, according to Quentin Meillassoux, that Kant's de-absolutization of

thought must face the problem of ancestrality directly.

> Granted, the transcendental is the condition for knowledge of bodies, but it is necessary
> to add that the body is also the condition for the taking place of the transcendental. That
> the transcendental subject has this or that body is an empirical matter, but that it has a
> body is a nonempirical condition of its taking place - the body, one could say, is the
> 'retro-transcendental' condition for the subject of knowledge… [W]hat distinguishes
> transcendental idealism from speculative idealism is the fact that the former does not
> posit the existence of the transcendental subject apart from its bodily individuation -
> otherwise, it would be guilty of speculatively hypostatizing it as an ideal and absolute
> subject. Thus the subject is instantiated rather than exemplified by thinking bodies. But if
> this is so, then when we raise the question of the emergence of thinking bodies in time we
> are also raising the question of the temporality of the conditions of instantiation, and
> hence of the taking place of the transcendental as such. Objective bodies may not be a
> sufficient condition for the taking place of the transcendental, but they are certainly a
> necessary condition for it… What effectively emerged with living bodies were the
> instantiations of the subject, its character as point-of-view-on-the-world… [T]his problem
> simply cannot be thought from the transcendental viewpoint because it concerns the
> space-time in which transcendental subjects went from not-taking-place to taking-place –
> and hence concerns the space-time anterior to the spatio-temporal forms of
> representation. To think this ancestral space-time is thus to think the conditions of science
> and also to revoke the transcendental as essentially inadequate to this task.[81]

According to Meillassoux, the thorough examination of Kant's transcendental idealism

reveals a hidden, non-metaphysical (i.e., speculative), absolute (and therefore the

conditions of a new materialism).[82] If the transcendental is *instantiated* in subjects and

not exemplified by empirical bodies, then both those bodies and the subjectivity

(correlation) they instantiate are *contingent, empirical facts*. It is this contingency—the

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[81] Ibid., 38-40.

[82] Meillassoux, "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition," 10.

contingency of both the empirical bodies of subjects and the time of thinking—which

implies an absoluteness to contingency itself. Put differently, there is *no thing*—either an

empirical body or the transcendental conditions of thought—that can be apprehended by

thought which is not contingent. It is therefore the contingency of all *things* which is

absolutely true, since even if one were to argue that such an absolute only appears as such

to thought, one would already have proven its validity (since thought itself is also subject

to such contingency).

Although the correlational circle becomes contingent in regard to the absolute

possibility of its non-being, this contingency reveals its *being* because for something to

be a fact, its being must be presumed. It is thus by passing through the *really existing*

correlational circle that Meillassoux derives the capacity of *all things* to be *otherwise*

than they are (that a thing could be *merely* given to thought indicates that it could be

otherwise, and that thought could be merely given as such indicates that it, too, could be

otherwise). There can be no metaphysics, no absolute *entity*, for Meillassoux, for

everything exists with the capacity to be other for *no reason at all*.[83] This is why such a

break must be characterized in the materialist fashion: the absolute contingency of beings

would exist (and with it beings themselves would exist) *independent* of human thought;

moreover, this contingency is *accessible* by human thought because it can be described

anhypothetically.[84] In other words, it is thought's capacity to think *its own emergence*

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[83] Ibid. 16-17.

[84] For Meillassoux, a philosophical principle is "anhypothetical" when it is arrived at not by deduction (syllogism or enthymeme), induction (paradigm), or self-evidence (axiom), but rather when *logos* can only reproduce an argument by articulating its opposite.

amongst the conditions which bore no resemblance to it which provides the terms of a speculative materialism.

If thought is able to access (via contingency) a world that is both radically outside of thought and radically a-subjective, then it is unsurprising that thought attempts to *describe* this world. For Meillassoux, this description of the in-itself can only be done mathematically.

> When one thinks about this thing 'in itself, ' i.e. independently of its relation to me, it seems that none of these qualities can subsist. Remove the observer, and the world becomes devoid of these sonorous, visual, olfactory, etc., qualities, just as the flame becomes devoid of pain once the finger is removed… The thesis we are defending is therefore twofold: on the one hand, we acknowledge that the sensible only exists as a subject's relation to the world; but on the other hand, we maintain that the mathematizable properties of the object are exempt from the constraint of such a relation, and that they are effectively in the object in the way in which I conceive them, whether I am in relation with this object or not.[85]

Meillassoux's insistence that this type of knowledge must be mathematical in nature refers to a distinction between natural and formal languages.[86] For Meillassoux, formal languages must be built around the structure of a *meaningless* sign. For Meillasoux, the term "meaningless sign" refers to a structural contingency which furnishes the capacity of objects to be signs. Put differently, Meillassoux would argue that objects retain the capacity to be signs in a fashion that is prior to any signification. He does so by an insistence on a material/immaterial duality in the sign. This duality, in order to fulfill the minimum conditions of the meaningless sign, must exist prior to the duality of signifier/signified. For Meillassoux, such a duality is found in the distinction between type and occurrence.

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[85] Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 2-4.

[86] Meillassoux, "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition," 20-21.

When I write the letter 'a' three times, I write three occurrences of a type that is itself unique—the letter 'a' in general, as instantiated in the occurrences proposed, without, however, being reducible to them. In other words, when you see a mark as sign, you see *the limitlessly reproducible occurrence of an intangible sign-type*. If I take the 'a' as mark, I am dealing only with the material thing. If I take it as an occurrence, I see it in the essentially unlimited number of its possible reproductions under the aegis of a type that, itself, is always identical to itself. Now, this *potentially* limitless reproduction of the occurrence obviously has nothing to do with the material of the latter…Thus, the duality of type and occurrence is constituted by a possibility of reproduction that is essentially immaterial.[87]

I will use set theory (one of the same examples already explored by Meillassoux) to illustrate this point as regards formal languages.[88] In set theory, mathematicians use variables (Greek letters, letters from the contemporary English alphabet, etc.) which are *named but not defined* in order to designate sets (collections of objects). If one were to *define* a set, one would quickly realize that its elements are themselves also sets. In other words, semantic content is antithetical to the basic structure of formal languages, since formal languages produce an infinite regression that denies semantic content as such. This structural resistance to definition in formal language can be referred to as the *rule governed* use of empty signs that Meillassoux calls "kenotypes."[89] This is what distinguishes formal languages from natural languages: natural languages may use kenotypes in a *structural* way at the *morphological* level, but are not *required* to maintain the emptiness of those signs at the syntactical level (in order to fill their role in everyday communication, natural languages are content to let meaning *take residence* in the kenotype). In other words, natural languages may make use of the empty sign *as empty* (as words that we *agree* are meaningless), but this is not required for the language to function. Formal languages, on the other hand, are kenotypical at the syntactical level.

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[87] Ibid., 25.

[88] Ibid., 22.

[89] Ibid., 26.

One cannot maintain the grammar of any formal, and thus mathematical, language without the notion of a sign which *stays empty* (in set theory this is done via an "empty set"—a set of which no other set is a member). For Meillassoux, the ability of mathematics to discourse about the in-itself is thus achieved through the kenotype, or the capacity of the semantic content of the sign to be *wholly* other (i.e. contingent). Put differently, the mathematical sciences are able to *describe* the world as it is without thought because they are gramattically bound by the in-itself and the ontological separation of the sign, since the contingency of objects grants them the capacity to be correlated to thought *at all*, from signification, or the pragmatic meaning of this or that sign as correlated to thought.[90]

Conclusion

A departure from Meillassoux's philosophical work seems necessary in order to demonstrate its importance to a new theory of rhetorical criticism. I will do my best to put the necessity of this departure in brief and pragmatic terms: those of us in the business of rhetorical criticism are not (and shouldn't be) interested in this world devoid of semantic content on the basis of its rhetoricality. Of what use, then, is this speculative materialism for rhetorical critics? It seems, to me, that the study of the richness of the time of the subject is an endeavor which finds a great deal more similarity to scientific inquiry than we have to this point cared to admit. As I have already said, in formal languages the empty sign must remain empty, while in natural languages the empty sign is one that can be filled with semantic content while maintaining the syntactical integrity

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[90] Ibid., 23-24.

of the language. That does not mean that signs are not kenotypical in natural language, but simply that they forego their ability to discuss the world of ancestrality in order to discuss the richness of the world of the subject. The relationship of signs to the semantic changes, but the structural capacity of the sign does not. What I am concerned with is thus the implications of the kenotype for *rhetoric* in the land of the semantic.

In referring to the kenotype, one is not referring simply to the arbitrariness of the signifier to the signified, but instead to the capacity of anything to be sign.[91] The kenotype may *be anything whatsoever*, but it is always also a material occurrence as sign. An example may help illustrate this distinction: the mark "A" has no necessary bond to the idea of *A* in general. This is the arbitrariness of the sign in Saussure, and is old news to most scholars of human language. The contingency of the kenotype deals, instead, with the notion that it is *unnecessary* for the mark "A" to be a *given* sign at all. In other words, a given occurrence must be understood as the token of a particular type *before* it is able to signify as that type. Moreover, non-necessity refers to the capacity of *any mark whatsoever* to fill the same function that is filled by "A" (to *be* a sign in the first place). This should, I think, beg a question which will bring me to rhetoric's encounter with the kenotype: why is it important that particular marks are taken as signs by thought? To answer this question one must recognize a set of implications generated by Meillassoux's speculative materialism.

First, the finitude of objects-as-such by way of their absolute contingency reveals the non-finitude of Time, and thus the non-finitude of objects as the material

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[91] Ibid., 27.

manifestation of time. If speculative materialism entails that particular, empirical objects

have an absolute capacity to be other than what they are, then it also entails that those

objects are subject to the force of an ontological (absolute) Time which provides a

substantive setting in which contingency and the objects it inhabits can take place.[92] The

materiality of the world (better known as "space"), then, is merely the physical

manifestation of contingency in Time. Insofar as Time itself is not finite, and finite

objects are the material manifestation of Time, then there is an infinity of finite objects.

Second, even if the non-finitude of objects were to imply the law of conservation of

matter (which it doesn't, since there is *no reason* that nothing cannot become something

just as there is no reason that something—even the laws of nature—cannot become

nothing), it does not place a *limit* on the delineation of that matter (those objects). This

means that the becoming other of objects *creates new objects*.

It is in this creation of new objects, itself entailed by the becoming other of

objects, that the importance of speculative materialism to the study of rhetoric might

begin to be realized. If objects become *different* objects when they become other, then we

might conceptualize the creation of new objects as intrinsic to language use itself. Here is

what I mean: every utterance entails the creation of a new mark/object. When one speaks,

one participates in the conversion of one set of objects into another set of objects. For

example, the various atmospheric molecules which are used in human respiration are

converted, in the physical mark of "sound," to a different set of molecules as a result of

exhalation. In a less overtly physical example, when one reads aloud the words on a piece

of paper, one is reproducing the signs of those words, but the marks themselves are

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[92] Ibid., 16.

different. Moreover, a particular concept can achieve different meanings when it is carried by different signs.[93]

In keeping with the distinction between signs and signification, the new objects precipitated by any utterance are not necessarily taken as signs. In natural language, however, the transition from utterance to sign also entails the transition from non-meaning to meaning. This concept bears further explanation, as the transition itself is bivalent. The pre-signifying arbitrariness of the sign (or the capacity of the sign as kenotype) points to this bivalence: the transition from occurrence to signification entails multiple steps which are folded together in the act of interpretation. An occurrence can be taken as a token of a type, but the relation between a particular type and token is contingent. In other words, when an occurrence is taken as a type, it is taken as a *given* type.

That the role of signs in natural language entails such a folding should point to two interesting phenomena. First, insofar as natural meaning occurs as a relation between a particular type and a particular occurrence, it foregoes the capacity to access the in-itself (since the question "can a relation occur?" is prior to the question "can *this* relation occur?"). In other words, this is not a model of direct correspondence. This, however, has an incredibly important impact on how the sign ought to be understood: interpretation does not define what given occurrences *mean or meant*, but does define what similar occurrences are *going to mean from now on* (in the *form* of new occurrences). This is

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[93] Marshall McLuhan's famous concept that "the medium is the message" is popular argument which is not terribly dissimilar from this one. Although McLuhan does little to rigorously theorize the materiality of this difference, the core of the argument remains similar.

because any token/occurrence which might become meaningful is subject to the

following decision on the basis of its ontological difference from all previous occurrence:

is this occurrence similar enough to previous occurrences as to constitute the reiteration

of a type, or is it sufficiently different so as to warrant an entirely different type? Second,

such a bivalence reveals a new area of interest for contemporary rhetoricians: while

rhetoricians are often concerned with how particular meanings are arrived at, that concern

appears, to me, to be wholly subsequent to the (kenotypical) question of whether or not

ontologically distinct occurrences become typified (and thus meaningful) *at all*. Insofar

as natural meaning occurs as a bivalence, the *smoothness* of that meaning (the grammar

of natural language) is subject to the eternal potential of its own interruption. If I have

been hesitant, to this point, to define what I mean when I say "rhetoric," it is merely

because of my intention to draw out the materials I feel are necessary to build such a

definition. It is this pair of phenomena (that signification occurs within a linear

temporality and that natural meaning is subject to the contingency of grammar), however,

which I must now relate to the rhetorical function of language.

This relation is not entirely new, as it borrows from the work of Paul de Man. For

de Man, here reading Charles Peirce, the debunking of a continuous relationship between

rhetoric and grammar begins with the linear temporality of natural meaning.

> The interpretation of the sign is not, for Peirce, a meaning but another sign; it is a
> reading, not a decodage, and this reading has, in its turn, to be interpreted into another
> sign, and so on ad infinitum. Peirce calls this process by means of which "one sign gives
> birth to another" pure rhetoric, as distinguished from pure grammar, which postulates the
> possibility of unproblematic, dyadic meaning, and pure logic, which postulates the
> possibility of the universal truth of meanings. Only if the sign engendered meaning in the
> same way that the object engenders the sign, that is, by representation, would there be no
> need to distinguish between grammar and rhetoric… [T]he question becomes rhetorical
> not when we have, on the one hand, a literal meaning and on the other hand a figural
> meaning, but when it is impossible to decide by grammatical or other linguistic devices

> which of the two meanings (that can be entirely incompatible) prevails. Rhetoric radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration.[94]

It is important to note, however, that the relevance of de Man's interpretation to a rhetoric of the kenotype is limited to the notion that the rhetoric bears a relation to the suspension and production of signs. For de Man, interpretation (what he refers to as Peirce's "pure rhetoric") is subsequent to the suspension of grammatical continuity insofar as it depends on the productive nature of invention. This or that "rhetorical" invention would *be rhetorical* only if it produced an inability to decide between literal and figural meaning, thus forcing a reading which would itself be another sign. Insofar as such an interpretation treats the suspension of grammatical continuity as subsequent to rhetorical invention, it is effectively concerned with rhetoric's relationship to the production of signification, yet unconcerned with its relationship to the production of signs. Speculative materialism, however, might open up the relationship between rhetoric and the production of signs (thereby providing an alternate path to the relationship between rhetoric and signification). If utterance itself entails the production of new objects, then the rhetorical function of language which suspends the continuity of meaning is based in the materiality of language which suspends the continuity of signs. This suspension is thus not subordinate to the power of invention, but rather produces it. This difference is subtle, but important, since it bears upon the meaning (ironically enough) of de Man's own statement. Just as signification is not endemic to the ability of the object to be taken as sign, it is not endemic to the new objects which are produced by utterance that meaning be suspended. In other words, the becoming other of the *material* marks of language *does not* coincide with the becoming other of the *ideal* continuity of language.

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[94] Paul De Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 9-10.

Every utterance materially suspends language, yet it belongs to the rhetorical that such a suspension becomes meaningful. De Man should thus be taken *literally* when he says that "rhetoric suspends logic," since it is the power of the rhetorical to take an object that is materially distinct and determine its *potential* semantic similarity (or dissimilarity) to another object. Rhetoric, then, *enacts* an ideal relation over an *already* material suspension (although this relation is also embodied, thus forming another material suspension in its very enunciation). Natural meaning is thus *always already* undecidable, for it is the nature of the contingency of objects which prevents any smoothness or continuity of that meaning. The *material* suspension of language leaves no basis for the functioning of a "pure grammar." What de Man referred to as the rhetorical question, then, might be better articulated as the rhetorical decision, since rhetoric does not generate the undecidable, it merely *decides the undecidable*.

It is the decisional nature of rhetoric that brings me to the relevance of speculative materialism to rhetorical criticism. If it is the function of the rhetorical is to be conceived of as a decision then the practice of rhetorical criticism must bear a relationship to this decision. In order to develop such a relationship, however, it seems prudent to explore what such a decision entails. First, it means that not everything is rhetorical. That meaning is decisional in relation to a materiality that precedes it by generating an undecidable separation between objects points to the fact that rhetorical meaning can *never* encompass the entirety of the material world. The rhetorical is a massive space of inquiry, to be sure, but its decisional structure means that its reach is asymptotic to the non-finitude of material objects. In deciding the undecidable, one thus participates in the *hypostatization* of this or that piece of semantic content. Put differently, the rhetorical

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decision is ideological at its core: it treats something contingent as if it were necessary; something that is finite as if it accessed the infinite. Second, the nature of the rhetorical decision means that rhetorical criticism, insofar as it is itself rhetorical, is also a rhetorical decision. Rhetorical criticism, since it produces rhetoric and is the product of rhetorical activity, would then also appear be an ideological practice. Moreover, such a conception of rhetoric (and of the integral place of ideology in rhetorical activity) seems to imply a lack of distinction between rhetoric and rhetorical criticism.

What, then, is the difference between rhetorical criticism (and rhetorical critics by extension) and the everydayness of rhetorical activity? The answer to this question appears, at least to me, to begin by recognizing, rather than obviating or denying, that rhetorical criticism begins from the same place as the daily practice of rhetoric: the rhetorical decision itself. If the rhetorical decision is the common element of these two rhetorical practices, then the difference might be found in the way that each orients itself to that decision. Specifically, there are two different ways to approach the way that rhetorical decisions imply semantic finitude. This is because there are not one, but many different signs that are produced when one sign creates another. One interprets an occurrence as type, and in the process of doing so begs a rhetorical decision about whether or not the interpretation is sign. The interpretation, then, is the utterance which is the potential sign/remainder. To borrow from de Man's reading of Peirce, the interpretation of each sign is itself a sign. This is true even if the rhetorical decision is conceived of as ideal, since it is instantiated in its performance by a subject. Just as each rhetorical decision has the capacity to be made, it also has the capacity to be made other (or not made at all). The everyday practice of rhetoric thus entails a rhetorical decision

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that does not treat itself as a sign. It is only concerned with the first sign, since the

rhetorical decision is not an object to be taken as sign until it is decided. Rhetorical

criticism, by contrast, is concerned with the second sign, and thus entails a rhetorical

decision which decides *another rhetorical decision*. Because rhetorical criticism decides

to take a decision as sign, it closes in on the ideology of everyday rhetorical practice,

even while it is itself ideological. Put differently, rhetorical criticism demystifies the

ideological meaning made by a given rhetorical decision by deciding that such a decision

is itself contingent. Rhetorical criticism is thus characterized by a meta-decision which

depends on the kenotype in both cancellation and production of ideology.

PART TWO: ON HUMAN MICROPHONES AND THE RHETORICAL SELF-

ASSEMBLY OF THE COMMONS

It seems worth mentioning, at the very least, that Slavoj Zizek's speech to the

Occupy Wall Street movement on October 9, 2011 was delivered to a relatively small

audience (albeit one that grew in number and encompassed greater physical space

throughout the course of the speech). It was not widely broadcast. Video recordings of

the speech show cameras from multiple major news networks (CNN, MSNBC, Fox

News, etc.) filming Zizek. A Fox News camera man, for example, can be seen filming

Zizek from within an arm's reach. The footage never aired on that network. Searching

"Zizek" on Fox News' website produces no results. This is not just a singular case, but

rather the norm regarding news coverage of the speech. The availability of the text itself

comes only from low quality video shot by people in the audience.[95] Many of these

videos have been posted to YouTube. When combined, they have fewer than 100,000

views by a wide margin. There are people like me who are responsible for hundreds of

individual views. Very few people have experienced this speech.

What strikes me as peculiar, however, is the sheer number of times this speech

(and certainly countless others during Occupy's brief existence) was delivered. Many of

those speaking to the crowds at Occupy Wall Street delivered their speeches into "human

microphones" (each time the "original" speaker completed a sentence or a phrase, the

audience would echo his or her words so those who were not close enough to hear the

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[95] Slavoj Zizek, *Slavoj Zizek at OWS, Oct 9, 2011 [Full Edition with English subtitles]*, YouTube, 18:05, May 15, 2012. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdwF3j1F2pg.

original utterance could hear a repetition of the words). It is this practice, then, that

resulted in Zizek's speech (alongside many others) being delivered not once, but rather

many hundreds of times (by many hundreds of speakers). This speech (or perhaps "these

speeches") might therefore constitute a very unique rhetorical artifact, for it is certainly

not commonplace for *any* public address to be repeated *verbatim* quite so many times in

such a limited spatial and temporal setting (or even at all). It would therefore be woefully

insufficient to see this speech and think to analyze *only* Zizek's words, as such an

analysis would gloss over the element that makes these rhetorical artifacts so unique: they

are repeated *regardless* of whether or not the "original" speech is particularly effective.

Although there is an emerging literature on the subject, it seems to me that far too little

has been said about the peculiarity of the so-called "human microphone"[96] and of the

peculiarity of its relation to *Zizek's* utterance, and so I will here endeavor to explore these

in greater detail. Specifically, I will engage the phenomenon of this human microphone

from three different perspectives, each of which represents my own effort at replicating a

different theoretical commitment at the heart of what might be called rhetorical criticism.

Of these, two are relatively well established practices taken up by contemporary

rhetorical critics. The third, then, is my own attempt at exploring what a different

theoretical commitment might bring to a rhetorical analysis of the human microphone.

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[96] Some discussion of the human microphone has centered on its history in relation to Occupy or the potential for understanding it as a particular medium (and one with interesting antecedents). For examples, see: Lilian Radovac, "Mic Check: Occupy Wall Street and the Space of Audition," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 11, no. 1 (2014): 34-41; and Marco Deseriis, "The People's Mic as a Medium in Its Own Right: A Pharmacological Reading," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 11, no. 1 (2014): 42-52.

I may have gotten ahead of myself, however, and the following point bears repeating: the point of contention with which I am concerned is the rhetorical decision to refer to the utterances in question as either *a speech* or *speeches*. To that end, my examination must concern itself primarily with the way in which one might conduct *this* rhetorical criticism by working through the aforementioned problem. It also seems to me that such a problem might not provide a clear resolution, so perhaps I should offer a different, yet closely related reinterpretation. To the extent that this rhetorical criticism might have an object of analysis—I'll call it a "text," for simplicity's sake—that object remains unclear by virtue of the role of the human microphone, which itself begs the question of how unified this "text" might be. It might then be worth asking the following question: is the human microphone a part of the "text" which includes Zizek's own utterance? If so, I am dealing with *a speech*. If not, I am dealing with *speeches*. Assuming one were to answer this question in the affirmative, there appear to be a series of questions that ought to immediately follow. Namely, why answer this question in the affirmative? What type of conclusions might this analysis produce? How (if at all) does the affirmative resolution of this problem come to bear on the conclusions of its analysis?

A Hermeneutic Approach

It seems to me that there are two lines of reasoning which might answer this question in the affirmative. The first of these does so by (roughly) the following logic: insofar as I might be concerned with the explication of a particular meaning that could (or perhaps "ought to") be gleaned by treating the utterances themselves as expressions that are already *prefigured* as a particular language, there appears to be little distinction between these utterances as expressed by Zizek and as expressed by the crowd. In other

words, the human microphone is not saying *other words*. It is merely a kind of

repetition/amplification device, albeit one that is unique for reasons that I shall explore in

short order. The task of a rhetorical critic, in this case, is thus as follows: I must

determine what the text of this speech *means*, given the external (not a part of the text

proper) information available to me (for the sake of simplicity, I'll call this "external"

information "context").[97] Already it would seem that I have made a leap which bears

further examination, since it does not appear (at least upon first glance) to be the case that

the utterances of the human microphone would necessarily be separate from those of

Zizek. I do not think, however, that it is necessary (at this point) to provoke any looming

discussion of the ontological nature of the text. As far as I am concerned (so long as I am

following this particular line of logic), these utterances might be considered *one text* so

long as I am able to unify their sum total as either one speaker or speech event. Here I can

do that by insisting on a lack of difference between Zizek's speech and its echo through

the microphone. What must be examined are thus the ways in which meaning can be

made by an analysis of these particular "speakers" (namely Zizek and the human

microphone) and their interaction as a sort of "call and response" exercise (certainly other

contexts can be examined, but these are sufficient for my purposes here). This is because

the *meaningful* difference between the utterances in question is in actuality a series of

relations between Zizek and the microphone (since, of course, the microphone merely

repeats and amplifies).

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[97] Here context is meant as a sort of pool of reference from which meaning is drawn. In a more specific
sense I am trying to get at the notion that context might refer to "other texts *and*." The "and" is therefore
the operative word here. What the contextual move does, then, is places two texts *in relation* to each other.
In other words, context is meant as a "weaving" of texts (from "contextus" or "contextere" in Latin and
Middle English, respectively).

What, then, might I deduce from the fact that the human microphone functions as a "call and response" that is contextually bound to Zizek and this audience which constitutes the microphone itself? It seems prudent, if such an investigation is to be productive, that I examine its constituent parts. Since it is only by placing the text in context that meaning might be made, I will begin with the two elements of what I have been calling the context: Zizek and the audience. I should note as I begin, however, that while an exhaustive description of each of these might be tremendously productive (indeed, it could lead to very many interpretations of this speech), it is overly sufficient for the purpose of the point I am trying to make. I will therefore limit my description to several *differences* between Zizek and the audience, as it may make my focus on a particular element of the text more salient.

Although the lack of diversity and the seemingly high—at least for a protest which was organized to criticize income inequality (although this distinction seems largely arbitrary to me)—employment rates and levels of affluence would later become criticisms levied against Occupy, it should be noted that the vast majority of Occupy attendees were *functionally* unemployed during their attendance. Certainly there were some members of the audience who were working and earning income *during* the protest, but the vast majority were not, having *forsaken* their jobs (if they had them) for the purposes of attending. Zizek, however, is not lacking for employment (he even attended several promotional book signings in the days immediately surrounding this address). Indeed, he is one of the most prolific *published* authors of his generation, writing several dozen books in several different languages, he is frequently a featured columnist in several major newspapers, and he routinely makes public speaking appearances around

the world (all this in addition to several academic appointments). Moreover, he is quite

literally *working* during his speech at Occupy, as he is participating in his role as a public

intellectual.[98] Economically speaking, he has very little in common (qua employment or

even production) with the constituents of his microphone at the time of his speech.

Moreover, this lack of commonality is indicative of a difference in the approach to

performing revolutionary politics. Although the political *allegiance* is ostensibly the

same here (i.e. protest as a type of revolutionary praxis), it belies the discrepancy in

approaching *labor* as integral to that politics.

In addition to a very tangible difference in labor, much of Zizek's speech assumes

a dramatic difference in the social atmospheres from which he and the audience emerge.

Although Zizek would bind the Occupy movement together with social unrest in other

parts of the world (in Greece, Tunisia, and Egypt, for example) under the banner of anti-

capitalism, he goes out of his way to isolate the unique nature of the situation in the

United States. While other countries must rely on political and cultural oppression as a

means of silencing alternatives to capitalism (Chinese censorship of film is perhaps the

most poignant example in the speech), the sociopolitical climate in the United States is

well beyond such crude methods. Indeed, at Occupy "the ruling history has even

oppressed our capacity to dream." Not only does the audience enter the speech without

having a particular alternative to capitalism, it does not even know that there *are*

alternatives. Zizek, however, does his best to distance himself from this particular type of

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[98] The majority of his speech would even make it into several articles he later wrote for the Guardian. Slavoj Zizek, "Occupy first. Demands come later," *The Guardian* (London, United Kingdom), Oct. 26, 2011. Slavoj Zizek. "Occupy Wall Street: what is to be done next?," *The Guardian* (London, United Kingdom), Apr. 24, 2012.

oppression. Certainly he is distanced by the separation between his home country (Slovenia) and the United States (a separation which is both geographical and ideological). He goes out of his way, however, to demonstrate that, in a *global* climate of contemporary capitalism, no *place* is *really* distanced, since "[I]f Communism means a system which collapsed in 1990… those Communists are the most efficient, ruthless Capitalists." Communism is, instead of a particular political system which opposed capitalism in a particular historical situation, a way of orienting one's self to "the Commons." Moreover, some of the old "Communists" (now that this term itself has been called into question) *remember* what it was like to bear this particular orientation, at least insofar as the consideration of alternatives might be concerned. They even had *jokes* about it. In fact, Zizek makes a point to tell one of them in order to demonstrate one of his points. Although the joke itself may seem poignant, I will not concern myself with its actual content, since it also operates at a level that is far more interesting in regards to this line of thought: Zizek *remembers* these times, and the audience (at least given this construction) *does not*. Zizek thus possesses a particular cultural knowledge that exists *outside* the space or time of this particular audience. It is therefore *only Zizek* who here has access to the particular "where" or "when" that is necessary to even understand that alternatives to capitalism are available.

It is worth highlighting these discrepancies because they might be problematized by a particular pattern in this speech: if the subject of the speech is how one might orient one's self to the Commons, then Zizek has little in common with the audience in practice (qua labor politics) or in experience and theory (i.e. his interpretation of Communism as a result of his particular social location), yet he almost always uses the first person plural in

situations where he might refer to himself in the first person singular or the audience in the third person plural. For example, Zizek begins the speech by saying, "We are called losers, but the true losers are down there on Wall Street" instead of saying "you are called losers…" It is the function of this use of the first person plural which I am here concerned with exploring in greater detail. These differences set the stage for a sort of ethos proof, or rather several ethos proofs. Of these, the discrepancy in the labor performed in this particular protest is bridged by a type of eunoia. The references to (re)articulations of Communism are thus a tool by which Zizek might *connect* himself to the audience via a general good will towards revolutionary praxis. The discrepancy in social location, at least in this instance, lends itself as a type of phronesis. Zizek's unique temporal, spatial, and (above all) social separation from the audience might give him a kind of practical wisdom insofar as the care of the Commons (or even Communism) is concerned. Insofar as the general character of the speaker is one type of (or part of a type of) conceptual framework for making *the text* intelligible, it relies on drawing a *contextual* connection between constituent elements of the text which are themselves presupposed to be separate in their very identification. I might make sense of the speech if I begin with assumptions that are rooted in an analysis of Zizek's general character, but in doing so I have accepted a primordial distinction between the speakers of each of these utterances (that of Zizek and that of the human microphone). In other words, it is difficult to articulate a coherent ethos proof if this is one single text. Even though I might consider the sum total of these utterances as a single text, I cannot describe the *speaker* of that text as a singular entity. *He* is speaking to *them*. What is interesting here is that the use of the first person plural interrupts the basic assumption of this train of thought: that Zizek and the audience could

be described as so radically different is *erased* by the first person plural insofar as it (re)articulates Zizek *into* the audience. *They* are all referring to themselves *collectively*, as a particular agent (albeit one with many voices). This articulation, then, appears to change the speech entirely. He is no longer speaking to them. *They* are speaking together as one. I might ask myself, at this juncture and as a direct result of this change: what am I to do with all of these *differences*? How am I to maintain the unity of this text along lines which assert the uniformity of utterance when the mode of my interpretation demands that such uniformity not exist?

Perhaps I might explore this tension by returning to the pattern of call and response, as it seems integral to the sort of centralization that I take to be occurring here. Here I use the word centralization in a very particular sense: I mean it as a type of arrangement which prefigures the location of *all* of the constituent elements of the text in relation to a *particular* element of the text. The latter, in this case, would be Zizek (and, of course, his utterance). The integral location of the call and response in this centralization is therefore defined by the fact that the microphone *echoes* Zizek instead of speaking *with* him. The audience, although it repeats the *words* that Zizek says, *does*, in fact, say other *things*. This is because the arrangement around Zizek is a type of melody,[99] much like one might create a melody (albeit a monotonous one) by repeating a particular musical note. What I mean by this is that the experience of hearing one note (or here, one utterance) is modified by the experience of hearing another note (regardless of whether or not they are differential) prior to it. The chorus of a given song sounds *different* the second time around. This means that although the human microphone says

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[99] Meillassoux, "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition," 31-32.

the same words as Zizek, they cannot be experienced in the same way because of the subjective experience of the passing of time. Zizek's "unification" with the audience by way of the first person plural (making one "speaker" with many voices) is simultaneously dissembled by the very structure of the human microphone.

It is here that I have run up against the limit of the logic which treats these utterances as one text (or one speech). The moment I treat this like one particular text, all of the contexts through which I would encounter it come flooding back to tear it apart. The only way I can make this into a unified text is by assembling a dividing line which presupposes the lack of unity in the first place. When I started with this multitude of utterances as one text, I was driven to acknowledge, by way of the very reason that analyzing this text might have been "unique" in the first place, that these are very different speakers, each of which is producing a text which calls up different contexts upon its encounter (which is why Zizek can be considered to have "ethos" here). In order to (re)unify the text along the lines of the actual discourse, I had to erase some of those differences. Even the unity of that discourse, however, is complicated by the fact that these speakers don't speak in unison. One could surely re-unify the text again, and along different lines, but that, too, would be dissolved in some larger contextual appeal.

A Materialist Approach

I'll turn now to the second route, since there are multiple ways to answer my problem—the problem of whether or not to treat this moment as a single text—in the affirmative. This second line of thinking follows a slightly different logic. I might consider these utterances as a single text insofar as they are a series of "material"

occurrences which are unified by their inseparability from a historical context which

retroactively prefigures the conditions of their possible construction as such. I might

therefore say that the goal of a rhetorical criticism of this type is to determine, by

working backwards from the text itself, what types of contexts act on these material

utterances in order to make them the way that they are. If the criticism of the previous

type endeavored to discover what context could reveal about the text, this second

criticism will aim at describing what the text could reveal about the context which

envelops it. In undertaking a more "materialist" criticism of this address, I might be

concerned with the ways in which the actual articulation of the text functions as a nexus

point between the words themselves and the "ethical, political, cultural, and economic"

milieu in which they are situated.

I might begin this approach by pointing out something that is somewhat obvious,

yet still quite important: this speech is made interesting by the audience, and the people

who make up that audience (or at the very least the quality that makes them so interesting

as an audience, i.e. that they/it are/is also a microphone) might have been there

regardless of whether or not *this* speech took place. Certainly the people in the crowd

might not exist in the same way had they not experienced the speech as members of the

audience/microphone, but their *bodies* would still have been at Occupy (if not in those

same places). Even in the face of restrictions on the use of megaphones at Occupy Wall

Street,[100] it would not have been hard for Zizek to talk publicly about Occupy Wall Street

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[100] Sarah Wanenchak, ""Mic check!": #occupy, technology & the amplified voice," *The Society Pages*, October 6, 2011, http://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2011/10/06/mic-check-occupy-technology-the-amplified-voice/.

without the use of the human microphone,[101] given the wide variety of dissemination tools available to him (the prominence of social media at Occupy Wall Street and Zizek's easy access major written publications are just a few possibilities).[102] The people in this audience were *not* there *merely* to hear Zizek speak. They were also there to speak *themselves*. It is therefore the set of *bodies* that are involved, and specifically their *relations to other bodies* (Zizek, city ordinances, etc.), that establishes the uniqueness of this particular discourse.

I should also mention, before I conduct any further analysis of the way the bodies of the human microphone function here, that, although those bodies are the elements that make this situation so interesting to me, they are not the only material concerns to be discussed as regards this text. Specifically, it seems worthwhile to make some mention of the fact that it was *Slavoj Zizek* that dictated this particular text. Why, then, is Zizek himself important? It seems, to me, that Zizek's literal presence at Occupy Wall Street bears examination. I do not mean to analyze this or that particular *reason* for his presence, but instead only intend to point out (as I did above in another context) that Zizek was *doing labor* there. To the extent that the portion of the text that can be attributed to Zizek might be attributed to him *as product*, one must account for the body of intellectual work which is tied to his name. Certainly one of the differences between Zizek and the audience is a difference in the way the oratorical production in question is categorized, which in turn reveals the means of this very categorization as one of the

[101] Slavoj Zizek, *Slavoj Žižek thoughts on Occupy Wall St at St. Mark's Bookshop Oct 26 2011*, YouTube, 49:21, October 26, 2011. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xl0HjO_3IEc.

[102] Neal Caren and Sarah Gaby, "Occupy Online: Facebook and the Spread of Occupy Wall Street," *Social Science Research Network*, October 24, 2011, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1943168#.

contextual relations with which I am concerned. In other words, the situation of this speech within a sort of "canon" (particularly given the extension of this speech into *multiple* pieces of Zizek's writing) indicates a *performative* relation between a set of ideas about politics and a set of bodies politic. The question of labor, then, is a question which concerns the assembly of a particular audience-as-such. This is not to say that it was Zizek's "intent" to construct an audience which resembled "his" conception of the proletariat, but instead to claim that the thing that we call "Zizek's" conception of such a proletariat is the product of a relation between him and a set of bodies which he rhetorically assembles as audience.[103]

If the examination of this performance is to stay centered on the discussion of Zizek's embodiment of it, then it should be mentioned that my use of the term "dictate" should be read in two different ways: as the literal speaking of words and as the direction of a particular tempo or rhythm. The latter, to this point, has been left undiscussed. Insofar as Zizek dictates the direction of the text (given the way the microphone itself functions), he does so by determining in advance what the microphone will say… provided he says the "right" thing. The microphone itself has agency here (at least in a different way than a traditional microphone might), and can "mic check" Zizek if it so chooses.[104] Moreover, it is difficult to say that all of the same themes which are present in the Zizekian "canon" (or any other canon in which this speech could be situated) are present in this particular speech. *Some things are missing*. The text itself thus reveals a

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[103] Greene, for example, would say that such a description of Zizek locates him as an "orator communist." Greene, "Orator Communist," 94.

[104] Brian Montopoli, ""Mic check": Occupy protesters interrupt Obama," *CBS News*, November 22, 2011. http://www.cbsnews.com/news/mic-check-occupy-protesters-interrupt-obama/.

set of unrealized potentials which are limited by the act of performance as such, since the performance only exists as relation between a particular set of bodies. The fact that the text (or at least part of it) is dictated (spoken) by Zizek calls forth a contextual relation which is itself shaped by the fact that the text is dictated (inaugurated) by Zizek as a relation to the microphone.

It is this second dictation which begs my return to an examination of the bodies which constitute the microphone itself, since its importance presumes that the audience itself is constituted in a way which includes a rough, but tangible set of political goals. In other words, the reason that Zizek might have gotten "mic checked" if he had lapsed into a lecture about psychoanalysis has something to do with the human microphone. How is one to go about discovering what this something might be? The only instance of such a "mic check" during the speech had more to do with Zizek's delivery than with some sort of political disagreement (in fact, it was because the people in the microphone couldn't understand what he was saying). Perhaps another way of asking this question is to ask the same question that I have already asked about Zizek: what type of labor is going on here? For Zizek, the labor is the assembly of an audience as proletarian multitude. If the microphone were to work that way, though, it would have to speak *with* him. Since it didn't, there is a *remainder*. That remainder is Zizek, and he exists as remainder because he does not speak with the audience. He actively introduces pauses into his speech so that he *does not* speak with them. The labor operation of the microphone is thus a very peculiar one for the orator who attempts to assemble the microphone as a particular audience: it will not go as fast as the speaker needs it to. Moreover, this type of labor is *antithetical* to Zizek's, as it is performed as a cancellation of his. This means that the

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crowd performs, in its function as the human microphone, a shift in labor relations which is itself dependent on the organization of bodies as such. By being *present as microphone*, one is rearticulating the terms of his/her labor power in a specific way: I will not work *that* fast.

How, then, is the direction of this shift to be understood? The answer, given the social milieu in which Occupy is situated, might appear rather self-explanatory: this is the "99%" performatively taking control of their labor, which was itself previously in the hands of the "1%." This is why Zizek cannot talk about Lacan or Hegel for twenty minutes: the slowdown which instantiated a shift in the labor relation between Zizek and the microphone also entailed a shift in the mode of production. In changing the coordinates of the production process itself, the dictation of the speech is re-figured within the confines generated by the microphone and functions as follows: "instead of talking about what Zizek might want to talk about, we're going to talk about what *we* want to talk about." Such an interpretation implies, or at least attempts to imply a shift in agency. The point, however, is that this social milieu (the "what" in "what we want to talk about") is *a given* rather than *a presumption*. In other words, this context does not exist over and above the text as some sort of historical inevitability. It is instead *given as such*, or appears to a critic via its instantiation as a *related text*. I can only come to the conclusion that understands this performative reorganization of labor as effectively proletarian (i.e. by placing this interaction in a wage-earner/boss relationship/opposition) *if* I refer to a set of texts which are themselves both separate and prior (the employment conditions of the individual bodies of the audience, the contrast between the "99%" and the "1%," the emergence #Occupy in social media, etc.) from what I had taken to be the

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text in the first place.[105] In other words, a "materialist" approach, in its methodological unification of the text, *implicitly* decides the way several different elements ought to be related. Moreover, I am only able to understand this set of relations as *oppositional* given the insistence on the unity of the text. If this is *a speech* which merely integrates a series of pauses and repetitions into its construction, then the microphone is a technology which fundamentally *cancels* the notion of an orator communist because it retroactively identifies the orator as boss.

Here, again, I have run up against the limit of a logic of rhetorical criticism which would treat *these* texts as *one* text. In appealing to a unified text as a means of discovering context, what one discovers is, in fact, *not* context (since it is not properly external to the text itself), but rather a multiplicity of text. The unification of the variant bodies here calls forth a new set of bodies (Zizekian literature) which themselves become inseparable from the critical performance. This inseparability, itself merely a "contextual" relation, calls forth *yet another "text"* (the empirical passage of time or the "pause" in speech). The relation between these, too, calls forth a multiplicity of objects of analysis (potential or unrealized "mic checks"), which in turn call forth even more objects of analysis (slogans and stories and social lives). The sum total of these points to a remainder, or a fundamental disunity of the text: the very logic of the unity of the text authorizes an absolute multiplicity of speakers and speech texts. It is thus not the absoluteness of the contextual relation which produces the plurality of the text. *It is*

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[105] Greene, for example, would likely make the argument that one is able to differentiate the types of labor performed on the basis of their immanence. My point is only that differentiation does not necessarily imply hierarchy.

instead the plurality of objects which cannot be held together by relation in any absolute way. This is not *One text* until I *take it* that way.

A Speculative Materialist Approach

If I am unable to deal with this problem by undertaking a rhetorical criticism which understands the text as unified, then perhaps a new approach is required. Moreover, it seems this new approach will not be able to begin with the assumption that this is one text. I will begin there, then, since this assumption appears to be the critical difference between a rhetorical criticism of this type and its predecessors. If I am to assume that these are *plural texts*, I might do so by inverting the infinitive in the text/context relation that is assumed in the previous rhetorical criticisms. In the previous approaches context is presumed as infinite, albeit in two different ways. In the former context is understood as a process, not an object. It is merely a mechanism for connecting various texts. It might be said that the text might exist absent a context, but it can only be *known* via context, which inverts the previous statement. It is in the epistemic block formed by the process of context that one *cannot* say that there is *not* a text. Since one cannot *escape* this block, we must presume that context is infinite (although it might be better described as transcendental). In the latter context is understood as that which both *precedes* and *assembles* the text. In other words, it is a substance. Here the text cannot exist apart from the context, since the context is the sum total of the virtual occurrences of text. Text is thus merely an empirical assemblage of context, though context can never be reduced to the text (by way of the partition between the virtual and the empirical). Context, as the substantive relation between these (the virtual and the empirical) is thus

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understood to be infinite here as well (although it might be better described as vital).[106] The inversion, then, is as follows: the text is (or rather "the texts are") infinite. Context can only be said to exist in the form of a particular occurrence or embodied subject. In the case of my first criticism, it might be true that context is a process, but it is one that is inseparable from the object which carries it out (the critic). Likewise with the second criticism: only texts are substantive, while context is an empirical quality of this or that text. It can thus be said (and in the case of rhetorical criticism, begun from) that there exists a plurality (infinity) of texts, which are only connected as embodied, empirical relations.

But what does this have to do with rhetorical criticism? Better yet, how is this expressed in the form of a rhetorical criticism? It appears, to me, that the concern here is with decision. By decision I merely mean (in this context) that one has the option to take the utterances of the human microphone as a series of signs in their own right (and not merely continuations of the utterances made by Zizek). Hence the resolution of my problem along negative lines: these are speeches. Specifically, they are speeches that can be taken together (as one) or apart (as many). This last type of rhetorical criticism, then, is concerned with the lines along which the text (as an object of study) is delineated.

If I begin with the assumption that these are different texts, then I should not take for granted that the human microphone itself is unified. After all, it is made up of a heterogeneous group of bodies, each of which would constitute a singular object (without making mention of the historical and cultural specificity of each) and would produce a

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[106] I am hesitant to use the term in a blanket sense, however, since there are certainly "materialist rhetoricians" who do not consider themselves to be vitalists.

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different utterance/object/text. My point is not to analyze each of these in its specificity, but merely to identify (once again) the remarkable nature of the phenomenon at work here: all of these different texts *happen* to be altogether quite similar. They all happen to say the same set of words. They all happen to respond to Zizek. They *could* have been otherwise. Zizek could have been "mic checked" or ignored or not "mic'd" at all. There is *nothing* necessary about the empirical similarities between any of these texts. Zizek does not *dictate* the text produced by the microphone. He opens up new relational possibilities. There *are* a lot of *similarities*. It is *easy* to understand this as one large text. I will return now, if only briefly, to a point I have made previously: the human experience of these texts is melodic. One comes after the other (or rather many come after the first). It is thus possible, *despite* the similarity of the texts, to understand them as differential. One can understand each repetition here as a *new sign* even though the utterances are similar. Once Zizek says "we are the awakening from a dream that is turning into a nightmare," it becomes possible to understand the audience as *meaning* something altogether different by the same phrase, since their utterance is modified by his, since their utterance is ontologically distinct.

The decision in question is thus as follows: in encountering these speeches, do I understand the microphone to mean the same thing Zizek means when they produce similar utterances? Certainly I could answer this question in the affirmative, but in doing so I would reduce the multiplicity of these texts to only one text, since I would do so by relying on a context which exists separately from its instantiation as individual texts/bodies/experiences. This seems less than tenable, if not openly and violently ideological. I'll assume a negative resolution to this question, then. What types of

conclusions might such a resolution produce? There are several factors at work here, namely: the contingency of the microphone as the source of a multiplicity of text, the iterative similarity (reiteration) of that multiplicity, and the repetitive sequence of the texts in time. Before I go further, however, I'll return to another point I've already made: there is some type of (communicative) labor going on here. Something is (texts are) *produced*. Moreover, this production appears to be of at least two categories when placed in relation to the repetitive sequence at work here: the text as produced by Zizek and the texts as produced by everyone else involved. This division of labor is further modified in light of the fact that there *are* similarities between the texts (reiteration), despite the contingency of the speaker/microphone relationship. In other words, the fact that Zizek was *reiterated* indicates that he said what the microphone would *permit* him to say. The human microphone is thus a particular type of revolutionary technology insofar as it shifts the control over the means of communicative production to the masses. Furthermore, the shift in the means of production retroactively aligns (via reiteration) the division of labor that is opened by repetition. There is a sort of universality in the connection that is formed between the two, since the microphone rearticulates Zizek's communicative labor in terms of its own control over the means of production. It says the same words, but it says them on the terms of its own agency. The problems posed by the human microphone are thus not merely starting points for rethinking rhetorical criticism, but rather the conditions under which rhetorical criticism can think these texts as a dictatorship of the proletariat which retroactively generated a Commons as such.

Conclusion

At first glance, the conclusions of this last analysis do not appear to be altogether different from those of the previous two. It seems to me, however, that this is more a function of the method by which those other readings might produce insight. Specifically, the production of insight in each of the first two rhetorical criticisms was premised on the breakdown of the unity of the text. The point of contention thus regards the insight gained from *beginning* a rhetorical criticism with a plurality of texts rather than encountering that plurality as a *byproduct* of the conclusions of the criticism itself. This distinction is far from trivial, since it accounts for the power of human microphone technology. Text is *always already* a multiplicity, but is not always *experienced* as such (via the melodic structure of experience). The technological power of the human microphone is thus not of assembly, but rather of *disassembly*. This is why I say the human microphone presents the rhetorical critic with a decision: the differences between these speakers/speeches/texts are *upon* the critic in the form of the human microphone, and they can either be embraced or ignored. The problem with the latter (and by extension any type of rhetorical criticism which would approach the human microphone as one text) is that it elides these differences in a way which insists upon a bourgeoisie ideology by treating the proletariat as ultimately subservient to the (ostensibly inevitable) *willing* transfer of labor power from the hands of bosses to the hands of the working class.

In the case of my first criticism this phenomenon is the result of understanding language as a pre-existing collection of ideal types. Zizek's position affords him the luxury of telling the microphone *how a revolutionary should be* (which is *like him*, given the first person plural). The implications, given the differences in labor power and social

location, are rather clear: Zizek's rhetorical move says "this is what is best for you," and the microphone *both amplifies and submits*. I can read this as one text being amplified (qua ideal types), but in doing so I am wedded to either the idea that any of the transformative potential of the microphone depends on the authorization of the existing hierarchy of labor power or to the idea that the discrepancy in labor power in this case is *not worth mentioning*. Such a phenomenon is also present in my second criticism in the form of the aforementioned "remainder." When Zizek figures a "pause" into his speech in order to let the microphone echo him, he generates a temporal separation between his speech and its amplification. The pause, however, is the result of what is effectively a workers' slowdown. Zizek, as the remainder whose primary relation to this slowdown is a redefinition *his* labor (the assembly and arrangement of an audience), becomes a boss. Moreover, he becomes a boss who *willingly* accepts the slowdown because it is the audience he *wants*. In other words, Zizek the orator communist becomes Zizek the profiting martyr. He sacrifices *his* labor power to the masses in order to coordinate *their* labor in a way which produces profit *for him*. I can read this as one text in which the microphone performs a reorganization of labor relations with the speaker, but in doing so I am wedded to the idea that such a reorganization happens on the terms of a boss who *intends to sell the product of that reorganization* (just as Zizek would go on to do). The message here is both clear and vehemently ideological: you get your slowdown because management *let you have it*.

The aforementioned phenomenon points to the necessity of *beginning* a rhetorical analysis of the human microphone with an assumption that it organizes a multiplicity of text, since it is a prerequisite to understanding the human microphone as a technology for

the expression of an agency which emanates from *agents* (rather than as a prefiguration the possibilities available to them). In other words, the rhetorical power of the human microphone is that it presents the critic with a situation which is wholly aleatory: labor is capable of organizing in a way which is *not dependent* on any historical inevitability or existing power structures, while at the same time retroactively organizing its relationship to them both. The voices of the human microphone therefore reveal a persistent *political* question at the heart of rhetorical criticism: which of these bodies aren't worth talking about *in their own right*? If rhetorical criticism is to be worthy of the latter half of its name, it cannot afford to enter *that* discussion having already sectioned off a set of those bodies by way of what amounts to a historical over-determination.

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