ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VOICE AND AUTHORITY IN ON MESSAGE COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

On Message communication allows political authority to fill the demand for authorised speech with a stable message reinforced by uniform performances. The strategy indicates the ways in which changes in the material and institutional mechanisms of discursive practice fundamentally alter the categories by which we understand, analyse, and respond to rhetorical productions. The essay suggests that On Message communication, illustrated by George W. Bush's administration, functions as a particular form of prosopopoeia, the verbal equivalent to wearing masks. The project charts the variable relationship between political authority and performance to suggest that On Message communication refigures the classical account of prosopopoeia and alters the relationship between publics and political authority.

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And it's hard to imagine that the world could possibly have gotten better with Saddam Hussein in power.

Condoleezza Rice, 9/10/2006

But the fact is, the world is much better off today with Saddam Hussein out of power.

Dick Cheney, 9/10/2006

The world is safer because Saddam Hussein is no longer in power.

George W. Bush, 9/11/2006

In the week leading up to the fifth anniversary of the September 11th terrorist attacks, the Bush administration ventured into the media landscape to comment on the progress of the wars on terror and in Iraq. As illustrated in the quotations above, the mobilisation of multiple officials resulted in a singular message from the Executive Branch. Confronted with numerous opportunities to reflect on the previous five years and project the course of administration policy, administration officials enacted the "open secret" of Bush administration public discourse: "Stay on message and say it often" (Ivie 2004a). On Message communication produces a discourse that can meet and defuse a variety of contingent calls for political speech, enabling any variety of individuals to speak on behalf of an institution in any number of places. Charles Walcott and Karen Hult (2003) suggest that staying on message produces an administration that resists transparency, appears unified, and maintains an aura of approachability.

On Message communication responds to the demands of any particular moment or audience with an impenetrable message marked and reinforced by its uniform performance. The resulting discourse resists treating the individual iteration of communication as a unique rhetorical performance and minimises the possibility of an unexpected, contingent outcome. The multiple iterations of the message suggest a democratic accessibility while the uniformity of the message resists allowing an audience a uniquely responsive rhetorical exchange. When used by the Executive Branch or other institutions of democratic authority, the strategy produces discourse with formative power over a public's relationship to democratic leadership. To the extent publics have access to democratic leadership through political communication, On Message communication impacts a public's ability to link discourse to individual positions of authority, and therefore shapes the conditions by which political authority might be held accountable by the people.

Kathleen Hall Jamieson (1988, 155) argues that the demands placed on political communication by the mediated political environment alter the style and substance of public discourse by abandoning a traditional conception of eloquence in favour of "synoptic moments" that offer memorable visual and verbal sentiments. These synoptic moments become repeated across the complex of political power and result in On Message communication that replaces kairotic eloquence with redundant and inflexible "talking points." A preference for eloquence assumes that every instance of political communication is unique and filled with inventive potential, which may have once been the case when the opportunities for authority to address publics

were limited by material and political constraints. Jamieson's lamentation about eloquence privileges a notion of contingency wherein every utterance serves as a *particular* response to a *particular* political moment. With a broad range of news media outlets covering political issues every hour of the day, political communication becomes autotelic, a preponderance of speech for speech's sake.

These alterations in the understanding of political authority's relationship to the contingent rhetorical moment result from a contemporary political environment that presents "diverse, fragmented, and complex" communication channels that require shifts in "power relations among key message providers" (Blumler and Kavanagh 1999, 209). Put simply, a single politician cannot individually satiate the broad demands for speech, thereby necessitating an extension of authority to other speakers in order to supply the appropriate volume of authorised discourse. Publics expect sufficient authorised discourse because such discourse serves as the basic mechanism by which the people can hold political power accountable.

The On Message strategy creates a network of rhetorical performances across a variety of discursive platforms in an effort to take advantage of and mitigate contemporary conditions of circulation and interpretation. An appreciation of these reconfigurations requires altering our critical perspective of political discourse from one that accounts for texts as fully formed and isolated moments of political expression and toward one that embraces the atomisation and recirculation of political sound bites and attempts to map political authority according to the variety of officials and contingencies presented and effaced in the process of staying on message. On Message communication serves as, on the one hand, an opportunity to examine how one kind of contemporary discursive practice encourages an evolving sense of – perhaps even a retro-fitting of – some key rhetorical categories. On the other hand, On Message communication also serves as a very particular rhetorical practice that constitutes a rhetorical relationship between political authority and the people, and – within democratic institutions, at least – fundamentally alters the ways publics understand and account for political authority.

Because On Message communication repeats a message in a variety of places, the relationship between the inventional moment and the contingent moment of expression becomes both tenuous and explicitly marked. The resistance to contingent rhetorical opportunities depends on reducing discourse to Jamieson's synoptic moments *and* reproducing those moments via numerous spokespeople. As such, the possibility of accounting for a discourse by way of its contingent speaker becomes a more laborious exercise (see Black 1998). While we might view this difficulty as a condition of Roland Barthes' (2001) declaration of the death of the author and the subsequent empowerment of the reader, such a conclusion denies the possible value in linking a discourse to its origin. For political discourse, the evisceration of the link between speech and speaker represents the suppression of the ethical register of public discourse, and as such, allows political authority to constitute a very particular mechanism of accountability. In the case of On Message discourse, the mechanism of accountability depends on carefully negotiating the relationships between a discourse's authorisation, its speaker, and its contingent encounter with a public. What follows is an effort to track those relationships by articulating a concept of authority in relation to its discursive variant, ethos, and considering how an updating of the classical rhetorical concept of *prosopopoeia* – the wearing of

masks, speaking in the voice of someone or something not present in the contingent moment of speaking – might reveal how On Message communication constructs a discursive environment that muddles the question of accountability.

Paul de Man explains prosopopoeia as the process by which a disembodied author appears localisable through performance. "Voice assumes mouth, eye, and finally face, a chain that is manifest in the etymology of the trope's name, prosopon poien, to confer a mask or a face (prosopon)" (de Man 1984, 75-76). Prosopopoeia plots the relationship between voice and mask, authority and speaker, and as such serves as the best critical apparatus for reading the discourse of disembodied authority. A continued engagement with Bush administration discourse surrounding the fifth anniversary of the September 11th attacks will help illustrate one process by which we might recuperate rhetorical figures for contemporary rhetorical environments. Considering the gap between authority and discourse produced via On Message communication may not empower publics to render authority democratically accountable, but such an investigation will at least illustrate how discursive strategies construct a public's imagination of political accountability.

Authority, Accountability, and Shifting Contingencies

President Barack Obama's first Executive Order in many ways serves as a response to and verification of a public demand for political accountability. Signed one day after his inauguration, the order revoked the previous administration's interpretation of executive privilege and thereby revised the protocols of Presidential transparency that inform a notion of Executive accountability (Obama 2009a). The order illustrates that political authority – and subsequently accountability – depends upon the discursive practices that present authority before the people. Obama's approach to executive privilege rejects Bush's executive order 13233, which depended on two significant characteristics of privilege framing the accountability of the Executive Branch. First, the order creates a relatively equal level of privilege for both the incumbent and former presidents. Second, when incumbent and former presidents disagree on whether to release past records or not, the document defaults to the refusal of access (Executive Order 13233, 2001).

Bush's order interprets executive privilege as a timeless defense against transparency and imagines the presidency as an authority that extends beyond any particular individual.[1] Such an interpretation affirms Herbert Marcuse's (2008,18) description of political authority in which a "separation of office and person is only an expression for the autonomisation (*Verselbständigung*) and reification of authority freed from its bearer." On Message communication, easily considered a mode of disciplining the unruly contemporary rhetorical environment, may on closer inspection represent the preeminent strategy for developing and sustaining this brand of disembodied authority before contemporary publics, which monitor political power via numerous forms and flows of public discourse. As such, the influence of On Message communication on notions of authority and accountability is most acute in representative and democratic political formations. In these formations, authority – understood as derived from and accountable to the people – produces a discourse that simultaneously appears accountable (in that it appears before the people) and obscures the relationship between authority and the people.

The possibilities of accountability may seem grim in the face of Marcuse's

historical account of authority as long-ago disembodied and in light of Michael Warner's (2005, 165) assertion that the kinds of personal abstraction that mark public discourse tend to be exclusively available to individuals in positions of power. Authority, according to Marcuse and Warner, has historically insulated itself from questions of accountability in order to perpetuate order and control. Robert L. Ivie (2004b) articulates this kind of insulation as a prominent myth in the American political imagination that neutralises the rhetorical possibilities of public dissent. He argues that "we might better grasp how constructing appropriately flexible boundaries of intersecting attitudes and attributes rather than rigid and exclusive categorical distinctions of identity and difference enables dissent to perform the crucial function of holding delimited perspectives accountable to one another," a performance that requires an appreciation for the "interface of democracy and rhetoric"(Ivie 2004b, 24). On Message communication not only operates by way of such an interface, it also uniquely constitutes the interface in such a way that it does not necessarily preclude the possibilities of dissent, but instead creates a chasm between a people and political authority.

As On Message communication produces a discourse resistant to the contingent moment of address and foregrounds a gap between speaker and authority it also relies on a particular speaker in a particular moment to give voice to the message. This account of the message as both institutionally stable and performatively particular takes advantage of a rhetorical presumption of embodied singularity by which "we cannot of course imagine a speech except as the speech of a person" (Quintilian trans. 2001, Book 9.2.32). On Message communication performs a distance between the locus of the speaker and locus of authority, which produces an anxiety because "on the one hand, no one seems to be in charge and, on the other, that someone might be in charge in a hidden way" (Salecl 2004, 121). Beyond producing public anxiety about leadership, On Message communication disrupts the representational relationship between democratic authority and publics by veiling the identity and localisability of authority.[2] On Message communication discloses a gap between speaker and authority and therefore calls into question, if it does not fully resist, the identitifiability of authority and its representational relationship to the people.

Blumler and Kavanaugh (1999, 224) link the increase in venues demanding political communication to an expansion of authorised speakers and a pattern of redundancy throughout authorised political discourse. On Message communication represents the quintessential mode of communicating under these fragmented conditions and suggests an overt refusal on the part of authority to engage in the unique contingencies of any particular speaking opportunity. As speakers pay closer attention to the institutional precision of the message than to the particularity of the speaking occasion, authorised speakers present themselves as cogs in the machinery of political discourse, or so the various political humour programs on television would have us believe.

Many a laugh has come by way of pointing out the unoriginality of On Message communication by sequencing clips of Bush administration officials saying precisely the same thing. Robert Hariman (2008, 251) argues that political parody functions "to reveal limitations that others would want to keep hidden", but such a revelation results as much in confusion as illumination in this case. The laughs

hoped for in disclosing On Message redundancy depend on the assumption that authorial originality indicates political credibility, and that both are measured in moment of vocal performance. On Message communication resists the assumption that authorship and speaker are concurrent positions in the rhetorical enterprise. Further, On Message communication refuses to conceal that gap in its performance, explicitly trafficking in artifice and wholly ignoring Aristotle's advice that speakers construct messages that appear natural and hide the prefabrications of discourse (Aristotle trans. 1984, Book 3.2).

While political humorists aim to discredit political administrations by revealing the compulsive unoriginality of political spokespersons, their dismissal of On Message communication as inauthentic only accuses its practitioners of something they have already admitted to in the performance. Further, such a dismissal mistakenly confuses the identification of the artifice of On Message communication as the kind of disclosure of political limitations Hariman values in his political humour. The identification of artifice states a truth, but not the whole truth of On Message communication. Questions of originality presume one can draw critical conclusions about authority and character by way of individual speakers. The On Message strategy takes advantage of that rhetorical privileging of an original and contiguous relationship between the locus of authority and the locus of speaker in order to reshape the relationship between authority and the people.

The assumption that authority and invention admit of some contiguity depends on conflating the notion of authority and the notion of authorship. That is to say, there is a preference for collapsing the rhetorical performer with the rhetorical inventor, ignoring alternate accounts of authority in rhetorical production. Authority, according to Quintilian (trans. 2001), functions not as a force that imbues a speaker with power or as a sign of proprietary ownership of content, but instead as an external proof brought to bear on the contingent concerns of the rhetorical encounter (Book 5.11.36-38). In contrast to the external resource of authority, the particular speaker gains authorising force only to the extent that the crafted speech demonstrates a sufficiently persuasive ethos. In his translation of Aristotle's treatment of ethos, George Kennedy (1991, 38) suggests that "Aristotle thus does not include in rhetorical ethos the authority that a speaker may possess due to his position in government or society… One practical reason for stressing character as revealed within the speech was that Greek law required defendants to speak on their own behalf, and they were often lacking in external authority". Understanding ethos as internal to the moment of speaking depends upon an understanding of the contingent moment of speaking as an authorising force itself.

The classically figured difference between authority and ethos rests on the relationship between an authorised voice and the contingent moment of speaking; authority represents a kind of portable and inalienable force of character while ethos represents a force of character negotiated and adjusted within a particular rhetorical encounter. On Message communication complicates the distinction between authority and ethos by performing a message that minimises the capacity for a speaker to demonstrate or construct a rhetorical ethos. Craig Smith (2004) suggests that "speakers are persuasive through *ethos* by demonstrating character through choice. That is, *ethos* reveals the speaker's habit when it comes to making decisions; the speaker's history of decision making is a history of individual enact-

ment. In this way, *ethos* is an ontological structure that leaves a trail that reveals moral fiber and standing" (Smith 2004, 15).

One might conclude that staying on message abandons a concern for ethos on the part of the speaker, since staying on message is in fact a refusal to make contingent choices. However, the refusal to make contingent choices is itself a kind of choice. The speaker still participates in the rhetorical encounter, prompting the audience to evaluate the content of the inflexible message according to the contingent context of its expression. Debra Hawhee (2002, 31) asserts that "the *dunamis* of *logos*, like the bodily arts of pharmacology and athletic training, emerges in the encounter itself," subjecting the moment of expression and the locus of the speaker to contingent dynamics as perceived by an audience that encounters the message as a unique rhetorical moment. While speech presents itself as embodied and reveals choices that illuminate character, On Message communication suggests that those choices may not originate within the speaking body. As such, On Message communication admits of multiple contingencies: the contingency of the audience experiencing the rhetorical encounter and the contingency of authority attempting to manage the contingency of that audience.

While the contingent choices in the act of staying on message appear limited, the choice to stay on message also minimises the potential for authorised speakers to contradict similarly authorised speakers. W. Lance Bennett (2005, 172) notes that a politician's "spontaneous departures from well-honed scripts can become big and often negative news." Under this formulation, authority is concerned with the contingent afterlife of any single authorised speaker's discourse. The strategy no longer refuses to engage in the contingent moment, but is instead engaging a contingent moment that has yet to occur. J. Blake Scott (2006, 119) explains: "kairotic action can be based on the assessment of and attempt to opportunistically control or at least avoid or defend against risk. From this humanistic perspective, kairos, like risk assessment and forecasting, can be thought of as an attempt to colonise the future in a way that creates an advantage."

Scott's notion of indeterminate risk figures On Message communication as a security mechanism against the uncontrollable forces of circulation. This account connects On Message communication to the communication strategies in the corporate world that view redundancy and consistency as components of issue ownership, and so we might view On Message communication as an indicator of the corporate sensibilities of contemporary political organisation. May-May Meijer and Jan Kleinnijenhuis (2006) suggest that the extent to which an organisation successfully addresses issues is directly related to the level of trust publics have in the organisation. Staying consistent across a variety of speaking opportunities serves to control the discourse on issues and to elevate the reputation of institutional authority before the public. The result is a kind of institutional anaphora, a rhetorical device predicated on repetition of phrasings within a discourse, extended here to a repetition of talking points across communication events.

The quotations at the opening of this essay illustrate this process of repetition. Condoleezza Rice (2006) asserts, "It's hard to imagine that the world could possibly have gotten better with Saddam Hussein in power," Vice President Cheney (2006) reiterates, "the world is much better off today with Saddam Hussein in power," and President Bush (2006a) ultimately affirms the sentiment when he states "The

world is safer because Saddam Hussein is no longer in power." The talking point allows the Executive Branch to speak univocally, minimising the potential for one authorised speaker to stand in contrast to others. In an age when mass media and even publics can recontextualise and circulate authorised discourses, such repetition serves both as a mode of reinforcement and as a defense against institutional inconsistency. But treating On Message communication as a form of anaphora fundamentally alters our understanding of authorised discourse because the figure appears only when we consider all the manifestations of the talking point. The discourse of authority stretches beyond a single speaking moment and the individuals authorised to speak in a single moment are not fully authorised to produce discourse that renders political authority accessible to the people. Salecl (2004) explains "there is no place for inconsistency, non-wholeness" (p. 121) when we substitute the virtuality of a disembodied authority with the virtuality of a momentary and partial authorisation of a speaker, and as such the embodied moment of speaking becomes deficient in rendering authority fully accessible to the people because its performance is predicated on artifice.

Voices, Bodies, and Masks

As speakers no longer find their voices in the contingent moment or by way of being uniquely suited to an invitation, they instead function as a momentary metonymic substitution for some other authorial voice. The substitution allows authority to address publics while the momentary nature of the substitution allows for a speaker's ethos to inflect the address with difference. This concept of authorial voice forces us to revisit Quintilian's presumption about the localisability of speech, the isolation of voice within a body. On Message communication mobilises the particularity of embodied and "voiced" rhetorical practice to complicate the relationship between the body politic and its disembodied authority. An increasing interest in the sonic dimensions of rhetoric and in the bodily manifestations of discourse[2] offer up new ways of thinking through the affective and material conditions of receiving public discourse; in this case, we must consider how discursive practices utilise the privileged categories of voice and body to obscure formative constructions of democratic imagination. In On Message communication, voice must be understood sonically as the flourish of difference created by the proxy speaker *and* conceptually as the authorising force of the discourse.

The rhetorical tradition offers up an excellent device for explaining the relationship between a speaker and a disembodied voice: prosopopoeia. Aristotle (trans. 1984) explains the strategic value of prosopopoeia as a way to say things about oneself or others without appearing contradictory or abusive (Book 3.17.16). Quintilian (trans. 2001) suggests the figure's value lies in simulating "the emotions of children, women, nations, and even things which cannot speak," and which "are all entitled to their appropriate character" (Book 11.1.41). As such, On Message as prosopopoeia allows political authority to meet all the demands for authorised speech given the material impracticality of speaking everywhere at once. Like Quintilian's treatment of prosopopoeia, On Message communication indicates an imbalance in the availability of the figure; only those authorised to speak can give voice to that which cannot. Unlike Quintilian's account, On Message communication does not channel the displaced or excluded voices of the margins, but to the

strategically displaced locus of authority. Where Quintilian's prosopopoeia served as a (typically meager and co-opting) mechanism of representing the voiceless, On Message's prosopopoeia becomes a mechanism for strategically representing authority in a nebulous state of disembodied voices and un-voiced bodies.

Quintilian (trans. 2001) further explains prosopopoeia as a valuable exercise for young orators, who "rarely deliver their speeches as advocates, but generally as sons, parents, rich men, old men, the bad-tempered, the easy-going, misers, the superstitious, cowards or mockers; comic actors hardly have more roles to sustain in their performance than these men do in their speeches" (Book 3.8.51). Similarly, de Man (1984, 76) argues that *prosopopoeia* presents itself by way of "style and narrative diction" that results in "the art of delicate transition." But On Message prosopopoeia lacks both the adaptive and stylised dimensions; the message is not crafted to suit the spokesperson or moment but instead to minimise message difference among spokespeople. The spokesperson performs the message not as an inventive invocation of an external and authorial voice but as a premeditated act that evacuates the inventional moment of prosopopoeia from the moment of performance, wholly – not partially – evacuating the speaker's own voice with the voice of authority. If prosopopoeia represents a kind of *energeia* that makes an excluded voice sonically appear within a discourse, the ability to appreciate that appearance depends on an ability to identify the difference in voices, to identify the authorial origins of the voices.

Hoping for a precise origin assumes prosopopoeia operates as a citational strategy, a quotation marked by vocal performance. Jacques Derrida (1988, 12) notes that in some ways, all language "can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable." However, On Message communication exists at least in part to resist this recontextualising possibility of language. Whereas in the classical account of prosopopoeia a speaker would invoke a voice from beyond the contingent moment, thereby figurally "wearing the mask" of another, On Message communication places a speaker before an audience who singularly speaks the voice of authority. The mask worn in On Message communication is not the mask of authority; rather, the disembodied voice of authority wears the mask of the spokesperson.

The metaphor of voice as clothing underscores the propensity for confusing body and voice, since, de Man (1984, 79) explains, "incarnate flesh and clothing have at least one property in common, in opposition to the thoughts they both represent, namely their visibility, their accessibility to the senses." The embodied performance of On Message communication leads to a contingent experience of authorised discourse which allows the speaker's ethos to momentarily figure disembodied authority. When de Man explains autobiography as a kind of prosopopoeia that allows others to place themselves in another's narrative, he asserts that the question of authorship concerns itself not with the epistemic accuracy of the narrative but instead merely with the capacity for the author to sanction the discourse (p. 71). In On Message communication the spokesperson does not serve as an authorial origin, but instead as an authorised intermediary between authority and a people.

Despite its implicit distinction between disembodied authority and individual speaker, the discourse presents itself as something unique, predicated on what

de Man, himself channeling Wordsworth, calls the "tender fiction" that the voice spoken by prosopopoeia and the speaker are somehow united (p. 77). On Message communication functions as a politics of style, a way of strategically dressing authority in a visible fiction of difference. The uncertainty about the locus of authority is reinforced by these visible differences in the performance: at one point Condoleezza Rice, at another point Donald Rumsfeld, and to the extent President Bush intones the same message, even the body that occupies the singular and institutional office of authority is rendered as a mask for the disembodied voice of authority. Where once prosopopoeia served to create a plurality of voices in an exclusive space, this contemporary prosopopoeia functions to make an exclusive voice appear diverse and multifaceted.

For On Message communication to work as a stylising strategy, individual speakers must at times speak in their own voices in order to plausibly demonstrate how the artifice of the message is imbued with difference. For instance, while Vice President Cheney channels the voice of authority when he answers questions on Iraq and the War on Terror during his September 10, 2006 *Meet the Press* interview, he must go "off script" when asked about events or issues unique to Cheney, such as accidentally shooting his hunting partner. Topics related to the authorised speaker, and yet not to authority itself, imbue On Message discourse with difference and also insulate authority from audiences as the spokesperson appears unaltered in the transition between prefabricated talking points and the contingent topics that arise. Cheney's response to Tim Russert's question about intelligence operative Valerie Plame further illustrates this delicate performance of authority and difference. When Cheney asserts that he has "the authority… to classify and declassify information," Russert asks: "Could you declassify Valerie Plame's status as an operative?" Like the hunting incident, the topic uniquely suits Cheney. Unlike the accidental shooting, the topic implicates the machinations of authority within the Executive Branch. In an effort to carefully negotiate the situation as a function of his own ethos and a figuration of an authority beyond his person, Cheney refuses to speak at all. In the case of Valerie Plame, Cheney's embodied presence threatens to collapse the distance between authority and speaker and create a localisable position of authority.

The alternation between voices illustrated by Cheney indicates that the stylising of authority by way of prosopopoeia has the capacity to threaten the strategic distance between authority and publics. However, On Message communication can also turn such threatening moments into moments of opportunity. On Message communication creates the possibility of momentarily localising authority in an effort to create a mask that might stand accountable. In the case of the Bush administration, this mask was Donald Rumsfeld. Rumsfeld may be accountable to the extent he took part in the performance of authority, but the prosopopoeia of On Message communication forces us to acknowledge that Rumsfeld's November 6, 2006 resignation is not tantamount to holding the voice of authority accountable. In fact, the possibility of accountability develops according to the dictates of disembodied authority, not by way of increased participation on the part of the people. If Cheney's interview illustrates how authority uses the performative difference of prosopopoeia to suggest diversity in the face of inflexible singularity, the Rumsfeld resignation reveals On Message communication to be the political

equivalent of Stuart Ewen's (1999, 270) consumer stylistics: "instead of social change, there is image change. Brief shows of flexibility at the surface mask intransigence to the core."

The Effacement of the Political

We might conclude that On Message communication presents certain democratic problems to the extent it is understood as a masking of authority, but to the extent that prosopopoeia "designates the very process of figuration as giving face to what is devoid of it" (de Man 1996, 24), the strategy may represent the only way in which we can access and know authority. Staying on message serves to mobilise authority in a world where "The dignity of the office and the worthiness of the officiating person no longer coincide in principle. The office retains its unconditional authority, even if the officiating person does not deserve authority. From the other side, as seen by those subject to authority, in principle every 'under-person' is equal as a person to every 'over-person'" (Marcuse 2008, 16-17). The substitutability of spokespersons in On Message communication represents a mode of sanctioning message distribution that implies "an alignment between two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution" (de Man 1984, 70).

If Marcuse and de Man are correct about the substitutive logic of authority, a concern for accountability must focus primarily on the ways in which a people are figured as both possible proxies for authority and wholly incapable of identifying an authority that authorises beyond the space of substitutability. Salecl (2004) suggests that

> *Where in the past, a politician would have hidden the fact that it is not he who writes the speech, today, this very revelation is used as a campaign advertisement. The message that this advertisement puts across is: we show you the truth, the politician is just an ordinary man like you, and he is very honest, since he even shows you how he is not even writing his own speeches, etc.* (Salecl 2004, 41-42).

Salecl's illustration reinforces the two crucial dynamics of the shared logic of On Message communication and disembodied authority: a dislocation of the authorial force of speech from the speaker and a presumed relative equality of potential speakers and audience members that imagines a limitless substitution of masks.

The implicit possibility of representative substitution and simultaneous distancing of authority from the people reveals On Message communication as a mode of deferral to a future contingent moment. Thus, there is a kind of preparatory nature to On Message communication, as evidenced by the following Bush Administration message:

> *President Bush (2006b): For example, Zubaydah disclosed Khalid Sheikh Mohammed – or KSM – was the mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks.*
>
> *Vice President Cheney (2006): The information we've collected from the detainees and people like Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind of 9/11, has probably been some of the most valuable intelligence we've had in the last five years.*

President Bush (2006a): We put al Qaeda on the run, and killed or captured most of those who planned the 9/11 attacks, including the man believed to be the mastermind, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed.

This series of talking points serves to introduce Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (KSM) as a *topos* for explaining the effectiveness of the War on Terror. On its face, the Bush speech on September 6, 2006 seems to abide by a typically contingent speaking situation, since Bush was detailing the administration's policy on torture, detainees, and intelligence-gathering in response to growing criticism about those policies. But once KSM comes up in Cheney's interview and again in Bush's address to the nation, the contingent moments that invited the above utterances were also smaller parts in the machinery of On Message communication concerned with a future moment. Therefore, the KSM talking point may serve to familiarise audiences with the "9/11 mastermind" so that the particular argument resonates with the audience via sheer repetition.

As a result of repetition across particular speaking moments, Bush's comments on September 6, 2006, come from a voice that will also speak five days later, a voice perpetually preparing for a future contingency. In being preparatory, On Message communication is also evacuating, rendering the body of the President mute as his voice is displaced with the disembodied voice of authority that precedes and follows Bush's embodied moments of speaking. On Message communication that responds to a rather empty demand for speech has the effect of emptying out the authority of the immediate speaker, which in turn empties the audience of agency in the contingent moment. Not surprisingly, de Man (1984, 75-76) links prosopopoeia closely to the rhetorical device of apostrophe – addressing a separate audience than the one assumed in the discourse, "an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter's reply." The audience Bush speaks to on September 6, 2006, and Cheney on September 10, 2006, is not merely, or perhaps primarily, the audience on those dates, but the audience that will be listening to Bush (that is to say, seeing Bush and hearing the disembodied voice of authority) on September 11, 2006. de Man's invocation of apostrophe reveals that, to the extent the voice of authority is disembodied, the audience addressed by prosopopoeia must imagine themselves in a similarly disembodied space in order to access and reflexively understand the characteristics of authority. The process by which On Message communication defers to a future contingency is also the process by which the capacity for the people to practically articulate their relationship to authority as a contemporary political arrangement is rendered impossible.

The preparatory maneuver of On Message communication reveals that the short term benefit of the strategy – stylising authority, reinforcing concepts – also displaces the authority of the audience to receive a message and make contemporary judgments about the discourse and the authority that produces it. Prosopopoeia and On Message communication ultimately operate on a principle of effacement, the same principle that informs Marcuse's disembodied authority. The masks are not effaced but they are not perpetually animated by the voice of authority. When the masks fail to present the voice of authority, authority exists as faceless, which results in a similarly effaced public. This double effacement most directly impacts a people's capacity to imagine their relationship to authority, and is best illustrated by one of the more recognisable talking points of the Bush administration's

On Message strategy:

> *Donald Rumsfeld (2006): So, I'm confident that over time they will evaluate and reflect on what's happening in this struggle and come to wise conclusions about it.*
>
> *President Bush (2006c): If we ignore the hopes and aspirations of the Iraqi people, we will have failed when history looks back.*
>
> *Vice President Cheney (2006): But I also think when we look back on this period of time 10 years from now…that 2005 will have been a turning point.*
>
> *Condoleezza Rice (2006): History will have to judge.*

The disembodied voice that authorises each particular speaker in On Message communication addresses an audience not physically and temporally present, thereby displacing, at least in the moment of message expression, questions about the legitimacy and accountability of authority. Such an apostrophe enacts a radical projection of contingency significantly different than Scott's (2006) colonisation of an indeterminate future. In this example, the Bush administration is not attempting to shape how history will judge, but is instead authorising a space of accountability that forces the audience to defer judgment. The concept of apostrophe, the effacement of the audience, and the Bush administration's reference to a future sense of history may seem exceptionally convenient for a project on prosopopoeia. However, this example of On Message communication brings into stark relief how the short term strategy of resisting the immediate contingency of a discursive opportunity via redundant talking points also creates long term challenges for positing a space of public judgment, a space de Man recognised as displaced in the figure of apostrophe.

To engage authority, the audience must assume a position of substitutability with authority, and to the extent that authority is nonlocalisable, so too is the audience authorised to hold political authority accountable. De Man (1984, 78) describes this radical effacement as "the latent threat that inhabits prosopopoeia, namely, that by making death speak, the symmetrical structure of the trope implies, by the same token, that the living are struck dumb, frozen in their own death" (p. 78). Lorna Clymer (1995, 362) argues that de Man overstates the dangers of prosopopoeia and offers an "intersubjective" treatment of the symmetrical substitutability of the figure in which "the living are struck momentarily motionless but seldom dumb" and as such describes prosopopoeia as "a both/and situation rather than the either/or condition" suggested by de Man. Clymer's approach certainly seems more hopeful, encouraging us to assume that the potential substitutability of spokespersons also implies the potential embodiment of authority. Marcuse (2008, 26) suggests that, in regard to political authorities, the "decisions regarding their rightness or wrongness are made exclusively within their own order, among themselves." The democratic promise of substitutability implied by prosopopoeia might make authority accessible to the audience, but only to the extent that the audience is effaced in the substitution, placed in the same disembodied position as authority. Under this process, the people can hold authority accountable, but only in a space distinctly other, effaced, and deferred from the realm of public political imagination.

On Message communication serves as strategic defence against circulation, as a politics of style, and as mode of deferring questions of accountability. In each capacity, On Message communication mediates authority to publics by way of particular speaking bodies. The privileging of embodied discourse permeates our understanding of public discourse, and we must take care to appreciate how shifting modes of discursive production and circulation refigure our rhetorical vocabulary. In the case of prosopopoeia, the contemporary rhetorical environment produces a series of reversals that refigure the original relationship between mask and voice. The locus of authority and the locus of the speaker differentiate themselves within the On Message strategy by way of a distinction between the future-oriented contingency of institutional authority and the immediate contingency of a particular performance. Such a distinction forces us to acknowledge the rift between the authorising force of discourse and the character authorised to perform that discourse.

Michael Hyde (2004, xiii) suggests that "the *ethos* of rhetoric directs one's attention to the 'architectural' function of the art: how, for example, its practice grants such *living room* to our lives that we might feel more *at home* with others and our surroundings." To extend Hyde's architectural metaphor, the choices that construct the living room of our political imaginations are often made beyond the singular speaker and moment. Instead, the apparent ethoi attached to the embodied moments become the stylistic flourishes that decorate the space in which we imagine ourselves in relation to authority. That is to say, a people's relationship to authority is informed by both institutional protocols and the discursive interactions between bodies; changes in either component have the capacity to alter our understanding of the other.

The difference suggested by the various moments of authorial embodiment offered in On Message communication are differences in style, not content, demonstrating an authority that appears present and diverse before the people when it substantively remains inflexible and unapproachable. This tension between appearance and reality represents a shift in strategies for managing democratic dissent. Where Ivie (2004b, 20) discusses the ways political authority renders democracy and dissent in opposition, On Message communication allows dissent to operate in an apparent engagement with an authority it cannot locate. Under Ivie's account of contemporary dissent, weak democracies tolerate dissenting discourse until it become necessary to overtly curtail dissenting ideas (p. 25). Via On Message strategies, dissent no longer requires censoring or containment, since the authorised discourses prevent dissent from finding its target.

As On Message communication constructs a political order replete with a copia of masks, the ability to remove the mask and know the face of authority becomes impossible. The relationship between disembodied authority and embodied ethos implies an ethos that functions as affective figure more than internal proof, a stylistic device more than a mode of ethical demonstration, and limits a public's capacity to produce ethical judgments about speakers and authority. As such, On Message discourse produces a communication environment that appears deliberative and accessible, but mobilises the identities of authority in an effort to evade the challenges of dissenting publics. In other words, the mechanisms by which authority mobilises itself in public spheres shape the capacities of dissenting publics to critique authority. Dissent can exist, be expressed, and critique the appearance of

authority, but remains constrained in its capacities to locate its challenges before localised, identifiable, and actual authority.

While On Message communication operates by way of a doubling of contingency, the future contingency of disembodied authority can only be invoked in the presence of a relatively weak contemporary contingency. Thus, a consideration of democratic dissent must consider both Ivie's sense of weak democracy (2004b, 25) and a notion of weak contingencies. On Message communication succeeds to the extent that media outlets create a somewhat empty – and predictable – demand for discourse that underfunds the contemporary audience's capacity to make judgments. I do not mean to suggest that there is some kind of media complicity at play in the On Message strategy (not that there couldn't be). Instead, I believe that accounts of public discourse must acknowledge how changes in communication production, reproduction, and circulation alter the dynamics of contingency that fund the conditions of possibility for public judgment by articulating the relationship between authority and embodied character in particular ways.

In his inaugural address, President Barak Obama (2009b) declared "a new era of responsibility – a recognition on the part of every American that we have duties to ourselves, or nation and the world." Obama's call for responsibility and his first presidential action indicate a possible discursive space for the idea of responsibility, understood here as more than duties and obligation but also as a criterion for accountability. The failed nomination of Tom Daschle for secretary of health and human services illustrates one moment when the distance between authority and embodied speaker collapsed. "I've got to own up to my mistake" Obama (2009c) asserted. "Ultimately, it's important for this administration to send a message that there aren't two sets of rules … one for prominent people and one for ordinary folks who have to pay their taxes." In refusing two sets of rules, Obama is also re-mapping (though not necessarily refusing) the disembodied space of accountability mapped out in this essay. Obama localises the space of authority squarely, in this instance, within his office and person. This localisation meets Ivie's imperative for a politics that engages in and manages antagonisms rather than eliminate them by force or suppression (Ivie 2004b, 21). However, Ivie predicates managing antagonism on "a fluid condition of consubstantial rivalry." Unfortunately, politically authorised discourse constructs various channels and obstacles of fluid consubstantiality, and thereby controls the very ways in which publics understand the possibilities of such consubstantiality.

Paying attention to the particularity of embodied speech comes with the burden of presuming the whole of rhetorical practice is contained within a network of identifiable and substitutable individuals. In many ways, democracies depend upon the fiction of substitutability as a consubstantial mode of deliberation. Democratic authority and publics must struggle with the paradox of consubstantiality: on the one hand, all individuals can be substituted in the office of authority and, on the other hand, authority constructs the discursive mechanisms by which we encounter and imagine authority in its substitutability. Obama may craft a localised space of accountability, but such a space is only one possible iteration of political authority.

Any effort to construct a discourse of dissent must come, given its responsive and deliberative nature, following a rhetorical construction of authority. Such a construc-

tion makes use of the flexible categories of political power, discursive bodies, and ever-changing modes of rhetorical production and circulation. The challenge, for democratic authority and dissent, alike, rests in identifying how rhetorical strategies privilege particular modes of discursive behaviour that can equally be used for and against the best interests of strong democracies by constructing the very ways we come to identify political authority, the place of dissenting discourse, and the grounds upon which we can understand those entities as accountable. Publics may claim a pound of flesh in retaliation for flawed discourse, but they will also fail to address the more significant dilemma of being related to authority in ways that shape their own political possibilities.

Notes:

1. This project articulates voice, with origins in the spokesperson but not necessarily the author, as a resource for rhetorical differentiation that can be strategically mobilised precisely because of an audience's tendency to conflate voice, body and subject. For alternate treatments of sonic accounts of rhetoric see Gunn 2007; Gunn and Hall 2008.

2. Such calls for accountability, to the extent they mark a legitimation crisis for authority, can either be temporarily resisted by insisting upon a distinction between authority and the people (which is, of course, not sustainable in democratic arrangements) or by allowing the people to participate in processes that resolve the crisis (Habermas 1975). In the case of On Message strategy, holding one mask up before the people as accountable splits the difference, in that it allows people to hold something accountable, but that something is determined by the institutional authority.

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