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Since Karl Wallace’s (1963) declaration that the substance of rhetoric is good reasons, the ethical, political, and epistemological horizon of rhetorical studies in US speech/communication departments has been organized by the investigation into public reasons. While argumentation studies is more plural than public reason and sensitive to the nearly infinite location of argumentation, reason giving remains a thread weaving together a uniquely new international discipline traversing a host of department names, philosophical modes of inquiry, and political commitments. The genealogy of the emergence of argumentation studies remains to be written, a genealogy I believe might fruitfully begin with the inaugural years of argumentation conferences held in Alta, Ontario, and Amsterdam. While I value returning to the past to write a history of the present, today I want to focus on the present in hopes of creating a history of the future. To begin this history of the future, I want to focus on the present, the peculiar event that brings me to Alta this year.

This year marks my fifth appearance at the Alta conference. My first was as a graduate student and this year, I return as a participant and an organizer. Tom Goodnight asked Kathleen Farrell and me to put together a new division for Alta: the critical and cultural perspective on argument division. For me, Tom Goodnight’s gracious invitation to organize a spotlight panel to introduce a critical and cultural perspective allows me the opportunity to write about my two intellectual passions: cultural studies and argumentation studies. And perhaps, it is not surprising to learn that since my education in both of these areas took place in speech-communication departments, these two passions intersect my disciplinary standing as a rhetorical theorist and critic of public discourse. A mediation, I might add, that comes with its own dangers associated with hybridity, displacement, misunderstanding, and disciplinary police actions designed to regulate the flow of intellectual border crossings which make our thinking impure, complicated, dirty, otherwise.

One such danger is, paradoxically, the enormous success of cultural studies. Particularly in the last ten years, cultural studies has attached itself to the US educational apparatus by seemingly pulling together an alliance of intellectuals interested in the study of power and everyday life. One of the problems with this state of affairs is that cultural studies has the potential of being both everywhere and nowhere. Many scholars write under its sign with very different intellectual backgrounds mediated by a host of various academic disciplines. In the United States, whereas early cultural studies found a home in
education departments and in communication departments with an investment in media studies, today it seems to circulate throughout the humanities, giving the impression to some that everyone does cultural studies. As cultural studies proliferates as a sign and as a practice (particularly within a time of exponential increases in forms of research circulating through international publication outlets) the ability to keep track of and define a joint project called cultural studies looks to be an increasingly lost cause. The 1990s began as a boom time for cultural studies, a situation declared by and problematized by Meaghan Morris (1990). It ended with the concern of David Morley (1998) that cultural studies finds itself faced ever more with a backlash as disciplines claim to, according to Cary Nelson (1991), always already have done cultural studies. In so doing, the voices of backlash, forget that, according to Morley, it was often the work of cultural studies that made possible the investigation into the ways power, culture and everyday life interact with one another.

Clearly, to do cultural studies today is different than doing it 10 or 15 years ago. I suspect when I say cultural studies, however, people do have a particular idea about what type of intellectual work I am talking about. For many, cultural studies is the study of how particular cultural forms contribute to the reproduction of hegemony and/or how these same or other cultural forms offer subordinate groups a space for interpretive resistance and pleasure, groups which in turn create modes of resistance to the dominant forms of power. This form of cultural studies is inspired and takes as its theoretical center the works of Antonio Gramsci. While it may be unlikely that cultural studies will ever completely abandon the conceptual insights of Gramsci, these views have been so thoroughly under attack in cultural studies that it may be time for a new defense of cultural populism. Toby Miller and Alec McHouł (1998) provide a recent example of the tenor of critique. Particularly in the area of popular culture, Miller and McHouł highlight three problems with how cultural studies is often done and received: 1) Many of the political effects claimed by the researchers are speculative rather than grounded in the everyday logics of power negotiated by particular subjects 2) There is a tendency to highlight the spectacular over the mundane. 3) This form of cultural studies attempts to allow these spectacular objects to stand in for or represent, wider social tendencies. Miller and McHouł offer an alternative that they call “ethnomethodologically inspired cultural studies” (EMICS) as a way to get to the mundane everyday practices of cultural power. My point here is not that we should all go do EMICS, but that a Gramscian inspired cultural studies does not go unchallenged within cultural studies.

To begin to describe what an argumentation/cultural studies hybrid might look like, a project I call “cultural studies inspired argumentation theory” [CSIAT, pronounced see-sat], let me begin with some open-ended axioms. 1) The object of study has nothing to do with defining our future. For example, to study music video’s as argument types might be a blast and a worthy project, but it does not guarantee that we are doing cultural studies inspired argumentation theory. 2) Our politics do not guarantee that we are doing cultural studies inspired argumentation theory. It is important to study the process of hegemony and counter-hegemony, but we should not confuse that with the whole project. So for example, I think it is reasonable to assert that President George W. Bush’s reasons for getting out of the Chemical and Biological Weapons Treaty represents an attempt to re-assert US hegemony in international relations. In fact,
I think this is obvious, and bad for global security, but I think the rush to make a political judgment might short-circuit analysis. The more difficult questions, questions that move me in the direction of doing CSIAT is: Why can the President of the United States turn his back on the process of generating international agreements and normative consensus? Do the reasons given for this change in policy offer any clues to how international agreements can be simply abrogated? What are the consequences of abandoning the use of international and bilateral treaties? In other words, what is needed, according to Lawrence Grossberg (1992), is a radical contextualism that attempts to reposition particular reason giving events alongside other events to better understand new and old pathways of power. In another setting, I have suggested that one such candidate for a contextual object for a materialist rhetoric is the organization and transformation of a governing apparatus (Greene, 1998; Greene, 1999). 3) The theoretical/methodological trajectory does not determine whether or not we are doing CSIAT. For example, think about what Miller and McHoul, are advocating as an alternative approach to the study of popular culture, that is an ethnomethodologically inspired cultural studies.

One of the consequences of Miller and McHoul's move is to use and modify conversational analysis as a way of studying mundane forms of everyday talk as that talk engages with power. At first glance, conversational analysis and the textual protocols and political commitments of cultural materialism would seem to exist in two different regions of the academy. Yet, Miller and McHoul are suggesting a new hybrid form of research, perhaps making no-one particularly happy. Regardless of the success and failure of Miller and McHoul's book, the object lesson is pretty clear. We should not divide cultural studies from other perspectives on argumentation based on theoretical/methodological trajectories. To say that cultural studies is a perspective on argumentation that pays less attention to norms that govern the public sphere, for example, would have the effect of ignoring the work of James Carey, one of the central figures in the creation of an American Cultural Studies. His initial gambit was to invent and use cultural studies to challenge the positivist forms of media studies dominant in the US by crafting a theoretical tool box that includes Deweyian pragmatism, the public sphere, and a theory of communication based on ritual (Carey, 1989). I think we can all agree that the norms of public argumentation must stay open, self-reflexive and offer themselves up to critical transformation.

Given the diversity of work that circulates under the sign of cultural studies it might be a bit foolhardy to suggest any sort of unified field theory for cultural studies inspired argumentation theory. Yet, some of standard markers of doing cultural studies might offer us some more positive directions for intellectual work: 1) Cultural studies inspired argumentation theory should have a stake in the present. 2) Research should demonstrate a conceptual reflexivity over the category of culture and argument. 3) CSIAT should have an investment in understanding the performance of public argument as always taking place within a striated geography of power, a public culture, for short. 4) CSIAT should have a desire to produce conjunctural, that is, historically specific and contextual, understandings of public argumentation. 5) CSIAT should have an open agenda for the invention of new problematics. With these five markers as a point of departure I would like to offer a joint research project as a temporary point of articulation, a unity in difference, if you will, for forming a cultural
studies inspired argumentation theory. As a starting point for a future research, I advocate that we begin with citizenship in a global context. To do so, will require an appreciation of at least two modes of citizenship: rhetorical/argumentative citizenship and cultural citizenship. It will also require an intersecting concern with argument as practical action and argument as pedagogy.

Let's begin with cultural citizenship and argument as practical action. As Kent Ono (2001) so well demonstrates, one of the primary ways in which we think about citizenship is through its formal and informal markers. Formal markers concern abstract rights that all citizens are supposed to share that can function as the grounds and stakes of public argument. The informal markers, however, are often the concerns of researchers working on the concept of cultural citizenship. These informal markers are just that, linguistic and embodied mechanisms that mark out particular folks based on their ethnicity, race, gender, and sexual orientation; in short, they are markers of particularity. If I might be allowed a slight category shift, these battles over cultural citizenship are battles over, what Stuart Hall (1997) calls the “politics of representation” and what Charles Taylor calls the “politics of recognition” (1994). These cultural markers of citizenship circulate as representational forms that mis-recognize, displace and deny access to informal and formal citizenship. The public arguments implicated in forms of mis-recognition and disrespect often risk the displacement of subordinate groups from public culture at the same time as they identify these groups as a threat to the common good. This dual process of displacement and threat construction is currently organizing the terrain of public culture around what Lauren Berlant calls “hygienic governmentality” (1996). A more formal concept for describing the interaction between particularity and universality is the concept of abstraction. Abstraction describes the ability of some folks within public culture to participate as unmarked bodies speaking from a position of universal reason (Warner, 1990). The consequence for public argument is that the claims from unmarked voices/bodies are never suspected of being tainted by a particular interest. So, one way for a cultural studies inspired argumentation studies to interrogate citizenship is through critiquing the logics of abstraction, recognition and representation that make up the cultural citizen.

There is a second way that we might approach cultural citizenship. This time, we can change the focus of our concern to argumentation as pedagogy. One of the more intriguing forms of self reflection taking place in cultural studies over the category of culture concerns how culture is a particular set of attributes and habits required for modern citizenship (Bennett, 1990; Bennett, 1999). For example, in educational policy these cultural attributes often concern how well students can read or write. For over ten years now, the textualist reading protocols of cultural studies have been challenged for their complicity in generating what Toby Miller (1993) calls, ethical incompleteness, a form of cultural governance that divides the students soul into competing dialectical pairs like reason and passion, individual and community, self and other. From this perspective, reading becomes a particular cultural technology for teaching students how to balance, integrate and mold the different elements of their souls. This work, influenced by the writings of Michel Foucault on government, circulates in cultural studies under the name of cultural policy studies. Its primary effect is to challenge Gramscian forms of cultural studies, which are more often attached to Raymond Willaim’s anthropological understanding of
cultural as a whole way of life. The effect of the interruption of cultural policy studies is to redirect the attention of cultural studies to how culture functions as a terrain of social management. As such, cultural practices can be investigated in and through how particular attributes that create the necessary distinctions required for forms of personhood and citizenship are justified, represented, and/or accomplished. From this direction a cultural studies inspired argumentation theory might ask: how does argument pedagogy generate the required attributes for citizenship? It is with this question in mind that Darrin Hicks and I have begun to investigate the history of debating both sides of a resolution, and argued that the decision to debate both sides helped to generate the necessary attributes for procedural forms of deliberative citizenship (Hicks & Greene, 2000).

At this point, let us return to the category of the rhetorical/argumentative citizen. If the rhetorical citizen can be fairly described as someone with the attributes necessary for making and critiquing good reasons, it would be fair to begin to understand our pedagogical process as a cultural policy. The challenge then is to take seriously how reason giving can serve as a marker of cultural class and citizenship. It would also be important to think about how different forms of argument pedagogy rely on different forms of citizenship. For example, Darrin Hicks (2001) has pointed out how the recent rage for dialogic civility as a norm to guide public argument as practical action and pedagogy entails how “[s]peech is no longer understood as simply the transmission of information, but the medium within which the ethical self-government of autonomous individuals can be articulated with the imperatives of democratic government. It is precisely this effort to govern through the calculated reshaping of speech performance and the regulation of discursive space that defines the recent translation of liberalism into the idiom of deliberative democracy” (125). What we should promote is an open discussion about how much we want to be implicated in a form of citizenship required for the transformation of liberalism/and or civic republicanism into a theory of deliberative democracy.

Of course, one could also posit the rhetorical citizen as a norm. The citizen orator as phronimos emerges to describe how well an argumentative performance negotiates the dialectic between agency and structure. The phronimos serves both as a cultural ideal and as an exemplary object of analysis for students to learn prudence, timing, decorum, and originality. At this point, it should be possible to understand how the rhetorical citizen as cultural ideal returns as an important part of a unique rhetorical form of cultural policy dividing the students soul between agency and structure while offering them a rhetorical role model to emulate. Again, what remains open at this point is how this educational practice articulates to the attributes necessary for citizenship in a global context. For, as some might suspect, the description of the phronimos I have articulated is taken from James Aune’s desire for creating a red republican (1993). Yet, in Aune’s hands this form of red republicanism is firmly attached to the nation-form, from where Aune hopes to generate some leverage against the global flows of capitalism. As our prior understanding of cultural citizenship should make clear, this can be a very dangerous game on the terrain of representation and recognition. It might also be politically dangerous for our understanding and struggles against forms of globalization.

As hard as it might be, the time may be right to think about working with globalization and not simply against globalization. Indeed, Michael Hardt
and Antonio Negri (2000) argue “our political task ... is not simply to resist these processes [of globalization] but to reorganize them and redirect them toward new ends.” Hardt and Negri suggest that the revolutionary actor must fight on the terrain of a new global form of postmodern sovereignty they name Empire. Thus, the fight is not against globalization but a fight for globalization. What is needed is a transversal assault that does not regress back to the modern forms of sovereignty associated with the nation-state but must construct a counter-empire, “an alternative political organization of global flows and exchanges” (p.xv). The common name for this revolutionary actor is the multitude and it is the multitude that will “have to invent new democratic forms and a new constituent power that will one day take us through and beyond empire” (p. xv). Based on my initial reading of Empire, the multitude and the phronimos are not the same thing. The multitude is a collective revolutionary power, while the phronimos is a cultural ideal, a transcendental norm, a form of regulative power, capable of capturing and dispersing the immanent and constituent powers of the multitude. Of course, my primary argument at this point is simply that the relationship between figures of revolutionary subjects (phronimos vs. multitude) and the role of rhetorical norms and practices, should remain open long enough to begin a discussion of how argumentation studies might approach citizenship in a global age.

As I hope I have just demonstrated the future of a cultural studies inspired argumentation theory can be carved out of our own intersecting intellectual resources. It can begin with the problematic of citizenship as it attaches to and challenges new forms of global power. It can do so by focusing on both argument as practical action and argument as pedagogy in an effort to figure out the relationship between the rhetorical and cultural citizen. In the spirit of an invitation, let us begin the future by inventing cultural studies inspired argumentation theory together. CSIAT’s future research problematics would be informed by Stuart Hall’s reminder that there are no guarantees, Michel Foucault’s provocation that everything is dangerous, and Karl Wallace’s call to argue with good reason.

Works Cited


