Another Materialist Rhetoric

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This paper argues for a new materialism. Rhetorical studies can achieve a new materialism by emphasizing how rhetoric traverses a governing apparatus as a technology of deliberation. As such, rhetoric makes possible the ability to judge and plan reality in order to police a population. To achieve this new materialism, I argue that rhetorical studies will need to abandon a logic of representation for a logic of articulation to better account for how rhetorical practices distribute different elements into a functioning network of power.

The most unlikely suspects are undermining the theoretical effort to create a materialist rhetoric. The project to center power under the sign of a critical rhetoric (McKerrow, 1989) elides rhetoric’s materiality by linking a methodological stance that privileges the “politics of representation” to a political stance that investigates power through a bipolar model of domination and resistance. Not only does McGee’s (1990) fragmentation thesis fail to overcome this problem, it also threatens to reduce the effectiveness of the rhetorical fragment to a simple reflection of a fragmented society. In response to both critical rhetoric and the fragmentation thesis, Cloud (1994) attempts to resuscitate a marxist ideological critique but her move threatens to de-materialize rhetorical practices by restricting our understanding of materiality to the intentions and motives of an “always already” ruling class. While the intellectual engagement between rhetoric and materialism is far from exhausted (Aune, 1994), an essentialist reading of the ruling class limits the complex possibilities of a materialist rhetoric. This essay argues that rhetorical studies is in need of another materialism.

The emergence of a rhetorical perspective on the mass media contributes to the urgency to generate another materialism. McGee’s fragmentation thesis privileges mass mediated forms of public address, thus collapsing the text/context distinction. In so doing, the fragmentation thesis de-materializes a series of institutions which rely on rhetoric in order to make judgments about how to govern a particular population. To re-specify a materialist rhetoric will require less emphasis on its mediated forms and more emphasis on how rhetoric functions in a series of institutional settings as a technology of deliberation.

To achieve a different materialism, this paper argues that rhetorical studies investigate the organizational and his-

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torical dynamics of a governing apparatus. A governing apparatus exists as a complex field of practical reasoning that invents, circulates, and regulates public problems. Following Foucault’s (1991) desire to study the art of government, a governing apparatus polices a population, space, and/or object by articulating an ensemble of human technologies into a functioning network of power to improve public welfare. From this perspective, rhetorical practices function as a technology of deliberation by distributing discourses, institutions, and populations onto a field of action. In so doing, rhetoric allows for a governing apparatus to make judgments about what it should govern, how it should govern, as well as offering mechanisms for evaluating the success or failure of governing.

As an alternative conceptualization for a materialist rhetoric I am suggesting that critics focus on how rhetorical practices create the conditions of possibility for a governing apparatus to judge and program reality. To focus on rhetoric as a technology of deliberation requires that a materialist project move away from a “hermeneutics of suspicion” (Ricoeur, 1970). A hermeneutics of suspicion limits the function of rhetorical practices to how they hide, mask, displace, construct, and/or express a more primordial reality. More often than not, this primordial reality is understood as a form of domination and the critical goal of a materialist rhetoric becomes one of unmasking this form of domination. As an alternative to this methodological straight jacket, articulation theory offers a way to produce a cartography of deliberative rhetoric without reducing its effectiveness to the politics of representation. Thus a geographically informed research protocol committed to mapping the temporal and spatial coordinates of the different elements which traverse and structure the deliberative logics of a governing apparatus is offered here.

To flesh out the theoretical and methodological implications of another materialism, I want to perform a critical genealogy of the attempt of speech communication to produce a materialist rhetoric. This move is not meant to displace other disciplinary traditions so much as it is meant to focus on how rhetorical studies in speech communication borrows from those other traditions in order to produce its own unique contribution. 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 and ending with Cloud’s (1994) materialist critique of critical rhetoric. In between, I will focus on how Charland’s (1987) constitutive rhetoric, McKerrow’s (1989) call for a critical rhetoric, and McGee’s (1990) fragmentation thesis offers problems and possibilities for a new materialism.

The Opening Gambit

Michael Calvin McGee (1982) first explores the possibility of a materialist rhetoric in a collection of essays in honor of Douglas Ehninger. He immediately aligns a materialist rhetoric with the marxist maxim that practice precedes consciousness. His gesture towards Marx authorizes an inductive research design that builds rhetorical theory based on the description and explanation “of persuasion as a daily social phenomena” (p 25). In one of McGee’s more important conceptual moves, he defines the particular practice of rhetoric as a process as opposed
to an artistic product and offers a molecular model of speaker, speech, audience, occasion, and change as a schematic for representing this relationship. For McGee a process-oriented materialist rhetoric is necessary to free rhetorical studies from the idealist tendencies in both the history of public address and the philosophy of rhetoric. A materialist rhetoric would attend itself to how "real speeches which are demonstrably useful to an end or are failures. Such an approach would . . . aim . . . at the description, explanation, perhaps, even prediction, of the formulation of consciousness" (McGee, 1982, p. 25). McGee's essay replaces social control for persuasion as the primary function of the rhetorical process but leaves unexamined how a persuasion centered theory of rhetoric relies on a peculiar model of rhetorical efficacy.

The dominant model of rhetorical efficacy structuring a persuasion-centered theory of rhetoric is the logic of influence. Biesecker (1989) explicates the limitations of a "logic of influence" in her appropriation of Derrida's concept of difference for rethinking the rhetorical situation. She suggests that a logic of influence "defines the text as an object that mediates between subjects (speaker and audience) whose identity is constituted in a terrain different from and external to the particular rhetorical situation" (1989, p. 110). The problem with this "logic of influence" is that it conceptualizes the speaker and audience as stable subjects whose relationship is mediated by language. The problem with theorizing speech as mediation is that it pushes rhetorical theorists in the direction of defending an essentialist theory of the subject. An essentialist view of the subject figures the subject as possessing a substance outside of history, a substance that is always already present, no matter the contingent rhythms of political, cultural and economic history. Rhetoric, then, can only mediate the relationship between two essential substances whose effect is either cooperation or coercion cooperation if the two substances are working toward a similar goal, and coercion if the two are working at cross purposes.

While McGee wants to maintain the unique material force of speech, he positions it as a form of mediation between speaker and audience. McGee writes: "The terms [speaker, speech, audience, change, occasion] themselves have meaning only in relation to one another--speaker puts one human being in a role vis-a-vis other human beings cast as audience in a social drama mediated by speech" (1982, p. 30). McGee's implicature of dramaticism suggests a more constitutive model of effectivity, but this model never becomes a clear alternative. McGee posits three different levels of abstraction for experiencing rhetoric. The microrhetorical is the most concrete representation of his model as an attempt of one person to influence the actions of another person by the use of symbolic claims. As we move up McGee's levels of abstraction, from the microrhetorical to the sociorhetorical and the macrorhetorical, McGee's "social materialism" begins to take shape as the rhetorical process becomes implicated in an act of social conditioning likely to promote asymmetrical relations of power favorable to the speaker. To be sure, the macrorhetorical is the most historical of the levels, attenuating an essentialist understanding of speaker and audience. However, the possibility that this level might offer a more constitutive model of rhetorical
effectivity is hijacked by McGee’s turn toward social control.

An unsteady alliance between an understanding of rhetoric as persuasion and a critical desire to account for how the rhetorical process implicates relationships of power generates a materialist rhetoric that privileges a bipolar model of power and a logic of representation. McGee begins to figure rhetoric as a coercive agency always already implicated in the circulation of power:

Rhetoric would appear to be the most common context of claim and control because it is the most comfortable context: the claims and controls are symbolic, the representation and consequent sublimation of painful physical claims and controls. . . . That which is preferable in rhetoric as opposed to war is precisely the symbolic sublimation of pain, not the lack or absence of coercion in the act of controlling behavior/belief (1982, p. 40).

For McGee, the stakes of a materialist rhetoric are the processes in which rhetorical practices (speech) make possible the sublimation of social control through symbolic representation. In the hands of those with economic, political and/or military power, rhetoric functions as a “symbolic placebo replacing bayonets and the company store as a matter of pragmatic efficiency” (p. 48). To his credit, McGee resists the dialectical opposition between freedom and coercion (p. 80). However, the mediating role of speech is now understood as a symbolic representation that makes “sweet” the forms of social control operating to support asymmetrical relationships of domination.

McGee’s materialist rhetoric attempts to place the critic on the side of the oppressed by activating a critical methodology to investigate the symbolic representations (placebos) used by the powerful to maintain a system of social control. However, this move contributes to his reliance on a logic of influence by emphasizing how the speaker is always already in a position of power in relation to the audience. By recoding symbolic persuasion as coercion, McGee has made possible a materialist rhetoric that describes and evaluates how the rhetorical process hides, distorts, and/or sublimates the coercive relationship between speaker and audience based on a zero-sum bipolar model of power. In McGee’s hands, the rhetorical process is one in which a speaker attempts to wield power over an audience through the use of symbolic placebos. This mediating role for speech replicates an essentialist theory of power as existing outside of its representations. A materialist rhetoric is now authorized to abandon the molecular relationship between speaker, speech, audience, change and purpose, and instead, to focus on how the powerful use rhetoric to maintain their privilege in a omnipresent system of social control. In this way, McGee sets in motion a materialist rhetoric wedded to a logic of representation. For a materialist rhetoric, the process of social control becomes the primordial essence “sublimated” by the symbolic mediation of speech and the job of the critic is to peel back this form of representation to expose the reality of social control.

The Constitutive Effect

McGee’s original formulation for a materialist rhetoric is unable to break from a model of effectivity based on a logic of influence. In so doing, speech is understood as a symbolic representation of a system of social control holding together a relationship of power favoring a speaker in relation to an audience. While McGee flirts with a
Nietzschean-inspired will to power, his conceptualization of the speaker/audience relationship fits a more bipolar form of power, in which the speaker exists to subjugate an audience by influencing how the audience might think/act. McGee's article positions a materialist rhetoric as a critical perspective concerned with how the representational logics of symbolic action circulate as a form of social control. Five years after McGee's first attempt to outline a materialist rhetoric, Maurice Charland (1987) offered an escape route from the logic of influence.

Charland's alternative to the logic of influence is a constitutive model of rhetorical effectiveness. To explicate this model, Charland reanimates Burke's (1969) attempt to displace persuasion in favor of identification as the primary function of rhetorical practices. In so doing, Charland is able to bring forward McGee's (1975) earlier work on the rhetorical dimension of the "people" as an alternative way to conceptualize the logics of representation. For a constitutive model, "speech" does not "sublimate" or hide relations of social control; it is a form of social control made possible by how language "positions" a subject. Thus the representational logics of speech are conceptualized less as a curtain to be pulled back to reveal a more primordial reality, and more as a form of reality that "represents" a subject in both political and aesthetic senses. In a political sense, speech speaks for a particular subject, while aesthetically, it speaks into existence a figure of a subject (Spivak, 1988). Charland turns to structural semiotics and narrative theory to help explain how the subject exists as a rhetorical effect so as to re-conceptualize the speaker/audience relationship beyond the logic of influence.

Charland grounds his theoretical moves in a reading of the "white paper" written by the Parti Québécois in 1979 favoring a politically sovereign Quebec economically associated with Canada. In his essay, he demonstrates how the rhetorical constitution of the People Québécois takes place through a "rhetoric of interpellation" made possible by the ideological effects generated by the narrative of the white paper. According to Charland, a constitutive rhetoric paradoxically names the subject at the same time as it claims the subject exists outside of the act of naming (p. 216). The Québécois exist as a subject made possible by the narrative logics of representation which position this subject in favor Quebec sovereignty. Charland identifies three ideological effects: the creation of a collective subject (the Québécois); the positioning of a transhistorical subject, that is, a subject with a past, present and future; and the illusion of freedom—the assumption that the subject is the origin of its action even though the narrative has already set out the type of action circumscribing the subject. Without the interpellation of the Québécois as a collective subject with a particular history and telos embedded in the act of political separation from Canada, the persuasive appeals in favor of Quebec sovereignty would be neither intelligible nor reasonable. Thus, one must be constituted as a subject before one can be persuaded to act in one way or another.

The first consequence of Charland's intervention is to re-specify McGee's (1982) molecular model as a constitutive effect of language. Charland writes, "Rhetorical theory must see through the 'givenness' of what appears to be
the delimatable rhetorical situation, where the ontological status of speaker, speech, audience, topic and occasion offer themselves as unproblematic. It must recognize that ultimately, the position one embodies as a subject is a rhetorical effect" (p. 148). The rhetorical situation is no longer controlled by persuasion's logic of influence, but instead the very categories of analysis associated with the rhetorical situation are constitutive effects of a "rhetoric of interpellation." Interestingly, this emphasis on a constitutive model of rhetorical effectivity, reinforces the tendency to generate a materialist rhetoric by focusing on how "speech acts" represent a subject. Due to his reliance on Althusser's theory of interpellation, Charland contributes to the possibility of coding constitutive rhetoric as a sovereign power. As Butler comments:

Althusser's scheme restricts the notion of interpellation to the action of a voice, attributing a creative power to the voice that recalls and reconsolidates the figure of the divine voice in its ability to bring about what it names. Interpellation must be dissociated from the figure of the voice in order to become the instrument and mechanism of discourse whose efficacy is irreducible to the moment of enunciation (1996, p. 32).

In other words, constitutive rhetoric offers itself as a speaking subject existing outside of history. The corrective to this problem is to insist on the materiality of constitutive rhetoric in and through its reiteration and institutionalization.

The strength of Charland's essay is that he frees a materialist rhetoric from the essentialism associated with a logic of influence. In so doing, his project authorizes a series of studies on the "politics of representation," that is, how rhetorical acts position subjects in both constraining and enabling ways (Greene, 1993; Ono and Sloop, 1995). A constitutive model is a particularly useful framework for exploring how the political representation of a subject corresponds with a particular aesthetic figuration of the subject. Yet once we recognize the subject as a rhetorical effect, the flirtation with the constitutive logics of representation creates the possibility of a materialist rhetoric limited to the "rhetorical politics of subjectivity" (Bennett, 1992). In other words, a constitutive materialism sets up the possibility that the only thing that matters for a materialist rhetoric is the conflicts and contradictions associated with the position of the subject in language. At this point, we should return to how Althusser contributes to a materialist rhetoric.

For Althusser (1971), "ideology is a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (p. 162). The first point to be emphasized is that it is not reality that is represented by ideology but the imaginary relationship to reality. Thus, for Althusser the imaginary relationship to the real is not to be confused with a distortion of reality, nor false consciousness. Rather it describes how a subject lives a life in relation to the conditions of existence. An ideology produces a subject as if the subject is the origin of the conditions of his or her existence. It is the sense of the "as if" which gets to the heart of the imaginary. Subjectivity is the result of an interpellation that positions the subject "as if" it was outside of this imaginary relationship. In Althusser's theory of ideology, ideology has a material existence. Thus, a turn to Althusser allows rhetoric to think materiality in different modalities: "the
material existence of an ideology in an apparatus and its practices does not have the same modality as the material existence of a paving-stone or a rifle. But... I shall say that matter is discussed in many senses, or rather, that it exists in different modalities” (1971, p. 166). This is absolutely crucial for a materialist rhetoric, for while Althusser authorizes an emphasis on the politics of representation, these representations exist in a material form and not as ideas that represent a more primordial (material) reality. Althusser allows a materialist rhetoric to redeem McGee's (1982) original desire to conceptualize “discourse, even language itself... as material rather than merely representational of mental and empirical phenomena” (p. 25).

An underappreciated effect of Charland's turn to Althusser (1971) is how ideology is materialized in what Althusser calls the ideological state apparatuses (ISA). For Althusser, the process of interpellation takes place in and through the ideological state apparatuses. Althusser draws a distinction between repressive state apparatuses (primarily the courts, police, and army) and ideological state apparatuses (the family, labor unions, the media, churches, schools, etc.). For present purposes, the distinction between an RSA and ISA is less important than recognizing the materiality of these institutions in the role of governing.

A governing apparatus activates a network of institutions as particular agents in order to attach a population to a policy. A recognition of the materiality of governing institutions offers a resistance to a constitutive model of rhetorical effectivity only concerned with the “rhetorical politics of subjectivity.” Appadurai (1993) writes: “There is a disturbing tendency in the Western Academy today to divorce the study of discourse forms from the study of other institutional forms, and the study of literary discourses from the mundane discourses of bureaucracies, armies, private corporations, and non-state social organizations” (p. 412). When a materialist rhetoric recognizes the interaction between rhetorical forms and institutional forms it resists being limited to a rhetorical politics of subjectivity. I would support this claim by suggesting that the idea of a governing institution allows the critic to map the effectivity of rhetorical practices in terms of their contribution to the act of government. That is, a materialist rhetoric marks how governing institutions represent, mobilize and regulate a population in order to judge their way of life. In this light, rhetoric becomes a technique of government no longer attenuating its materiality to the politics of representation.

Tony Bennett (1992) writes:

The programmatic, institutional, and governmental conditions in which cultural practices are inscribed—in short, the network of relations that fall under a properly theoretical understanding of policy—have a substantive priority over the semiotic properties of such practices. For it is the “overdetermination” of such properties by these conditions that establishes, in any particular set of circumstances, the regions of person or citizen formation to which specific types of cultural practice are connected and the manner in which, as developed technologies, they function to achieve specific kinds of effects (p. 28).

The argument in the next section is that the emergence of a critical rhetoric offers the possibility of rebuilding a materialist rhetoric through a Foucauldian understanding of practical reasoning.
Critical Rhetoric

One of the more curious things about reading Charland's essay is his lack of judgment about whether or not Québec sovereignty is a good thing. Narratives produce ideological effects whether those narratives are written by the Québécois or the federal government in Canada. These ideological effects do not exist as forms of mystification; they are the interests of a speaker who is always already constituted as a positioned subject in a particular rhetorical economy. Thus, Charland is able to break out of a bipolar model of power dependent on a representational logic of influence. Unfortunately, Raymie McKerrow's (1989) attempt to center the study of power as the object of analysis for a critical rhetoric reinscribes a politics of representation attached to a bipolar model of power.

In his original formulation, McKerrow (1989) offers an impressive reading of nearly ninety references as the philosophical foundation for the theory and praxis of a critical rhetoric. He offers critical rhetoric as a species of critical social theory performed by a rhetorical critic. The essay is split between its theoretical debts and practical principles. The theoretical debts are divided between a critique of domination and a critique of freedom. A critique of domination concerns itself with how discourse contributes to the interests of a ruling class while a critique of freedom advances itself as a permanent criticism turned against the very act of critique. In this way, a critical rhetoric remains open-ended and, hopefully, free from any particularly orthodoxy. The second part of the essay sets out a series of eight principles for doing a critical rhetoric. While the referential scope of McKerrow's essay functions as a bridge to a vast list of critical and cultural theorists, it risks painting over a series of important disputes and controversies between these thinkers. I want to focus on how the emphasis on power keeps a materialist rhetoric inside a logic of representation.

McKerrow sets out the project of critical rhetoric in order to track power. He writes, "[I]n practice, a critical rhetoric seeks to unmask or demystify the discourse of power. The aim is to understand the integration of power/knowledge in society—what possibilities for change the integration invites or inhibits and what intervention strategies might be considered appropriate to effect social change" (1989, p. 91). While this desire to "understand power/knowledge" is obviously informed by Foucault, the desire to "unmask or demystify the discourse of power" involves a definitional confusion concerning the movement of power. The essay's structure pivots on two critical acts: a critique of domination and a critique of freedom. This structure fails to redeem McKerrow's Foucauldian gambit. According to Ono and Sloop (1992): "By separating the terms 'freedom' and 'domination,' McKerrow suggests an essential difference between the two terms—that each maintains a separate space, is used at different times and for different purposes, that freedom for one person is domination for another" (p. 49). Ono and Sloop are attempting to hold McKerrow to his Foucauldian gambit which would require abandoning a bipolar model of power for one that thinks power not as repression but as production. For Foucault, power is not equivalent to domination, but a force which circulates transforming subjects, institutions and knowledges making them
useful. One possible effect of a particular power/knowledge regime is the creation of asymmetrical relationships of domination. A Foucauldian focus points to an emphasis on the production of the power/knowledge regime and a careful mapping of its effectiveness without presupposing that power is bad or that the only effect of power is domination. To be sure, different forms of power exist and Foucault (1991) argues that juridical, disciplinary, and governmental forms of power exist as a triangle attached to the body politic. However, Foucault (1983) also suggests that power only works to the extent agents are made free to perform a series of operations on their own body and conduct. Thus, if a critical rhetoric is going to front Foucault’s understanding of power, it will be necessary to abandon the bipolar theory of power set up by McKerrow’s founding essay.

If a critical rhetoric is unable to redeem the Foucauldian gambit, it is only left with a polysemic reading strategy which replicates a bipolar model of power by searching for dominant and subordinate readings of a text. McKerrow writes: “A polysemic critique is one which uncovers a subordinate or secondary reading which contains the seeds of subversion or rejection of authority, at the same time that the primary reading appears to confirm the power of the dominant cultural norms.” (1989, p. 108). The emphasis on a polysemic reading strategy only serves to attach a critical rhetoric more firmly to a hermeneutics of suspicion that explicates how the politics of representation mystify relationships of power. This methodological stance that attaches a politics of representation to a bipolar model of power is reinforced by McKerrow’s description of practical reasoning.

In describing the relationship between rhetoric and power, McKerrow suggests that the integration of power/knowledge materializes as a form of *phronesis* (practical reasoning). In his words, phronesis is a “‘transformative activity’ in which the social relations in which people participate are perceived as ‘real’ to them, even though they exist only as fictions in a rhetorically constituted universe of discourse” (1989, p. 103). I agree that for a materialist rhetoric a key site for investigating the materialization of power demands an emphasis on practical reasoning. However, McKerrow’s emphasis on how individuals act in and through a set of rhetorical fictions risks reducing the transformative activity of practical reasoning to those rhetorical fictions. For McKerrow, the power of practical reasoning exists only in so far as it is represented by rhetorical practices. From this perspective, the politics of representation defines the relationship between power and rhetoric.

An emphasis on the politics of representation structures the aim of a critical rhetoric to “unmask the discourse of power.” The role of rhetorical fictions in the construction of practical reasoning leads McKerrow to investigate the relationship between the discursive and the non-discursive. At first he seems to claim that the “real” is the constituted effect of both discursive and non-discursive practices (1989, p. 103). However, in the very next sentence he suggests that a critical rhetoric should follow Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and reject the distinction between the discursive and the non-discursive. He justifies his move by claiming that “the discussion of such non-discursive practices takes place in discursive prac-
tices." (1989, p. 103). While this claim would seem to be a tautology what McKerrow is trying to explicate is the object focus of a critical rhetoric. Critical rhetoric should focus on how rhetorical fictions represent the non-discursive. Yet, McKerrow’s move through the relationship between the discursive and the non-discursive only reinforces the tendency to reduce the transformative power of practical reasoning to their representations as rhetorical fictions. The emphasis of a critical rhetoric on a politics of representation displaces the different material modalities traversing practical reasoning. Ultimately, then, a critical rhetoric forces a materialist rhetoric to adopt a methodological stance that privileges the study of the representational politics of practical reasoning to a political logic limited to the bipolar model of the dominant/subordinate. A materialist rhetoric under the sign of a critical rhetoric is left with two problems: 1) critical rhetoric begs the question as to how particular discourses become discourses of power/knowledge and 2) critical rhetoric reduces the study of power to the representational politics of practical reasoning. Both questions will demand an investigation into the rhetorical dynamics associated with government.

Critical rhetoric claims to focus on how practical reasoning circulates as a power/knowledge regime. To deflect the problems associated with how critical rhetoric conceptualizes practical reasoning this paper suggests that it would be useful to think practical reasoning in Foucauldian terms, as human technologies. Nikolas Rose (1990) claims that “Human technologies involve the calculated organization of human forces and capacities, together with other forces—natural, biological, mechanical—and artifacts—machines, weapons—into functioning networks of power” (p. 8). The primary advantage of translating practical reasoning into a human technology is that it allows for different material modalities. Foucault (1988) identifies four different types of practical reasoning:

As a context, we must understand that there are four major types of these “technologies” each a matrix of practical reason: (1) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols or signification; (3) technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject; (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means of the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conducts, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (p. 18).

The importance of this formulation is that rhetorical critics need not focus on how rhetoric represents practical reasoning, but instead can analyze how rhetorical practices exist as a specific human technology. One way to conceptualize a governing apparatus is to suggest that it exists as an ensemble of human technologies dedicated to improving the welfare of a population. While Foucault’s perspective allows us to conceptualize rhetoric as a technology of signs, we should approach these “signs” less as a discourse to be interpreted, than as a technique that makes meaning possible. Rhetorical practices stabilize meaning by distributing populations, discourses and institutions onto the terrain of a governing apparatus so that a series of judgments might be made about the art of government. It
might be worth a quick detour through the transformation in our understanding of invention to explore the differences that matter for understanding the materiality of rhetoric as a technology of deliberation.

In classical rhetorical theory, invention constitutes an important element of the rhetorical canon. Invention is the process of discovering the appropriate things to say for a particular speaking situation. In the aftermath of social constructionism, invention becomes understood as the constitutive effect of rhetorical practices. Thus, rhetorical scholars investigate how rhetoric invents knowledges, situations, and audiences. The transformation of invention marks the emergence of the "constitutive turn" in rhetorical studies. The significance of the constitutive turn is that it contributes to the globalization of rhetorical studies as a meta-hermeneutic procedure for unpacking the meanings embedded in the textualization of the social (Gaonkar, 1993). It is not my intention to ignore the value of the constitutive turn for rhetorical studies since one site to register the materiality of rhetoric is through the ability of rhetorical practices to create problems, situations, knowledges, institutions, publics, and subjects. A constitutive turn also helps to abandon the limitations of a logic of influence for understanding the effectiveness of rhetorical practices. However, I am interested in blocking the rush to a politics of representation which risks dematerializing how rhetorical practices combine with other forms of practical reasoning to form a governing apparatus.

One way we can begin this process is by suggesting that the process of invention points to how rhetoric serves as a mode of publicity. By publicity, I mean to point to how different rhetorical practices, make visible a host of behaviors and populations. In short, invention concerns itself with how "a way of life" becomes an object for social change. Of course, the forms in which this act of publicity takes place can include speeches, documentaries, photographs, movies, news casts, white papers, statistics—the list is nearly infinite. An articulation of a governing apparatus requires that particular behaviors and populations become visible so that a program of action can intervene to improve the happiness, longevity, and material welfare of a population. Thus the "fragments" that do not seem to stand still due to their mediated form, function on the terrain of a governing apparatus to make a whole way of life stand still so that a series of institutions might be able to govern a population.

The ability of rhetoric to generate a "publicity-effect" implicates the materiality of rhetoric in a process of surveillance. Foucault writes: "He [sic] who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation which he simultaneously plays both roles: he [sic] becomes the principle of his own subjection" (1979, pp. 202–203). In this way, rhetoric is not epiphenomenal to a governing apparatus but absolutely crucial to its organization since the ability to make visible a population in order that it might calibrate its own behavior is dependent on how rhetoric contributes to panopticism as a technology of power.

I have claimed two advantages for translating practical reasoning into a human technology. The first advantage is that practical reasoning can exist in different material modalities.
From this point we can define a governing apparatus as a specific articulation of these human technologies in order to improve the welfare of a population. Thus rhetoric emerges as a technology that distributes different elements onto a governing apparatus in order that a series of judgments might be made about the act of government. The second advantage for a materialist rhetoric is that the distributive role of rhetoric better explains how rhetoric becomes a discourse of power. For example, rhetoric becomes a discourse of power when it’s “publicity effect” makes a population visible inscribing that population onto a field of practical reasoning. The consequence of such a move is to demand that rhetorical critics pursue an analytical search for the specific ways in which the techniques of rhetoric and the techniques of power intersect to regulate a population. What rhetoric needs is a critical procedure for describing how a set of human technologies come together to form a governing apparatus. McGee’s (1990) recent defense of a fragmentation thesis may offer a possibility.

**Fragmentation**

As the 1980s ended and the 1990s began, speech communication’s attempt to create a materialist rhetoric was being re-specified by the explosion of critical and cultural theories swamping the human sciences. The disciplinary significance of McKerrow’s (1989) essay was that it offered “critical rhetoric” as a nodal point for linking the rhetorical tradition of speech communication to the human sciences through the shared vocabulary of critical and cultural theory. It is not my point that McKerrow was the first to explore the links between rhetorical studies and the broader terrain of critical and cultural theory; instead, I am suggesting that the timing of the essay was particularly important because it was able to capitalize on the “theory revolution” of the 1980s. In particular, “critical rhetoric” became a way for “postmodernism”—a particular reading of a specific vector of critical and cultural theory—to take center stage in the construction of a materialist rhetoric.

McGee’s (1990) recent defense of a fragmentation thesis immediately recognizes the relationship between “critical rhetoric” and what he calls (through clenched teeth) the postmodern condition. In an essay written for a *Western Journal of Speech Communication* special issue on rhetorical criticism, McGee links critical rhetoric with “postmodernism” by substituting “fragments” for “texts” as the object of critical attention. The first section of his essay points to how “rhetorical criticism” emerged as an obsession of rhetorical studies creating a disciplinary subfield concerned with investigating the methods for approaching rhetorical phenomena. McGee declares this emphasis on criticism guilty of either pushing rhetorical criticism into the realm of philosophy or turning rhetorical criticism into a species of literary theory. McGee argues that both effects are problematic because they are unable to account for rhetoric, thus, dissolving its specificity into the telos of philosophy or literary interpretation. As a corrective to this situation, he suggests that rhetorical studies abandon Black’s (1978) call to focus on how critics do criticism so as to pay closer attention to how rhetoricians do rhetoric. Yet, this change in focus does not push rhetorical studies out into the world searching for great orators. Instead, it transforms the academic practice of rhetorical criti-
icism into an act of rhetoric. In so doing, critical rhetoric becomes a practice dedicated to producing texts out of the fragments of contemporary public discourse.

In the next section of his essay, McGee offers three structural relationships for thinking through the significance of the fragment. The first is the relationship between a “finished discourse and its sources” (p. 280). McGee reminds his readers that the traditional notion of invention requires a respect for how a speaker accumulates evidentiary support for his/her claim by “reducing and condensing” the argumentative positions of other speakers. According to McGee, the fragment exists in a similar structural relationship, that is, as a part standing in for the whole. The second structural relationship concerns that between a finished discourse and culture. For McGee, the rhetorical tradition’s emphasis on doxa points to the importance of culture as a site for understanding the meaning of a rhetorical event. In this way, the need of the audience to link the text to the doxastic tradition points to how “culture is implicated in every instance of discourse” (p. 281). For McGee, this means that the “text” is never finished without the help of the audience; thus, the supposed finished text is really a fragment made meaningful by the audiences attachment of that fragment to the larger whole of public culture. Finally, the third structural relationship is that between a finished discourse and its influence. For McGee, this means that all discourse is interconnected. Here he defines this interconnectedness not as an “inter-textual network” but as a process of response and counter-response. A professional critic lives a rhetorical life because s/he must not only create a text out of the fragmented residue of public culture, s/he also becomes an advocate or adversary of those texts as they impact public culture. The pay-off of these three structural relationships is that the text/context distinction is collapsed into the idea of the fragment.

From this vantage, McGee is able to defend his thesis that “The fragmentation of our American culture has resulted in a role reversal, making interpretation the primary task of speakers and writers and text construction the primary task of audiences, reader, and critics” (p. 274). For McGee, the structural relationship between text and context no longer allows for a close reading of a “text” because the text is no longer self-evident. The text has become one fragment among many making up public culture. Since the text is no longer a self-evident object of study, it is up to the critic to produce a “text” out of the fragments of public culture so as to make sense of the everydayness of practical discourse. McGee argues that “we stand in the middle . . . of a seventy-year movement which has fractured and fragmented American culture. Contemporary discourse practices reflect this fragmentation” (1990, p. 286). McGee grounds his call to abandon the idea of a text due to how the fragmentation of contemporary society displaces cultural homogeneity for heterogeneity. McGee’s assumption concerning the existence of a homogeneous culture consuming the same texts probably does not withstand the recent historical investigations into the “public sphere” (Calhoun, 1990). Yet, I believe McGee is on the right track when he attempts to push rhetorical studies out of its reliance on its hermeneutic procedures for reading texts.

The fragmentation thesis is, how-
ever, an attempt to maintain a materialist rhetoric. McGee offers a truncated theory of rhetoric’s materiality as the “everydayness of practical discourse.” For McGee, the only way to account for the everydayness of practical discourse is to recognize its fragmented nature. He writes:

The public’s business is now being done more often via direct mail, television spots, documentaries, mass entertainment, and “quotable quotes” on the evening news than through the most traditional media (broadside[s], pamphlets, books and public speeches. . . . Nothing in our new environment is complete enough, finished enough, to analyze—and the fragments that present themselves to us do not stand still long enough to analyze (1990, pp. 286–287).

McGee is arguing that the mediated forms of contemporary public discourse do not exist in the same way as a nineteenth century speech. McGee’s emphasis on the “brute reality of persuasion in everyday life” is displacing how a series of institutions take responsibility for improving the welfare of a population. For the war room, manager’s office, and classroom, rhetorical forms exist to make populations “stand still long enough to analyze” so as to make a series of deliberations. At the political level, McGee is confusing the hegemonic struggle to gain a population’s consent to lead with the less sexy and more mundane rhetorical practices used for making the judgments necessary to govern. It is the latter that points to the direction of another materialism.

Put another way, the 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” (Althusser and Balibar, 1970, p. 310). Since fragmentation (the essence) marks the social, our public discourse (phenomenon) must, according to McGee, “reflect this fragmentation.” In McGee’s hands the fragmentation thesis keeps a materialist rhetoric locked into a logic of representation. Only this time, rhetorical practices metonymically represent culture writ large. Rhetorical practices do not exhibit their own positivity, their own unique place in the structure of everyday life, their materiality does not resist but simply reflects what we already know: that we live in a fragmented culture. By placing all rhetorical practices under the sign of the fragment, McGee is unable to account for the complex articulation of material forces which produce fragmentation as a “structure of feeling” (Williams, 1961; Cox, 1990).

Yet, the fragmentation thesis does offer the possibility of abandoning a “logic of influence” for a “logic of articulation” (Biesecker, 1989; Cox, 1993; Grossberg, 1986, 1992; Greene, 1993; Hall, 1980, 1985, 1986; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985), opening up an escape route for materialist rhetoric from the orbit of representational politics. The fragmentation thesis demands, according to McGee, that critics create an object of study. 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 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.

Not only does a logic of articulation allow for abandoning a politics of representation, it generates the possibility of rematerializing the political, economic, cultural and affective structures of public deliberation as sites of rhetorical effectiveness. In other words, the 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. The point is that a logic of articulation opens the possibility of studying how rhetorical practices traverse a number of different structures for the purpose of making judgments and planning reality. In the case of a governing apparatus we can index the materiality of rhetorical practices as a double articulation: first, rhetorical practices contribute to the articulation of a governing apparatus by pulling together and distributing the elements and technologies required for making judgments about public welfare. Second, we can investigate how a governing apparatus attaches itself to its own historical conjuncture in an attempt to program reality. Unlike the representational logics associated with the fragment an emphasis on the logics of articulation prevents the rush to de-materialize the space between text and context. In this way, the logic of articulation begins the transformation of rhetorical studies from an interpretive project into a geographical project committed to mapping the multidimensional effectivity of reading, writing, and speaking.

The Gulf War

The engagement between rhetoric and the “posts” (Grossberg, 1992) reveals a growing anxiety about the materiality of language (Wood & Cox, 1993) and the bipolar model of power (Condit, 1993; Greene & Hicks, 1993; Sloop & Ono, 1992). As suggested above, the two trajectories are closely aligned often feeding one another through an emphasis on a polysemic reading practice. In opposition to the posts, Cloud (1994) attempts to defend a materialist rhetoric under the sign of a pre-Althusserian marxist ideological critique. Cloud’s primary thesis is that the “materiality of discourse thesis” embraces idealism and relativism. She rejects the possibility of different material modalities as she performs a reading of a number of different theorists to support her claim that “the materiality of discourse thesis is better understood as the discursivity of the material thesis” (1994, p. 153). I agree that critical rhetoric risks attenuating other material modalities, though this has more to do with its relationship to disciplinary logics concerning our understanding of rhetoric as an interpretive project, than its relationship to the “posts.”
Cloud’s essay invites a hermeneutic struggle over the works of Baudrillard, Laclau and Mouffe and/or Foucault. However, this would displace her analysis of the Gulf War. I want to focus on how she uses the Gulf War to defend the superiority of her version of an historical materialist criticism. Her analysis of the Gulf War serves as her trump card in proving an “extra-discursive reality,” but the way Cloud plays her “trump card” is through a logic of influence wrenching a materialist rhetoric back into a bipolar model of power and the politics of representation.

Cloud implicates her project in a logic of influence through her definition of a materialist theory of language. She writes: “a materialist theory of language and ideology suited to a materialist view of history suggests that economic forces and relations of power motivate discourses that justify, obscure, or mystify the workings of powerful interests and structures of power.” (1994, p. 143). From this perspective, Cloud limits the materiality of rhetoric to a mediating role between a “ruling class” and the “masses.” Thus we are back to the problems identified with McGee’s first attempt at constructing a materialist rhetoric: an essentialist theory of both the subject and of power. A materialist rhetoric can only index its materiality in the ways the ruling class uses rhetoric to hide, mask or otherwise obscure their real interests. In opposition to a ruling class rhetoric, Cloud asks critical intellectuals “to seek out counter-ideological information and perspectives whose contradictions with the prevailing constructions of “reality” expose those constructions as mystifications” (1994, p. 157). Cloud’s call to “recover the voices of the oppressed” inverts a bipolar model of power by claiming the need for critical intellectuals to side with the epistemological claims of the always already oppressed.

Her conflation of power with the interests of a transcendental ruling class limits her materialist analysis of the Gulf War. For example, Cloud suggests that the war planners duped the American people into granting their consent to the war by a massive propaganda campaign. She writes:

From the perspective of ideology criticism, it is clear that “yellow ribbon news” served a hegemonic function: to frame the war in terms of family unity and emotional support, to imply that protest is inappropriate in a space of unity and emotional support, and thus to domesticate the home front. We must acknowledge that the persuasiveness of protest was limited severely by the dominant discourse’s hold on the popular imagination and on public opinion, as popular opinion polls showed increasing support for the war (nearly 90 percent) as the prowar propaganda wore on (1994, p. 148).

A new materialism will continue analyzing how a host of structures deny particular classes of people access to the modes of representation. But Cloud’s argument suggests that if only the protest rhetoric circulated as freely as the “propaganda campaign,” then the protesters could expose the “truth” of ruling class interests in the war. This assumption replicates a transparent materialism because it ignores the possibility of a vast assemblage of countervailing practices that made consent to the war possible. Cloud places her faith in the persuasive ability of protest rhetoric to provide the better argument. Yet she fails to analyze how a host of political, economic and military structures intersect creating a border for what defines a “better argument.” For example, Cloud does not analyze how
the political economy of oil, the discourses of international realism, and U.S. security commitments to Israel come together as an assemblage of practices constituting what is "in the true" (Foucault, 1972). The articulation of these discourse practices code Saddam Hussain's military invasion of Kuwait as a direct threat to U.S. national interests. What I am suggesting is that the propaganda machine did not so much "turn" the American people as it was able to occupy a place in the true constituting pro-war rhetoric as persuasive. As long as these discourses placed the war protesters outside the true, their rhetoric circulated as "unpersuasive."

However, the peace movement did activate a series of counter-discourses that also occupied a position in the U.S. attempt to police Saddam Hussain. Cloud's distaste for "yellow ribbon news" fails to account for how concern for the troops intersected the demands of the peace movement to end the war. One might justly argue that the "yellow ribbon news" governed the war by reinforcing the claims of the peace movement that the deaths of U.S. soldiers to protect a corrupt political regime in Kuwait were not in the national interest of the United States. One possible effect of the deployment of the discourses responsible for the welfare of soldiers was to prevent the United States from a more massive ground war to kill or capture Saddam Hussain. My point is that a governing apparatus exists as a stratified field of action where some elements reside in more controlling places, but that does not mean that marginalized discourses have not occupied a position within the logics of a particular program of action contributing to a series of complex effects. In other words, nothing is clear about the effectiveness of particular rhetorical practices.

Cloud is absolutely correct to point out how "yellow ribbon news" contributed to the war effort. However, there is no one-to-one correspondence between the news casts as rhetorical fragments and the ability of the war planners to gain the consent of the American people. The process associated with gaining the consent of the American people to the Gulf War is itself an effect of an articulation of practices (discursive and otherwise). For example, the mediatization of the Gulf War took place on many levels, not simply "yellow ribbon news." As Butler (1992) writes, watching the "smart bombs" constituted a complex identification between those watching and the bomb:

The so-called smart bomb records its target as it moves to destroy it—a bomb with a camera attached in front . . . relays that film back to a command control and that film is refilmed on television, effectively constituting the television screen and its viewer as the extended apparatus of the bomb itself. In this sense, by viewing we are bombing, identified with both bomber and bomb, flying through space, transported from the North American continent to Iraq, and yet securely wedged in the couch in one's own living room. The smart bomb screen is, of course, destroyed in the moment that it enacts its destruction . . . which effects the phantasmatic distinction between the hit and its consequences . . . We are in relation to this site of destruction absolutely proximate, absolutely essential, and absolutely distant, a figure for imperial power which takes the aerial, global view . . . the television screen redoubles the aerial view, securing a fantasy of transcendence, of a disembodied instrument of destruction which is infinitely protected from a reverse strike
through the guarantee of electronic distance (p. 11).

While Butler’s post-structuralist analysis does not deny the “extra-discursive” status of Iraqi deaths, she demonstrates how it might be possible that one might desire the Gulf War through a phantasmatic structure activated by viewing the trajectory of a “smart bomb.” It is not post-structuralist theory that dematerializes Iraqi deaths, but the frame of the smart bomb which “through excluding its targets from view under the rubric of proving the capacity to target precisely, this is a frame that effectively performs the annihilation that it systematically realizes.” (Butler, 1992, p. 12).

My reason for turning to Butler’s analysis of the smart bomb is to demonstrate that the “posts” offer alternative mechanisms for approaching the question of the relationship between discourse, materiality and “reality.” Cloud’s claim that the posts are inevitably idealist and relativist refuses to acknowledge how materiality has been re-thought after Althusser within marxism and by Foucault and Butler alongside and in opposition to marxism. I suspect the peace movement is less threatened by the idealism and relativism of postmodern and poststructuralist theory than it is by the discourse of international realism that places the peace movement outside of “truth” and “reality.” Cloud’s appeal to “realism” and “objectivism” seem to be the same tropes historically used to exclude the peace movement as (dangerously) utopian. A new materialism must abandon any replication of a base-superstructure model of materiality that conceptualizes the materiality of rhetoric as an epiphenomenal effect of the more primordial “structures of power.”

Conclusion

The problem with an attempt to build a rhetorical materialism is that it is unable to break free from the logics of representation. While different forms of rhetorical materialism exist, their differences exist within a similar problematic. In this essay, I have identified that problematic as the logic of representation. The question that haunts rhetorical materialism is how to account for the representational politics of rhetorical practices. To account for the representational politics of rhetorical practices materialist rhetoric is pushed back and forth between a logic of influence and a constitutive model of rhetorical effectivity. In the former, materialists focus on how the interests, often understood as a will to power, of a speaker are hidden, distorted or revealed by that speaker’s rhetorical choices. In the latter, materialists focus on how the text functions to politically and aesthetically figure the process of subjectivity. The former emphasizes rhetoric’s role as a form of persuasion, while the latter emphasizes rhetoric as a form of identification. McGee’s attempt to focus on fragments instead of texts does not escape these different models of rhetorical effectivity as much as it ties both to a metonymic theory of representation that identifies a homology between the forms of rhetorical practices and culture writ large.

To break free from this problematic, I have attempted to offer a materialism based on how rhetoric traverses a governing apparatus. Instead of focusing on how rhetoric represents, we should focus on how rhetoric distributes different elements on a terrain of a governing apparatus. In this way, a rhetorical materialism will be able to focus on rhetoric as a technology of deliberation that allows a series of institutions
to make judgments about the welfare of a population. As an alternative to the logics of representation I have offered a logic of articulation as a way to map the multidimensional effectivity of rhetoric as a technology of deliberation. The advantage of this configuration of a materialist rhetoric is that it replaces a hermeneutics of suspicion with a form of cartography that does not reduce the materiality of rhetorical practices to the interests of a “ruling class” at the same time as it maintains the irreducible difference between rhetoric and other material elements (technologies of power, production and the self) in the creation of a governing apparatus. A materialist rhetoric built on the logics of articulation avoids positioning the historical forces of capitalism, white supremacy and/or patriarchy as the deep structure(s) of a governing apparatus but instead maps how they are transformed, displaced, deployed and/or challenged by a particular governing apparatus. In other words, the “macro-structures of power” exist less as hidden interests to be uncovered than as technologies distributed, activated and programmed by rhetorical practices for the purpose of policing a population.

References


