

RE-ORIENTING FROM WITHOUT:
BURKEAN NOTIONS OF 9/11 & THE RHETORIC OF DISSENT

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Kenneth Burke's theory of orientations, grounded most thoroughly in *Permanence and Change*, posits that each of us is trained by the rhetorical stimuli of our environment and subject to be conditioned to a dominant ideological orientation. And on September 11th, 2001, the dominant orientation toward the 9/11 attacks—our way of looking at that reality—was fully constructed within hours of the collapse. The rapidity with which this rhetorical construction occurred was enough to have Robert Ivie declare that the Bush speeches had left “[n]o space for critical thinking” (227). However, according to Burke, the orientation must have had “space for critical thinking” and contestation, as all orientations are subject to ideological correctives. The attempted correctives to the 9/11 orientation, the counter-rhetorics intended to correct the way we viewed that reality, revealed the precise rhetorical performance of orientation-correction, including the navigation of the orientation's “piety,” “the sense of what properly goes with what” (*Permanence and Change* 74). The dominant orientation toward 9/11, far from being a rhetorical blockade with little space for contestation, was a site for discovering the interaction between Burkean piety and “the ‘stealing back and forth’ of symbols” (*Attitudes Toward History* 103). As dissenting rhetors infiltrated the orientation, stole one or more of the component symbols, and attempted to reconfigure

them in a way that read more truthfully, they triggered a rhetorical domino effect predetermined by the orientation's pious configuration. As each piece of the dominant orientation was altered symbolically according to the corrective, this rhetorical action subsequently destabilized others that the initial component was connected to, rendering the corrective too impious.

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INTRODUCTION: A BURKEAN VIEW OF BUSH'S 9/11 ORATORY

The roar was still in the air, the buckling rumble of the fall.

This was the world now.

Don DeLillo - *Falling Man*

Within hours of the first plane striking the north tower of the World Trade Center, political figures, news media and the White House began constructing a very specific master narrative. Such a narrative became framed by ethical judgments, causes and effects, and definitions. Within days, George W. Bush had given four speeches and made several appearances at Ground Zero and elsewhere, defining the attacks as “evil” (and thus the American response as inherently righteous), naming unknown terrorist operatives as behind the attacks, and declaring the events an act of war. In a speech on the evening of September 11, Bush addressed the nation and uttered for the first time the phrase “war against terrorism,” eagerly suggesting a counter-attack or an instigation of war itself as a potential remedy (Bush). The components of these speeches constructed a single master narrative that quickly became part of a dominant ideology. And that dominant ideology, the default rhetorical lens through which many rationalized the events of that day, eventually went so far as to implicate Saddam Hussein and his regime as co-conspirators. A 2002 Pew poll reflected this ideological dominance, finding that 62% of the American

population supported military action against Iraq (Feinstein).¹ History has since shown that the war in Iraq was launched under, at best, contestable circumstances. Weapons of mass destruction were never discovered, no financial or political link between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden existed, and a brief scan of similar traumatic events—the Lockerbee bombing, the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the Oklahoma City bombing—illustrates that the September 11 attacks could have, and perhaps should have, been open for an alternative to the rapidly constructed and unexamined master narrative.

This response to the attacks can be seen as illustrating the most tragic form of, to use Kenneth Burke's term, "trained incapacities" (*Permanence and Change* 7).² According to Burke, one's trained incapacity is a symptom of the dominant orientation toward reality. That is, Burke determines through a behavioral model that people can become philosophically or ideologically conditioned, much as dogs can become conditioned to salivate at the sound of a bell, to perceive themselves as facing "reality" when, in fact, they may have simply engaged in default logics due to conditioned responses to rhetorical stimuli (7). Burke believes that this conditioning often results in faulted perceptions of reality:

¹ Further, 65% of American believed that Saddam Hussein was "close to having" nuclear weapons, while 14% believed he already had them; 66% believed "Saddam Hussein helped the terrorists in the September 11 attacks"; 85% were in favor of getting rid of Hussein; 56% believed "war still might be avoided"; 43% opposed war if Hussein permitted "full and complete weapons inspections"; 39% of those who opposed military action said they would change their minds if Hussein did not cooperate with the UN; 56% approved the President's handling of the "situation with Iraq"; approximately 33% believed Bush was "moving too quickly"; 51% believed he was "giving careful thought to the issue"; 75% of those who supported military action believed the members of Congress who opposed such action were "taking their positions for political reasons."

² "Trained incapacities" is an idea appropriated by Burke from the work of Thorstein Veblen. The source of this term in Veblen's work has been long contested. Briefly, the term describes habitual lines of action undertaken by the business class. *Theory of the Leisure Class* expresses this through the desire of businesspeople to consistently work toward "some concrete, objective, impersonal end." According to Erica Weiss in her *KBJournal* article, "Trained Incapacity: Thorstein Veblen and Kenneth Burke," the term first arises in Veblen's *Instinct of Workmanship and the Icksomeness of Labor*.

We need not say that [those with trained incapacities] have refused to face reality. We need only note—as seems experimentally verifiable—that their past training has caused them to misjudge their present situation. Their training has become an incapacity. (10)

Whether defined as resulting from repetitious scenarios within environments or seen as having incapacitating characteristics, orientations to reality are subject to ideological “correctives” (61). Correctives operate “from without,” and are seen as inherently “impious,” deliberately reordering and thus contesting the dominant orientation (61, 71).

Burke frames the theoretical process of correcting dominant orientations with a comparative analysis of large swaths of history; to Burke these orientations are culturally active. He divides human history into three eras of orientation dominance: “magic,” “religion,” and “science,” each eventually replaced by philosophic “correctives,” ideological alterations to the way civilization perceives the symbolism in a current reality (*Permanence and Change* 60). This model can be applied in local contexts, including that of September 11, by placing emphasis on the orientation inherent to the 9/11 narrative—that the attacks were a condemnable act of war committed by an unknown evil. And noting this, one can work through the ultimately unfulfilled rhetorics which attempted to “correct” that orientation to understand the orientation-correction process (63). The dominant orientation toward September 11 was built by inscribed narratives and rhetorical devices held in common and the rapidly-built consensus was symptomatic of past ideological conditioning. The counter-statements, dissent, and impiety toward this orientational dominance worked “from without,” introducing correctives that maintained components of the very ideology it sought to revise (61). Here I focus on this

second part of this Burkean rhetorical model: the attempt to enact rhetorical, philosophic correctives.

Little has been said about the rhetorics of dissent surrounding the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent wars, and much scholarship has already been published on George W. Bush's post-9/11 rhetoric. Robert Entmann's "Cascading Activation: Contesting the White House's Frame After 9/11" posits that the White House rhetoric did well to clearly identify the four most vital components of any news narrative: problematic conditions, causes of those conditions, a moral judgment, and "remedies or improvements" that would alleviate those conditions (417). By constructing the narrative so clearly from the White House, it would seem that the media would be at great pains to dissent from such a narrative and still be able to compile an effective story. John Oddo's "War Legitimation Discourse" seeks to understand one rhetorical dimension of the moral judgment passed down from the White House, concentrating on the "us/them" discourse popular among war-time presidential speeches (here, those of Bush and Franklin Roosevelt). Oddo illustrates specifically how politicians, pulling from common lexical fields of "the enemy," while simultaneously disembodimenting that enemy, are able to pass moral judgment on a "them" through the very act of rhetorical construction.

Jason Thompson extends the reach of the orientation in "Magic for a People Trained in Pragmatism: Kenneth Burke, *Mein Kampf*, and the Early 9/11 Oratory of George W. Bush." There, he applies Burke's "The Rhetoric of Hitler's 'Battle'" to Bush's post-9/11 rhetoric, widening the range of components present in the dominant orientation toward 9/11 and noting the same Hitlerian formula described by Burke in the

post-9/11 oratory: a geographical and temporal “common center” (358, 363), a common enemy as being an incarnate evil (360), and a rhetorically created reality that supports his vision of the War on Terror.³ Robert Ivie similarly applies “Hitler’s ‘Battle’” to Bush’s rhetoric in “The Rhetoric of Bush’s War on Evil,” yet emphasizes the Christian rhetoric of tests of faith and its ability to essentialize the enemy and facilitate consensus for war. Ivie’s “Fighting Terror by Rite of Redemption and Reconciliation” expands upon the Christian themes of Bush’s war rhetoric and suggests that it is a crucial component to the rhetorical process of enemy-making because it is innately dehumanizing. This notion of “dehumanization” is inherent in the oratory from the day of 9/11 itself. “Us/Them” rhetoric, disembodiment of the enemy, the “common center,” and Christian rhetorics are as well. Collectively, they embody symbolic and interconnected components of the 9/11 master narrative and the orientation and lay the groundwork for rhetorical analysis of dominant 9/11 rhetoric.

These essays provide evidence that, over time, rhetorical study on Bush’s 9/11 and War on Terror oratory is perhaps reaching a satisfactory end. Thompson himself in “Magic for a People Trained in Pragmatism” writes, “the narrative of what 9/11 means, and of what kind of president George W. Bush was—the rhetorical packaging of these questions—is now almost complete; in fact it is nearly set” (351). Similar sentiments are found in a seemingly innocuous passage from Ivie’s “Fighting Terror by Rite of Redemption and Reconciliation”:

³ This is a “reality,” according to Thompson, that created a “common enemy” that was “a human, indivisible, [...] singular face to hate, unobscured by complexity” and a “utopia of a new center: [...] a place to love” (357, 366). Thompson notes the similar rhetorical formulae found in Bush’s post-9/11 rhetoric and Kenneth Burke’s analysis of Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*.

No space for critical thinking about the challenge of terrorism or the invasion of Iraq was provided by the president's rhetoric of evil. From the beginning of Bush's war on terrorism, every consideration domestic and foreign became a matter of national security as viewed through the lens of an evil threat." (226-227)

While Ivie alludes to a legislative impact that grew from and expanded the dominant rhetoric surrounding the 9/11 attacks and the War on Terror, his claim that there was "[n]o space for critical thinking" within the orientation is shortsighted. Since the rhetoric did effectively promote and provoke a two-fronted war that provoked backlash, such space must have existed, as illustrated in published responses from those such as Slavoj Žižek, Susan Sontag, Toni Morrison, Don DeLillo and Noam Chomsky. For example, it must have been possible to view foreign and domestic issues through something other than "the lens of an evil threat," as Žižek wrote within months of the attacks that we should view them through a lens of "global capitalism" (*Welcome to the Desert of the Real* 49).

The study that follows grows out of frustrations with the opinions of the dominant narrative mentioned above: first, that the criticism of Bush's rhetoric is approaching near-completeness and soon to be exhausted; and second, that Bush's rhetoric acted as an impenetrable political and cultural barricade. In considering attempted correctives through the Burkean models, as forming beyond the bounds of this dominant orientation, it follows that something other than the "lens of an evil threat" is available for attempted correction. Further, it holds that the dissenting rhetor possesses an deep rhetorical or ideological tool box to pull from, or as deep as their rhetorical training allows, and that, by entering the dominant orientation with those tools and subverting the symbolism of one component of that ideology, a rhetor can correct the dominant orientation. Assuming

this to be true, this study focuses on the work done with those tools by those who desired to enact philosophic correctives to the dominant orientation they witnessed. First, by examining early post-9/11 rhetoric, particularly Bush's oratory between 9/11/2001 and 9/20/2001, I delineate the symbolic components of the dominant orientation, ultimately understanding the arrangement of those components according to Burke's theory of orientation "piety," the "sense of what properly goes with what" (*Permanence and Change* 74). These are presumed to be the same terms from which correctives can be enacted. Second, I take the ideologically rich responses to the dominant rhetoric from Slavoj Žižek, Susan Sontag, Paul Auster, Toni Morrison, Suheir Hammad, and Nancy Mercado, to explore the dimensions of the attempted correctives and the variable effectiveness of each. This effectiveness is largely determined by the rhetorical willingness to adhere to the dominant orientation's rhetorical piety. Ultimately, by examining and close reading the attempted correctives, noting similar performative and thematic patterns among them, a view of the Burkean orientation-corrective model arises that sees orientations subsisting only as long as their senses of piety remain culturally valid.

CHAPTER ONE: THE DOMINANT ORIENTATION: A COMMON RHETORICAL TOOL BOX FOR THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Every movement that would recruit its followers from among
many discordant and divergent bands, must have some
spot towards which all roads lead.
Kenneth Burke - "The Rhetoric of Hitler's 'Battle'"

Before the towers fell on September 11, President Bush had provided the American people rhetorical tools for potential dissent. Each successive speech compounded upon the components of the dominant orientation: a common center, a moral judgment, a characterization of "us" and of some other "them," and a suggested course of action. Each component materialized and gained symbolic import to greater or lesser degrees, providing variable points of contention through which a dissenting rhetor could enact their own Burkean "correction" to the dominant view of, or "orientation" toward, the 9/11 attacks (*Permanence and Change* 61, 63). This "orientation," constructed brick-by-brick as each component was further fleshed out through individual rhetorical utterances, became a unified whole; and through the parts the whole was made vulnerable.

The "whole" in Burkean "orientation" is given its foundation in Burke's *Counter-Statement*. There, he illustrates his indebtedness to behaviorist methodology in describing the role of recurrent training in how we view reality:

Any particular cluster of conditions will involve the recurrent emotions (fear, tenderness, delight, etc.), and fundamental attitudes (belief, cynicism, skepticism,

expansiveness, reclusion, etc.); but the particularities of the cluster will require the stressing of some and the slighting of others. (107)⁴

He later writes of “modes” and “patterns of experience. “Modes of experience,” Burke says, are contingent on behavioristic training; “they arise out of a relationship between the organism and its environment,” ranging from “bodily needs” to “the whole ideology or code of values among which one is raised,” and develop patterns such that “the adjustments of the organism will depend upon the nature of the environment” (150).

Here we have Burke miming his behaviorist roots. That is, orientations are formed not only by becoming accustomed to our environments but by responding to scenarios within those environments to the extent that past training allows. And once the components of that orientation are arranged effectively, further stimuli can “stress” or “slight” individual components, slowly acculturating the orientation to the environment that conditioned it. Thus, the efficacy of any attempted correction to such an orientation—the web of patterns developed and philosophically depended on by one within one’s environment—is similarly dependent upon a particular environment and the components of the orientation the environment stressed; it will thus be similarly restricted.

I. “Founding an Orientation: Bush’s Remarks at Booker Elementary”

On a localized scale, speaking specifically of September 11 and the orientation that was informed restricted by that environment, Bush laid the first rhetorical brick from Sarasota, Florida, minutes after the attacks were reported. The timing here and the

⁴ In the 1920s and ‘30s, Burke would have been familiar with behaviorism as a psychological theory, particularly with Pavlov’s *Conditioned Reflexes*. These ideas provided a foundation for Burke’s rhetorical theories, such as those explored here, which are rooted in the notion that human ideologies are conditioned much in the same way animals are conditioned to respond to bells with expectations of food.

chronology of that day are crucial. Bush was notified of the attacks only twenty-four minutes before addressing the nation on September 11th, and was only given fourteen minutes of contact with Vice President Cheney before then.⁵ Until that point, it should be noted, the towers were still standing; and because of the condensed time frame, as well as the still-unfolding nature of the events, Bush's remarks were closest to improvisational yet most formative to the specific cultural environment that assisted and hindered them. That is, by addressing the public so quickly after the initial crash, these remarks set the tone for the orientation that was to dominate our view of the attacks. He opens his remarks solemnly and systematically, but within moments of this opening the collective, dominant orientation to the attacks began to form:

Today, we've had a national tragedy. Two airplanes have crashed into the World Trade Center in an apparent terrorist attack on our country.

I have spoken to the Vice President, to the Governor of New York, to the Director of the FBI, and have ordered that the full resources of the federal government go to help the victims and their families, and—and to conduct a full-scale investigation to hunt down and to find those folks who committed this act.

Terrorism against our nation will not stand. And now if you [would] join me in a moment of silence. May God bless the victims, their families, and America. Thank you very much. (Booker Elementary)

Of the rhetorical strategies here, Bush best exemplifies what John Oddo terms the “Us/Them binary” and the corresponding “moralized lexical resources—especially highly moralized material processes and nominalizations” (288). According to Oddo, Bush's rhetoric is highly indebted to a discourse of moralized processes within the lexical field of war: defense, confrontation, protection and victory when discussing “us,” attack,

⁵ The first plane that day struck at 8:46 a.m. Bush was told at 8:55 that a small plane had crashed into one of the buildings of the World Trade Center. The president had begun speaking at Booker Elementary School before the second plane struck at 9:03 a.m., though was told of the attacks by an aide at 9:05. He continued speaking for ten minutes before leaving the room at 9:15, returning at 9:29 to deliver his first remarks on the tragedy.

killing, murder, invasion and domination when discussing “them” (295). In Bush’s first speech, before the attacks themselves had played out, we find three of these processes, leaning already on the strategy of defining the enemy while speaking little of our role in the events.⁶ First, in terms of defining “us,” is the positive iteration of confrontation: “to conduct a full-scale investigation to hunt down and to find those folks who committed this act.” Here, Bush places positive moral value on our role in the situation. “[C]onduct a full-scale investigation” is a neutral term for Bush—too positive to allow for the classification of an act of war. And Bush’s evocation of the Southern dialect, “to hunt down and to find those folks who committed this act,” illustrated for the American people (again before the attacks had been carried to completion) a rhetorical folk hero for “us” to seek guidance from. Second, in an attempt to define “them,” Bush provides a prototypical nominalization of the process of attack: “Today, we’ve had a national tragedy. Two airplanes have crashed into the World Trade Center in an apparent terrorist attack on our country.” This can also rightfully be seen as the first of two variations of this nominalization, if we consider the aforementioned “folks who committed this act” as the first. Finally, in a further attempt to define “them,” Bush gives the following, ambiguous nominalization: “Terrorism against our nation will not stand.”

“Terrorism against our nation will not stand” became a rhetorical beacon the moment it was uttered. It has to date been at the forefront of our military, diplomatic, and economic policies. There is good reason for this, found in three individual implications.

⁶ Flight 77 did not crash into the Pentagon until 9:37 a.m.; Flight 93 was downed in Shanksville, PA at 10:03 a.m. The significance of any implication that stems from *partial* knowledge of the full scale of the events has yet to be discussed; to date I have found no other published study that discusses any of Bush’s oratory that took place before all flights were grounded on September 11th.

One implication is that Bush further defines an “us” on the tail of illustrating the folk hero persona, making it easy to interpret the phrase “will not stand” as another variation of the “confrontation” trope. Another implication is that “terrorism” was immediately understood as a nominalization of “terrorize,” a process that seemingly includes all of Oddo’s other processes: “kill,” “invade,” “dominate,” “murder,” and “attack,” particularly when “attack” follows notions of “tragedy” (295). Further, it acted as a nearly ideographic meta-process, in that the term “terrorism” carried with it a corresponding ideology, one that saw it as antithetical to “us,” perhaps itself born through the folk-hero-narrative evoked by the Booker Elementary speech.⁷

These rhetorical observations lead one to see that Bush had constructed for the American public a brief yet highly moralized narrative of the events. In mapping the events across a readily digestible frame—there are problems caused by people, their actions were morally condemnable and we will respond as a nation—the initial plane crash in Manhattan could mold a dominant orientation, and this speech could moralize its ideology.⁸

Further, Burkean rhetoric holds that this initial response was operating within the bounds of an orientation that was formed by the conditions of its environment, and all subsequent rhetoric concerning the attacks would be conditioned by that environment, as well as by this initial address (*Counter-Statement* 107; *Permanence and Change* 14).

⁷ Michael Calvin McGee’s “The ‘Ideograph’: A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology” seeks to synthesize the Marxist and symbolist views of ‘myth’ and ‘ideology’ within social systems: “[T]erms such as ‘property,’ ‘religion,’ ‘right of privacy,’ ‘freedom of speech,’ [...] and ‘liberty,’ are more pregnant than propositions even could be. They are the basic structural elements, the building blocks, of ideology. [...] [L]ike Chinese symbols, they signify and ‘contain’ a unique ideological commitment” (445).

⁸ *cf.* Entmann 417. My compression of the implicit narrative in Bush’s Booker Elementary remarks attempts to mirror the language of Entman’s four “basic functions” of framing narratives for news media.

Expectedly, then, subsequent oratory from that day reinforced the moralized telling of the events as seen above: this was a morally corrupt attack and we require a certain, righteous American response.

II. Rhetorical Variation but Consistent Moralization: Bush's Barksdale Remarks and

Evening Address from the White House

Bush's second public address that day aired from Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana shortly after 1:00 p.m. By this point, the President had full knowledge of the attacks, though it would be some time before an "enemy" would be given concrete rhetorical form. Here, Bush is still heavily indebted to the rhetorical iteration of nominalized processes under the lexical field of "war" though other rhetorical patterns begin to emerge:

Freedom itself was attacked this morning by a faceless coward. And freedom will be defended.

I want to reassure the American people that full — the full resources of the federal government are working to assist local authorities to save lives and to help the victims of these attacks. Make no mistake, the United States will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts. ("Remarks at Barksdale")

Here again, the rhetoric is indebted to a desire to define "us" and "them." It becomes apparent that, by the afternoon of September 11, Bush relies on the nominalization of these processes and the moralization of the same to characterize his enemy. Again the process of "attack" is morally invoked to give materiality to a yet immaterial enemy. Americans were "attacked by a faceless coward" and they were "cowardly acts."

Conversely the American people are understood through synecdoche as "Freedom," and

will “hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts.” In short the rhetoric of war, and the moralization of that rhetoric, abounds in these first two addresses.

With the Barksdale address, the moral adjective “cowardly” becomes irrevocably linked to the immaterial “them” we were to respond to. However, Bush’s evening address from the White House widens the parameters of moralization in the rhetorical situation. There, the rhetoric takes on, according to Bostdorff, a distinctly “Puritanical” form which does not refute Oddo’s notion of immateriality, but instead adds a dimension of innateness and perhaps metaphorical visibility to the reading (303). All of these rhetorical additions to the narrative and orientation are seen in the speech’s opening lines:

Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts. The victims were in airplanes or in their offices: secretaries, business men and women, military and federal workers, moms and dads, friends and neighbors. Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror. The pictures of airplanes flying into buildings, fires burning, huge — huge structures collapsing have filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness, and a quiet, unyielding anger. These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed. Our country is strong. (“A Great People”)

Here, Bush performs the same basic moves of moralizing the rhetorics of attack, threat, and murder. Terrorism, understood as “deadly terrorist acts” and “despicable acts of terror,” is again nominalized, reinforcing the ideographic reading of the term and augmenting the necessity of a war-like response (here, that of Oddo’s defense, protection and confrontation) from the American people, the “us.” The “us” here is understood again through synecdoche as “our very freedom” and “our way of life.”⁹ On a material

⁹ The hijackers were not setting out to attack these abstractions, but people themselves. It is Bush, not Al Qaeda or the Taliban, who rhetorically link a “way of life” or “freedom” to the concrete targets, which were in many places understood as cultural ways of life and freedom of expression. The cultural meaning within the synecdoche becomes as visible a point of contention for those attempting correctives as the notion that New York City is the ideological center of the atrocities.

level, Bush evokes occupational and familial lexical fields to humanize the victims: “secretaries, business men and women, military and federal workers, moms and dads, friends and neighbors.” He then compounds this level of materiality of the “us” with “Thousands of lives were suddenly ended,” and alludes to a common moral disposition, (apparent commonality being key to forming a dominant orientation): “[The attacks] filed us with disbelief, terrible sadness, and a quit, unyielding anger.” Further through the speech this materiality of the victims, the greater “us,” and those groups’ places within the narrative’s orientation become clear in utterances such as “A great people has been moved to defend a great nation,” “[Terrorist attacks] cannot touch the foundation of America,” “the steel of American resolve,” “we’re the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world,” “we responded with the best of America,” “all those who want peace and security in the world,” and “defend freedom.” With these rhetorical components of the orientation considered, it becomes apparent that Bush sought to pass moral judgment on the American people—their strength, their love of freedom, their very democratic foundation as a people—and vowed to “defend” that freedom. This illustrates Oddo’s categorization of moral processes—the “superordinate thematic formation”—of an “us” in near-complete form (291).

The “them” in the evening address, like the “us,” also begins the process of thematic materialization in this speech. Bush accomplishes near-materiality here both through the growing web of nominalized processes ascribed to “them” and through his

appeal to a more “Puritanical” rhetoric.¹⁰ In “George W. Bush’s Post-September 11 Rhetoric of Covenant Renewal: Upholding the Faith of the Greatest Generation,” Denise Bostdorff speaks on the Puritanical rhetoric of “evil” and illustrates its ability to materialize a near-human subject from abstractions: “Bush was not the first contemporary president to describe an adversary or an act as evil, but [...] For him, evil was an innate human characteristic that was a cause rather than an effect” (303). This innateness translates to near-materiality for Bush, providing tangible points of future correction in the “them” categorization. The level of Puritanism in Bush’s oratory speaks directly to the moralization in the constructed 9/11 narrative, in particular by defining the immaterial enemy. For example, one of the most famous lines in Bush’s evening address from the White House, “Today, our nation saw evil—the very worst of human nature,” positions the moral coding of the enemy—“evil” and “the very worst of human nature”—as being concrete figures. “Evil” became the thing that we could see in post-9/11 rhetoric when we couldn’t yet see the face of our enemy. This solution for the material rhetorical problem is seen in Barksdale when Bush evokes “a faceless coward.” And expectedly, the notion of “evil” remains innate on September 20, 2001, when the enemy itself is materialized, strengthening the correlation between the material “evil” that attacked us and the now material Al Qaeda: “[Al Qaeda recruits] are sent back to their homes or sent to hide in countries around the world to plot *evil* and destruction” (“Address to Joint Session of Congress”; italics mine). Thus, though material evil was an incredibly

¹⁰ On a practical level, it is most likely the case that the materialization of an enemy—moralization and Puritanical rhetoric aside—cannot be complete in the twenty-first century without a visual image to attach the processes and judgments to. Instead, here, immaterial nominalizations and morally-charged language provided a strong enough foundation of abstractions for an enemy to be—though not named or seen—vividly imagined by the American people.

successful rhetorical tool on September 11th, Bush carried forward this rhetoric of evil to construct a concrete enemy from a web of abstractions and nominalized processes and to speak of evil as innate in our new enemy: international terrorism.

III. The Dominant Orientation's "War on Evil" Fought from An American City

The dominant rhetoric contains other elements beyond the moralization of "us" and "them" that define its dimensions as an orientation toward the 9/11 attacks. Robert Ivie has contributed considerable—specifically Burkean—vocabularies to characterize this orientation. In both "Fighting Terror by Rite of Redemption and Reconciliation" and "The Rhetoric of Bush's War on Evil," Ivie notes the particular success of several of Bush's other rhetorical tactics. First, the "Christian test of faith," compounds upon Bostdorff's notion of Puritanism by noting that this sense of "evil" is evoked as being innate to the immaterial enemy ("Fighting Terror" 223-224). This rhetorical movement from themes Christian faith to notions of material evil reaches a point where, as Ivie says,

[The war on terror] was no more and no less than a war waged against evil, a fight to preserve the nation's soul personified in its president. [...] An unrestricted war on evil was declared that day to smite the enemies of God. ("War on Evil")

Ivie's iteration of the Burkean "scapegoat" mechanism compounds upon the rhetoric of the "test of Christian faith," showing that in this test of faith, where a righteous nation goes up against the incarnation of "evil," it becomes necessary to allow the "us" to be reborn through the scapegoating process; in other words:

The Christian dialectic of atonement is much more complex than this, hence includes many ingredients that take it beyond the paradigm we are here discussing. Here we are concerned rather with the kind of scapegoat seen in the Hitlerite cult of Anti-Semitism. Here the scapegoat is the "essence" of evil, the

principle of discord felt by those who are to be purified by the sacrifice. (*A Grammar of Motives* 407, italics original)¹¹

This mechanism, in 9/11 rhetoric, illustrates the immateriality of the other, the abstracted “international terrorism” as enemy. The method of scapegoating is parallel in both: the dominant rhetor (for our purposes, Bush as synecdoche for his staff, his speech writers, and himself) goes to great lengths to imbue the amorphous enemy with faults one finds with oneself. However, Ivie has the benefit of standing on Burke’s shoulders and follows with his own valuation, revealing what can be understood about 9/11 as history through the lens of the Burkean scapegoat:

Evil, in this sense, is banal, not demonic in the traditional image of a fallen angel[.] Evil is thereby made into an ordinary, common, everyday, shallow, and routine phenomenon uninterrupted by moments of reflexivity. The banality of evil is the absence or collective loss of imagination, the calcification of a tragic frame of acceptance for want of a Burkean comic corrective. (“War on Evil”)

The sense of evil as “banal” in September 11 rhetoric is in hindsight valid. However, popular opinion illustrated shortly after the September 11th attacks that Americans-at-large did not see through the materialization rhetoric to recognize “evil” as simply “shallow” or “routine phenomenon, and did not reflect on the default, righteous characterization of their own nation.

A final part of the dominant orientation provided us a place from which to fight the war against evil. Jason Thompson’s “Magic for a People Trained in Pragmatism” delineates notions of both the “common enemy” and “common center” through which he explores the centrality of New York City in the dominant narrative of the attacks. In Bush’s speeches, Thompson traces part of Hitler’s rhetorical formula outlined in *Mein*

¹¹ For more on these see Burke’s “The Rhetoric of Hitler’s ‘Battle.’”

Kampf, the declaration of one geographic area as distinctively American: “instead of dwelling on the utter destruction of the Towers, the emphasis on cooperation and work will erect not just new towers, but [...] an *American* city!” (364, italics original). In 9/11 oratory, New York becomes symbolic of cooperation and determination, characteristics the dominant orientation capitalized on. The World Trade Center is chosen above other crash sites as the geographic center of the attacks and the ground from which the War on Evil can be waged, most notably illustrated in Bush’s bullhorn address at Ground Zero:

President Bush: I want you all to know that American today, American today is on bended knee, in prayer for the people whose lives were lost here, for the workers who work here, for the families who mourn. The nation stands with the good people of New York City and New Jersey and Connecticut as we mourn the loss of thousands of our citizens.

Rescue Worker: I can't hear you!

President Bush: I can hear you! I can hear you! The rest of the world hears you! And the people -- and the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon!

The notion of the “good people” Bush speaks about and to centralizes the notion of American goodness on New York City, specifically on the symbolic image of rescue workers there in the aftermath. That it becomes a site from which “the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us” further links these two components of the dominant orientation—the geographic center of the attacks and the righteousness of the response—in a way that felt natural and expected.

These rhetorical patterns—and others, to be sure—constructed the core components of the 9/11 narrative and its sympathetic dominant orientation. We were attacked in our most American city by a faceless evil incarnate. Everything about the attacks was condemnable in the eyes of a righteous, fair, Christian nation. These attacks

were unprecedented, unprovoked and an act of war; they were an act of deception and murder. The American people rallied behind a President whose faith would assist in his decision making. We would be protected as we confronted global terrorism, and the only appropriate, if not necessary, action therein was a war against evil.

Each one of these threads provided a starting point for a rhetoric of dissent.

Hindsight creates the illusion, because so seems contestable today, that any component thread could have been pulled easily to unravel the web of abstractions, nominalizations and invisible, immaterial actors that dominated the rhetoric from the outset. However, over a decade of war proves otherwise. The following section thus examines these dissenting rhetorics and the individual attempts to correct the dominant orientation described above. And through such examination one can discover whether the strength of the dominant orientation or the weakness of the dissenting opinions was to blame in its inability to correct that orientation from the outset, to change the rationalization granted the attacks while Bush remained in office.

CHAPTER TWO: ATTEMPTED CORRECTIVES: STEALING SYMBOLS FROM AND PULLING THREADS OF THE DOMINANT ORIENTATION

now we see whether Americans can meet the next human challenge:
Protect the innocent & reject Terror in all its disguises,
even strutting on TV in our own leaders' garb?
Eliot Katz - "When the Skyline Crumbles"

By virtue of a retrospective account now proving that the wars that followed the September 11 attacks were largely carried out under faulted ideological and material circumstances, including the collapsing of Afghanistan and Al Qaeda and the assumption of WMDs in Iraq, such a corrective to the dominant orientation did eventually happen (the election of Barack Obama perhaps being the final move to a new micro-orientation in terms of the expected trajectory of the War on Terror). Yet a quick scan of Pew Research data reveals that both the opinion of progress in the war itself and the sense of patriotic righteousness behind the military response rose and fell variably over an eight year period. One 2003 poll found that, in a four-day span, notions that the war was going "very well" dropped from 71% to 38% while the number of people believing that "Military force was the right decision" hovered between 78% and 74% ("Public Confidence In War Effort Falters"). In 2005 Pew showed a large shift in opinion as to whether the "decision to take military action" was right at all. In the poll, contrasted with the 74%-78% numbers of 2003, only 48% of the general public continued to support military action in the Middle East, while 45% opposed ("Opinion Leaders Turn Cautious, Public Looks Homeward"). In other words, while it was normal in the first few years to

see public confidence in the war effort shift day-to-day, poll data shows us that confidence in the decision as moral steadily declined. But even this dip below 50% in belief of American righteousness cannot be considered definitive proof of a corrective philosophy having done its work.¹² As late as 2009, 50% of Americans supported a continued U.S. presence in Afghanistan, with 76% believing a Taliban takeover a real threat to U.S. security (“Public Support for Afghan Mission Slips”).

These numbers tell the story of being unable to fully tell a story. That is, they illustrate a dominant orientation in the midst of a performance, telling the narrative of a righteous “us” defending freedom against an evil “them,” and in many cases helping a backwards “them” after we’ve eradicated the bad apples living among them, even though at times unsure how righteous we are. At some point, however, the Burkean model holds that the dominant orientation must shift to accommodate a new corrective philosophy from beyond the boundaries of that orientation itself. Yet that point of correction, because of a shift in the dominant narrative or material evidence suggesting that the individual components of the orientation were faulty, is nearly impossible to pin down.¹³ This section is dedicated to reviewing those uncertain ideological attempts at crafting

¹² Take, for example, facts cited in a 2009 CBS News story: Earlier that year (January/February 2003), despite military officials having already declared their inability to locate WMDs in Iraq, 56% of Americans still believed that Iraq “probably did” have WMDs, and 55% maintained that U.S. troops in Iraq should “stay as long as it takes” (Cosgrove-Mather).

¹³ Here I struggle with a few ideas. One the one hand, Barack Obama’s election largely changed the rhetorical dimensions of the orientation in question, shifting the focus from Iraq to Afghanistan and from greater foreign presence to bringing troops home. However, in a 2008 campaign speech he says, “The attacks of September 11 brought this reality [the reality that we are under the threat of terrorism in the form of nuclear capability in the hands of Iran] into a terrible and ominous focus” (Obama). This, plus the evidence of the Pew Research data, suggests that the orientation was largely *unchanged* by 2009. The narrative of the deceptive and secretive terrorists threatening the first-world remains, and in our righteous might it is our duty to do something about it, to enact American leadership on behalf of the global good.

such a corrective, mapping their movements precisely, and positing how they could have come about in a more coherent, less contentious way.

A Burkean model of dissent from the 9/11 narrative would begin from beyond the dominant orientation, that which is given its terminology by the White House's narrative. Such attempts to articulate dissent, to correct the dominant orientation, would then have to be open to the "'stealing back and forth' of symbols," pulling one symbolic component of the dominant orientation and, in the process of rejecting the orientation, using its own language against it (*Attitudes Toward History* 103). The attempted rhetorics of dissent came in multiple forms, precisely because of the multitude of ideology-bearing symbols that were used to construct and then bolster the acceptable narrative and thus the dominant orientation. Four components of the dominant orientation that present opportunities for such corrective actions may be identified: the notion of "place" within the narrative as illustrated by Thompson's "Magic for a People Trained in Pragmatism"; the role of victimhood in the attacks and the wider Us/Them binary; perceptions of otherness illustrated through the binaries in Oddo's essay; and the orientation's perception of morality.

I. Correcting Place and Acting Impiously: Žižek's *Desert of the Real*

Slavoj Žižek's work surrounding the 9/11 attacks became some of the most popular in cultural studies circles, a notion he problematizes in the context of September 11. Žižek's concern with cultural studies reveals a problem that has deep affinities to Burke's orientation-corrective theory: "[...] will they risk taking the step into radicalizing

their critical stance; will they problematize this framework itself?” (*Welcome to the Desert of the Real!* 49). This sense of problematizing the framework rests at the core of the dissenting rhetoric of 9/11, itself brought to tension with a “framework” or an orientation that had strengthened quickly and decisively. Here, Žižek’s concern mirrors Ivie’s from “Fighting Terror”: there may be no space to contest the orientation in question. However he proves there is in a very Burkean way—he troubles a component of the orientation himself. To occupy such intellectual space, Žižek is required to navigate innate notions of rhetorical “piety,” what Burke defined as “the sense of what properly goes with what” (*Permanence and Change* 74). This notion of piety becomes a principle of Burkean orientations, and perhaps more so in those orientations that are grounded in narrative, where we expect one thing to logically follow the next in our understanding of our present reality, including our sense of *what will happen next*. Importantly, this “sense of what goes with what” is key in domestic traumas (or their narratives), where we look to outside sources for enemies and civic leaders for moral, rational guidance.

One component linked through rhetorical piety to the dominant 9/11 orientation was the role of place within our rhetorical understanding of the attacks—New York City as geographic center. More lives were lost on Manhattan that day than in Washington, D.C., or Shanksville, Pennsylvania, but for narrative purposes (if not solely symbolic purposes), Bush’s speech writers focused on New York almost exclusively. Of Bush’s September 20 speech to Congress, Thompson writes,

Bush reminds the listener of the state principally affected by loss: “Those who want to give can go to a central source of information, libertyunites.org, to find

the names of groups providing direct help in New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.” Observe the illogical placement of Virginia in the sequence “New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia” [...] Bush places Virginia last in order to further eradicate “Washington DC” as the symbolic center of US government. In this, Bush’s career-making speech, one has to switch Pennsylvania with Virginia, then substitute Virginia with Washington DC in order to even consider the Pentagon a possible center. (363-364)

By claiming Washington, D.C., “the symbolic center of US government,” Thompson notes the impossibility of declaring the Pentagon a geographical center of the attacks. To make the Pentagon such a crucial component (in terms of its intellectual reach or symbolic import) within the dominant orientation would effectively place the military at the center of the orientation prematurely. Yet, what is then the implication of placing New York City, and with it a metonymic understanding of the Twin Towers, at the center of such a narrative? Partially, Bush’s motivation for placing New York at the geographic center of the narrative can be found in anecdotal treatment of the space. In his 2002 State of the Union address, he provided two particularly touching images:

Every day a retired firefighter returns to Ground Zero, to feel closer to his two sons who died there. At a memorial in New York, a little boy left his football with a note to his father: Dear Daddy, please take this to heaven. I don’t want to play football until I can play with you again some day. (“2002 State of the Union”)

Yet perhaps more widely known, having more direct symbolic weight, is Bush’s bullhorn address to the Ground Zero workers. Despite having said very little there (the event is better remembered by the chants of “U.S.A.” from the rescue workers), the rhetorical moment created the iconic image of President Bush and an FDNY rescue worker standing atop rubble of the World Trade Center (“Bullhorn Address to Ground Zero Rescue Workers”). No event such as this, with such symbolic attention and foregrounding

through anecdotal treatment, occurred in Shanksville¹⁴ or Washington. It may stand to reason, then, that though Shanksville could not be the geographic center of our understanding of 9/11 because of the comparatively small scale of that catastrophe, Bush perhaps did not favor New York for any material attribute; it was simply symbolically preferable to centering the locus of politics, government, and warfare, Washington D.C., at the forefront of this story.

The general American public accepted New York City as the setting for the narrative. The skyline became a worshipped image. Bumper stickers commemorating that day almost exclusively bore images of the skyline or the Twin Towers themselves. And two of the first poetic responses, Toni Morrison's "The Dead of September" and Nancy Mercado's "Going to Work," focus on New York and the towers themselves as central figures in the 9/11 narrative; the placement of the towers as central to the narrative becomes so interwoven into the fabric of the orientation that their presence becomes fodder for figurative speech.¹⁵ Mercado's apostrophic inclusion of the towers imagines them as a creature capable of being "forgotten," writing, "Frantically I too / Purchase your memory / On post cards & coffee cups / [...] / Afraid I'll forget your powers" (8-10, 18). The World Trade Center becomes a locale through which to explore the poetic and human dimensions of memory and loss rather than, as in the bull horn address, a gesture

¹⁴ The narrative of Shanksville—the unarmed, everyday passengers standing up to evil, calculating terrorists and saving the lives of countless others despite losing their own—has its echoes and pervades our culture through repeated narratives of blue-collared heros or common heros: think of the slightly more recent "Miracle on the Hudson" or films such as *Die Hard* and *Independence Day*.

¹⁵ Perhaps, then, this ability to become part of the process of "figuration" denotes the degree of dominance of any given orientation, such as the metaphoric reference to parts of vehicles in terms of body parts (each functioning as part of a whole and being treated individually for the better health of the whole) signaling the near complete dominance today of the Burkean "scientific" orientation.

of patriotism garnered under a framework of war (“the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon!”). Morrison’s text, however, references the towers far more indirectly, providing evidence for the pervasive strength of their ideological place within the dominant orientation. In a lamentation of her inability to “speak to” the “Dead of September,” Morrison illustrates a sympathetic, perhaps apolitical, understanding of the symbolism of the Towers:

To speak to you, the dead of September, I must not claim false intimacy or summon an overheated heart just in time for a camera. I must be steady and I must be clear, knowing all the time that I have nothing to say—no words stronger than the steel that pressed you into itself; no scripture older or more elegant than the ancient atoms you have become. (1)

Here, Morrison uses the Towers, the “steel that pressed you into itself” as a symbol for the incomprehensibility of the scale of the attacks and the experiences of those in the towers. Yet beyond the literary-analytical implications, it is necessary to note that Morrison responds in kind with Bush’s notion of New York City as the central geographical space of the narrative, if for different reasons. Mercado does so as well, keeping New York central to her poem yet figuring it to explore dimensions of loss and memory in the context of September 11. Just as Bush works with the destruction of the Towers (and the creation of a “Utopian center”) at the center of his rhetoric, Morrison and Mercado keep the Towers at the center of theirs (Thompson 364). Further, Morrison’s and Mercado’s figurations of the Towers in their poetry refrain from commenting directly upon Bush’s figuration of the World Trade Center as the primary construction site for a distinctly American city, and the site of a future.

Conversely, the attempt to correct the symbolism and position of place and within the dominant orientation is undertaken by Žižek himself in *Welcome to the Desert*, where he takes the near-ideographic concept of New York City and its role in September 11 and troubles it in two ways. First, he writes, “Is it not the ultimate irony that prior to the US bombing, the whole of Kabul already looked like downtown Manhattan after September 11?” (35). And later: “the only way to conceive of what happened on September 11 is to locate it in the context of the antagonisms of global capitalism” (49). In these two iterations of New York as a component of one understanding of 9/11, Žižek reasserts the Burkean model. If we are to understand downtown Manhattan in a simile with Kabul, it would then follow that we are to understand both the 9/11 attacks and our role in the international conflict that ensued radically differently. A new narrative would follow, one in which the attacks are seen as acts of war and New York is therefore an uncivilized war zone. Such an understanding would lead to a new view of the political leadership, and similarly a new view of the enemy (the enemy is much stronger than we imagined, and our leadership must first overcome the war zone before responding to the attacks).

Similarly, the second subversive instant, where Žižek claims that we should place the events within “the contexts and antagonisms of global capitalism,” directly contradicts the rhetorical understanding of the dominant orientation. Whereas Žižek reinterprets the symbolism of the World Trade Center in the context of the attacks, painting it the symbolic center for global capitalism, Bush had considered New York City a place of “extraordinary spirit” in the wake of September 11 (“Address to Joint Session of Congress”). And by considering the Twin Towers symbolic of the position of the event

within “the contexts and antagonisms of global capitalism,” Žižek once again asks his reader to follow a subverted version of the 9/11 narrative. This version would call for fault to be shared among many parties, including the very political leaders looked to for moral and ideological guidance. It would remove a degree of blame from “them” and thus trouble the morality originally implicated into the rhetoric of the dominant orientation.

These divergent responses to the dominant notion of place within the collective understanding of the 9/11 attacks shows Burkean piety to be a crucial concern for dissenting rhetors responding to the 9/11 narrative. Žižek’s corrective to this component of the narrative can be read as too impious based on what this particular philosophic corrective would require—an easing of blame on the attackers, a type of ideological collateral damage caused by striking such a widely symbolic component of the orientation by invoking “global capitalism.” Understood through Burke, the nature of this impious corrective is that it breaks too far from the notion of what would follow what within a dominant narrative. And in breaking from this sense of rhetorical propriety too far the corrective distastefully reorganizes components of the orientation (the perception of the enemy, the moralization of the narrative, the role of the “us” and our leaders, the notion of the geographic center). This impiety can be directly illustrated by contrasting the degree of Burkean piety across Morrison’s, Mercado’s, and Žižek’s texts. While Žižek called for a radical new perception of place in a “corrected” post-9/11 orientation, Morrison and Mercado accepted the ideologically dominant notion of the same and in fact integrated it—although to different ends—into the poetic figurations of their texts.

Mercado and Morrison accrue little collateral damage in their re-imaginings, altering the symbol of the location in accordance to the piety of their own rhetorics; Žižek simply goes too far.

With the divergent results of the attempted correctives above, questions arise about the possibility of enacting any local corrective to a dominant orientation. Neither rhetoric, the poetic or the theoretical, succeeded in correcting the dominant orientation despite two of the three rhetorics remaining pious enough from their position of reconfiguring place. The poetic rhetoric appears to soften the rhetorical blow in figuring the components metaphorically into a pious arrangement, while Žižek, speaking theoretically, also speaks explicitly against the way we understand September 11. Burke's discussion of "piety" and "impiety" in *Attitudes Toward History* unfortunately stops short of detailing the methods of symbol appropriation. However, further exploration of these varying rhetorical moves in other texts, some with a greater sense of piety than Žižek's essays, reveals the complex dimensions and variability in performing the philosophic corrective.

II. Degrees of Piety and Victimhood in Mercado, Morrison, and Auster

In the two artistic responses above we see poetic examples of rhetoric aligned to some extent with the dominant orientation's sense of piety. Both Mercado and Morrison, even in appropriating the notion of place to new ends, do not enact further component correctives from that specific position. This apparent sympathy between Bush's rhetoric and the sample poems lends the texts to exploration of the range of piety in 9/11

rhetorics. “Going to Work,” however, is an incomplete example. The range of piety, the number of components it discusses within the dominant rhetoric is minuscule; the poem simply presents the following rationale: after September 11, commuters mourned the loss of the towers and feared forgetting their presence in the character of the skyline and in the experience of commuting through Manhattan. The symbolic terms here—the Towers and memory—represent no significant departure from the dominant orientation’s piety; they operate in Mercado’s poem as addenda to the orientation, keeping the Towers at the center of her view of the reality of 9/11 and adding to notions of “memory” and “loss” to their symbolism. These notions are compatible with the default view of New York as symbolic of America itself. Nothing in her view suggests that the dominant one is faulty. To that end, Mercado’s poem is declared pious in Burkean terms, not because it bolsters the “sense of what properly goes with what,” but because the rhetorical make-up of her poem does not challenge it (*Attitudes Toward History* 103). We have the two extremes: Mercado largely accepting the component of place in its default terms, and Žižek’s near-total reconfigurations in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!* While Mercado’s poem remains on the pious end of the Burkean spectrum, altering one symbol in a way that refrains from contesting any other, Žižek’s essays subvert the notion of place within the orientation in a way that calls for the destabilizing of nearly every other component.

The rhetorics that fall in between these two extremes are those that accept some notions of the dominant orientation but attempt to correct others. One such text is Morrison’s aforementioned prose poem, “The Dead of September 11.” While accepting the centrality of the Twin Towers in the dominant 9/11 orientation in a way that does not

upset the dominant orientation's piety, Morrison corrects the discussion of the "us" by emphasizing a perspective of "us" as individual victims: "Some have God's words; others have songs of comfort for the bereaved. If I can pluck courage here, I would like to speak directly to the dead—the September dead" (1). Yet even this comes with compositional caveats. Morrison qualifies other components of the 9/11 rhetoric that must be destabilized for hers to centralize the notion of "us" as "victims":

But I would not say a word until I could set aside all I know or believe about nations, wars, leaders, the governed and ungovernable; all I suspect to know about armor and entrails. First I would freshen my tongue, abandon sentences crafted to know evil—wanton or studied; explosive or quietly sinister; whether born of a sated appetite or hunger; of vengeance or the simple compulsion to stand up before falling down. I would purge my language of hyperbole; of its eagerness to analyze the levels of wickedness; ranking them; calculating their higher or lower status among others of its kind. (1)

Here, Morrison shows the extent to which correcting the rhetorical notion of "us" as righteous and steadfast corresponds to other components of the dominant orientation. Thus, her suggested corrective philosophy is ultimately impious, but the extent to which is undetermined. Morrison accepts the centrality of New York City as true within the orientation. Nothing here suggests that she finds the Twin Towers anything short of an ideographic symbol for a tragedies that occurred; her revision does not trouble the piety of the default ideology. However, in the act of envisioning an orientation that works through our status as victims, she moves away from other components of the dominant orientation, notably its penchant for "war" rhetoric ("set aside all I know [...] about armor and entrails") and the moralization found in Bush's treatment of "them" ("I would purge my language of [...] its eagerness to analyze the levels of wickedness"). In the process of the attempted correction of one component ("us" as victims who need to grieve) her

poem openly acknowledges the collateral damage that must be inflicted upon others, including the orientation's understanding of war against evil as a proper response ("purge my language of [...] its eagerness to analyze [...] wickedness"). Morrison's poem represents piety to a degree.

Morrison's was not the only corrective philosophy that offered a centralized rhetoric of "us" as victims. In an interview with *The New York Times*, dated December 31, 2001, Paul Auster commented on the running "Portraits of Grief" section, "One felt, looking at those pages every day, that real lives were jumping out at you [...]. We weren't mourning an anonymous mass of people, we were mourning thousands of individuals. And the more we knew about them, the more we could wrestle with our own grief" (Scott). The significance, here and throughout the *Times* article, is that it places the narrative of the September 11th attacks through a new lens, a Burkean metaphor (as outlined in "The Four Master Tropes"¹⁶). Auster's comment stresses the patients of the 9/11 narrative, the victims, and reads the narrative through a perspective that sees each of "us" as an individual victim. Further, the date on the *Times* article is significant in that, by the end of 2001, the rhetorical frame of "war" dominated discussions of September 11, a rhetorical move that increasingly belittled the notion of the victims as individuals and embraced the notion of the victims as a "mass." This rhetorical movement within the dominant orientation is seen as early as September 12, 2001, when President Bush officially declared the attacks an *act of war*:

¹⁶ In his essay, Burke defines metaphor as another term for "perspective." He writes, "Metaphor is a device for seeing something *in terms of* something else. It brings out the thisness of that, or the thatness of this" (503, italics original). That is to say, that by seeing one thing in terms of another, the "other" highlights specific attributes of the thing in question.

The deliberate and deadly attacks, which were carried out yesterday against our country, were more than acts of terror. They were acts of war. This will require our country to unite in steadfast determination and resolve. Freedom and democracy are under attack. The American people need to know we're facing a different enemy than we have ever faced. This enemy hides in shadows and has no regard for human life. This is an enemy who preys on innocent and unsuspecting people, then runs for cover, but it won't be able to run for cover forever. ("Address from Cabinet")

Here, the only mention of the September 11 victims is as "innocent and unsuspecting people." They are given the role of patients in the war narrative, an orientation that bolsters the notion that we were indeed mourning "an anonymous mass of people."

Bush's rhetorical move here was new. His discussion of the victims was crucial in the rhetoric of September 11th, a rhetoric that bolstered the image of the "us": "The victims were in airplanes or in their offices: secretaries, business men and women, military and federal workers, moms and dads, friends and neighbors. Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror" (Bush, "A Great People"). So why would the dominant rhetoric suddenly de-personalize the victims after the fact? What does it gain from such a transition? Given the attention to the location of the attacks, the innumerable photo ops with New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, FDNY and NYPD, Bush could have likely continued emphasizing the individual lives in his subsequent rhetoric. Yet, instead, there is very little individualization of the victims from the White House after that Tuesday.

III. Correcting Otherness: Suheir Hammad and “Us” as “Them” in the Dominant Orientation

Rather than ask what was gained by Bush’s movement away from individualizing or humanizing the victims once turned to a greater war rhetoric, it becomes necessary to explore what he avoided. Suheir Hammad’s “first writing since” contains a direct plea for an orientation that places all humanity at its center, a notion the dominant orientation sought to avoid: “if there are any people on earth who understand how new york is / feeling right now, they are in the west bank and the gaza strip” (87-88). And,

[...] but i know for sure who will pay
in the world, it will be women, mostly colored and poor. women will
have to bury children, and support themselves through grief.
[...]
in america, it will be those amongst us who refuse blanket attacks on
the shivering. those of us who work toward social justice, in
support of civil liberties, in opposition to hateful foreign
policies. (97-99, 103-106)

Here, Hammad takes a route similar to that of Žižek’s call for the necessity to contextualize the 9/11 attacks within “the antagonisms of global capitalism” (*Welcome to the Desert* 49).¹⁷ That is, she, like Žižek, attempts to latch her argument against the typified reaction of war to the symbolic notion of otherness grounded in Bush’s. Her call for understanding the enemy others as a reflection of our own experience of the destructive terroristic attacks (“they are in the west bank and the gaza strip”) places “them” in simile to “us.” This move speaks directly against the rhetoric of the dominant orientation as seen in a White House press release declaring September 14th the “National Day of Remembrance.” In the release, the White House explicitly divides the

¹⁷ Cf. 29

civilized world and the evil other. Such a division causes the audience to imagine the United States at the center of their understanding of the “civilized” world:

Civilized people around the world denounce the evildoers who devised and executed these terrible attacks. Justice demands that those who helped or harbored the terrorists be punished — and punished severely. The enormity of their evil demands it. (“National Day of Prayer and Remembrance.”)

By distinguishing between the “civilized people around the world” and “the evildoers who devised and executed these terrible attacks,” Bush effectively takes the amorphous enemy, who at that point was known only as coming from a specific region, and others them; the rhetoric here makes them foreign, different. This is a key strategy of war legitimization.¹⁸ The rhetorically constructed barriers between the U.S., the victims of the attacks, and the enemy other preclude sympathetic feeling toward the people of the region claimed to have orchestrated the attacks. Thus, while Hammad doesn’t speak specifically to the people of Afghanistan in her poem, she constructs her counter-rhetoric as an attempt to deconstruct these rhetorical barriers. She speaks against an orientation that sought to legitimize a war through moral judgment and a constructed, symbolic other: “women will / have to bury children, and support themselves through grief.” By invoking the discourse of family and grief Hammad responds directly to a theme of Bush’s 9/11 evening address: “The victims were [...] moms and dads, friends and neighbors. Thousands of lives were suddenly ended” (“A Great People”).

Oddo’s “War Legitimation Discourse” sees rhetorical othering as a primary strategy for Bush’s rhetoric and thus the dominant orientation. This strategy is one that is largely found in the discursive choices—most notably the choice of nominalizations—in

¹⁸ Cf. Oddo, Entman.

Bush's post-9/11 speeches. While Oddo looks toward Bush's 2002 State of the Union and later speeches, similar moves are discovered in more immediate responses to 9/11. Nominalized lexical choices paint an other responsible for attacks, deliberating their plan at length before attacking, committing murder and remaining a salient threat. These nominalizations abound in the three recorded speeches of 9/11 alone, and the chart below illustrates the frequency with which Bush employs them on that day:

Process	Variations	Frequency
Attack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "an apparent terrorist attack on our country" (Sarasota) - "those folks who committed this act" (Sarasota) - "terrorism" (Sarasota et. al.; the nominal phrase takes on the connotation of the process itself) - "Freedom itself was attacked this morning by a faceless coward" (Barksdale) - "[...] the United States will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts" (Barksdale) - Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack" (D.C.) - We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts [...]" (D.C.) 	7
Deliberation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts" (D.C.) - "The search is underway for those who were behind these acts" (D.C.) - "[...] and those who harbor them" (D.C.) 	3
Murder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil and despicable acts of terror" (D.C.) 	1
Threat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - [...] for the children whose worlds have been shattered and whose sense of safety and security has been threatened" (D.C.) 	1

(fig. 1.1)

Considering the brevity of each published address on 9/11 and the balance Bush attempted to strike that in discussing both the attacks and the victims with equal weight, that Bush included twelve characterizing statements for the enemy other illustrates his indebtedness to the categorization of “us” and “them.” And these statements can be reduced to four distinct nominalizations: “attack,” “deliberation,” “murder,” and “threat.” This reduction of the other is precisely the component of the dominant orientation Hammad sought to correct. She attempts to complicate the ease with which a negatively moralized perception of the other is constructed. She reconsiders the “faceless coward,” “those who harbor [terrorists],” in short, the “them,” as something beside an “other.” By reflecting the description of the other in “first writing since” back on the American population and imbuing it with mentions of family and children Hammad leads us to understand the situation in question through a new perspective: families as opposed to enemies.¹⁹ However Hammad, like Morrison, Auster, and Žižek above, ultimately did not succeed in grounding a re-imagining of the “other,” let alone the default 9/11 rationale. The reason for this is found in figure 1.1 above, which illustrates the stress given to defining the other as attackers, rather than confronters (as we were to be considered). This divide is the chosen point of stress for Bush’s speech, with seven utterances reinforcing this theme.

The table also illustrates that Hammad had few rhetorical resources to steal from Bush’s speeches and appropriate to her own ends in countering the dominant orientation (that the “others” were enemies, that they were evil, and that we had to respond to the

¹⁹ This may be Hammad’s attempt at undoing the “scapegoat” mechanism. Rather than externalizing our own shortcomings on the enemy in question, Hammad reflects our own domestic tragedy on the “other” that she had seen as demonized by the public.

attacks with wide-ranging force). Her solution is then to steal from the dominant orientation the notion of “the children whose worlds have been shattered and whose sense of safety and security has been threatened,” and to re-imagine it in terms of their children, the children of war torn regions such as “the west bank and the gaza strip.”

The limited scope yet complex interweaving of symbolic components within the dominant orientation evokes a profound yet practical problem in adopting the Burkean methodology of correcting the dominant orientation: how does one thief a symbol when so few are present, without being noticed? As Burke understands an intermediary stage in the orientation-correction process as “the stealing back and forth of symbols,”²⁰ we must also keep in mind that a rhetorical performance of dissent must be “pious.” Thus, when a dissenting rhetor has thin resources to steal from—as is the case in the bare-bones characterization of the “other” after 9/11²¹—expected levels of piety are destabilized and discontented. Hammad, in an attempt to maintain equitable piety in her philosophic corrective to the dominant orientation pulls only from one component of that orientation: the “other.” And because our understanding of this “other” remained so thin, correcting the orientation from that point outward is exceptionally difficult. Hammad calls for us to understand the “other” as like us, but how can they be like us when we cannot see them? How are we to understand their connection to what happened to us? How are we to see them like us, when what they did was so *unlike us*? The answer to this demanded a reinterpretation of our own, seemingly stable, sense of morality.

²⁰ Cf. 23

²¹ This is attributable to the inability to quickly materialize an enemy (see Oddo, Ivie). Whether due to minimal intelligence on the actual attackers on the day of 9/11 or an unwillingness to speak of what was known, the failure to name an attacker led much early post-9/11 rhetoric characterize the immaterial “enemy” through nominalizations of *threat*, *murder*, and *attack*, and abstract lexicons of “good and evil.”

IV. Correcting Morality: Susan Sontag's Radical Corrective

If we consider the rhetorical characterizations of “us” and the “other” too thin to steal for effective ends, Susan Sontag's *New Yorker* remarks on the attacks prove that not all of the orientation's symbolic components were functionally predisposed to ineffectiveness; many of them were volatile. As shown below, there is a distinct mapping of these components and their interconnectedness that can be exploited for the sake of correcting the default orientation:

The [media] voices licensed to follow the [September 11 attacks] seem to have joined together in a campaign to infantilize the public. Where is the acknowledgment that this was not a “cowardly” attack on “civilization” or “liberty” or “humanity” or “the free world” but an attack on the world's self-proclaimed superpower, undertaken as a consequence of specific American alliances and actions? How many citizens are aware of the ongoing American bombing of Iraq? And if the word “cowardly” is to be used, it might be more aptly applied to those who kill from beyond the range of retaliation, high in the sky, than to those willing to die themselves in order to kill others. In the matter of courage (a morally neutral virtue): whatever may be said of the perpetrators of Tuesday's slaughter, they were not cowards. (Sontag; parenthetical original; brackets mine)

In this passage, Sontag illustrates one possible connection among all the symbolic components of the post-9/11 dominant orientation as spoken against by Žižek, Morrison, Hammad and Auster. What is also fascinating about Sontag's piece here is that hers may be the most direct thieving of dominant rhetorical symbols—the direct theft of words—from that orientation. She references Bush's rhetoric directly in invoking the constructed divide between “civilization,” “liberty,” “humanity” and “the free world,” on the one hand, “cowardly” attackers on the other.²² Where the “us” was once understood through

²² See Bush, “2002 State of the Union,” “A Great People Have Been Moved to Defend a Great Nation,” “Address to Joint Session of Congress,” “Remarks from Barksdale Air Force Base.”

metonymy as “freedom,” Sontag externalizes that innate characteristic and critiques it up against the notion of “the world’s self-proclaimed superpower.” And where the enemy was formerly materialized as “cowardice” in the Barksdale address, Sontag similarly externalizes that characteristic and critiques it by pointing out the Burkean scapegoat mechanism in motion.

In thieving the dominant rhetoric so directly, Sontag claims her corrective starting point as the moral code inherent in the White House narrative; she wants to correct the orientation from its judgment-out. Yet in doing so, she encounters a rhetorical, cognitive web of conditioned associations among each component. By rallying against the characterization of the attacks as “cowardly,” she evokes not only the moral judgment that the dominant orientation has past on the 9/11 attacks, but the characterization of “them,” the other. Further, in evoking the characterization of “them,” Sontag also destabilizes that characterization of “us,” claiming that the attacks were “undertaken as a consequence of specific American alliances and actions,” and asking if “citizens are aware of the ongoing American bombing of Iraq,” calling to question the righteousness of our cause the American response to the attacks. She completely subverts the distinction between “us” and “them”: “if the word ‘cowardly’ is to be used, it might be more aptly applied to those who kill from beyond the range of retaliation, high in the sky, than to those willing to die themselves in order to kill others.” In essence, Sontag begins by attacking the morality of the orientation and concludes by subverting the notion of the “other” within the same. This eviscerates our understanding of our role in the events. Perhaps most astonishing rhetorical move here is the complete departure not only from

Bush's view of the American people (steadfast, strong, resilient) or Morrison's view (victims needing to be heard) but painting "us" as nearly culpable.²³ Sontag's chosen thread to pull, the one that declared the attacks immoral if not "evil," initiated a rhetorical domino-effect, where each component of the dominant orientation was touched in such a way that compounded impiety to rhetorically ineffective ends. As one component of the orientation was taken as a starting-point for a corrective, the new meaning given to that component enacted rhetorical collateral damage, changing the symbolic meaning of all the components that linked to that starting point by virtue of the orientation's piety.

As I have shown, the role of piety in attempting correctives cannot be neglected in any assessment of rhetorical efficacy. In remaining almost completely pious Nancy Mercado is shown as nearly de-politicizing her work, making her view of 9/11 as an issue of memory and loss culturally and socially viable. Toni Morrison and Suheir Hammad, by endorsing a type of humanistic corrective, borrowing orientational components and granting them symbolism that promotes human sympathy, remain almost largely ineffective in their attempts to re-orientate the discussion of the 9/11. Morrison, by placing human sympathy in the contexts of re-configuring the symbol of place and subverting the notion of a righteous war, directly destabilizes multiple components of the default orientation. Hammad, by promoting human sympathy in a way that sees "us" and "them" in simile, also strays too far from the dominant sense of piety, where the other

²³ This is a common rhetorical move for conspiracy theories—and explains their cultural positioning as easily-dismissed and rarely fully believed. In inverting the narrative structure here, Sontag makes the "victims" responsible and the "good guys" become the "bad guys." Such a blanket subversion of popular belief, particularly a belief as basic and vital as the goodness of oneself, makes her argument in this instance completely ineffective as a corrective, and even less so considering that 9/11 was a domestic disaster, a type of event where scripts are automatically enacted that almost always include the characterization of the self as righteous.

must be culpable and the “us” must be justified in retaliating. Conversely as is illustrated by Žižek’s and Sontag’s statements, the choice of which “thread” to pull from within the orientation can lead one (intentionally or not) toward rhetorical impiety.

Perhaps the most rhetorically brilliant feature of the dominant 9/11 rhetoric is that it makes pious correction to the orientation virtually impossible. As illustrated above, reconsidering the implications of Bush’s characterizations of “us” and “them” or “the other” gives one few rhetorical resources to combat, and thus few chances to create lasting change within the dominant orientation. Conversely, attempting a corrective that begins from rhetorically omnipresent points of either morality or place within the orientation leads the corrective to inadvertently destabilize subsequent components of the orientation by virtue of their “pious” connections to other symbolic components. Žižek finds this in moving too rapidly from a discussion of New York to a claim that global capitalism is somehow at fault. Sontag finds this in moving from a condemnation of labeling the hijackers “cowards” to troubling the given truth that we were victims, not perpetrators, of these attacks.

The understanding that we are left with through the individual analyses of each corrective response to the dominant orientation is thus one that provides a more concrete understanding of piety within an orientation than one of how dissenting rhetorics can effectively navigate such piety. I determine these sample texts above as “incomplete” attempts at a corrective not because their rhetorics have not proven effective elsewhere over the past decade, but because they all fell short of enacting a pious and effective philosophic corrective. In examining these shortcomings we can visualize the

interactions of orientations and correctives as contentious navigations of rhetorical piety, and the notion that piety after traumatic events as much more dire to those who adhere to the subsequent, default orientation.

CONCLUSION: LESSONS OF INCOMPLETE RHETORICS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE INTERROGATION”

[...] the student’s goal is to *discover*, in a wide sense of
term, the rhetorical pattern inherent in the movement
selected for investigation.

Leland M. Griffin, “The Rhetoric of Historical Movements”

I use Griffin as an invitation to meta-discourse in this closing. My findings here raise many questions but provide few definitive answers in moving forward, and maintaining Burke’s models only points vaguely in directions for future investigation. Griffin’s “Rhetoric of Historical Movements” posits a hypothetical scenario for studying “movements,” striking out in a rhetorical direction that allows for the study of “a multiplicity of speakers, speeches, audiences, and occasions,” and makes room for what he determines “failed” rhetorics (366-367). My own study has settled on terms of “incompleteness” or “un-fulfillment” rather than “failure.” As the Burkean model shows in *Permanence and Change*, where Burke hypothesizes correctives as occurring over great periods of history, the term “failure” too absolute to apply to a “corrective” or to an ideological “movement,” as such a designation only becomes salient long after the movement has come to an end. And the “movement” of dissent from the default 9/11 narrative, examined through the Burkean models here, is imbalanced. The dominant orientation toward the September 11 attacks is presented as univocal, with Bush at its lead, while the dissenting rhetorics are many, dispersed, variable, and multi-vocal. They range here from *New York Times* interviews to prose poetry and theoretical manuscripts,

rendering the discovery of salient features or patterns subject to issues of genre, discourse community, and medium.

However, the Burkean models provide a terminology with which to name a set of features. If not feasible to do so thematically or, with some exceptions, stylistically, Burke's orientation-correction model allows us to read counter-rhetorics according to which components they speak against. Reading counter-rhetorics according to these components illustrates the importance of Burkean "piety" in understanding the action of philosophic orientations in social movements. By understanding "piety" as the arrangement of orientational components in an ideologically rich way, creating a taxonomy of types of correctives becomes a step toward gauging, if not predicting, the effectiveness of types of corrective actions. For example, by examining Žižek and Morrison as counter-rhetors who sought to correct "place" within the dominant orientation, we note that Morrison's correction of this component did not inadvertently trigger further impiety. Thus we have means to differentiate the moves made by each counter-rhetoric and, through that, can posit an orientation-correction process that would have better contended with that dominant rhetoric.

One possible distinction to make would be between implicit and explicit, or indirect and direct, demands of an orientation. That is, a distinction between those rhetorics that take the ideology as its subject and those whose ideology is revealed through levels of analysis. For example, Žižek wrote specifically of this notion of place by *re-locating* the September 11 attacks "in the context of that antagonisms of global

capitalism,”²⁴ taking the default orientation as his subject (*Desert* 49). Conversely, Morrison implicated the geographical center of the Twin Towers into a symbol of the incomprehensibility of the attacks, refraining from direct appropriation of the words of Bush’s rhetoric. Similarly, Sontag’s attempted corrective in the *New Yorker* took an explicit approach. By appropriating individual utterances, particularly those of cowardice, Sontag more directly invokes the orientation and thus its piety, creating an immediate epistemic conflict between the dominant orientation and her own corrective. Her rhetoric could not be successful in penetrating the dominant rhetoric because it too directly called attention to a subversion of “the sense of what properly goes with what” (*Attitudes Toward History* 103). This stylistic division suggests that artistic responses, in general, are more inclined toward piety in attempting to correct dominant orientations. The tendency toward indirect rhetorical subversion of dominant ideologies in artistic works is one possible avenue for further exploration of the Burkean models, though with only two poems cited here any definitive statement would be overreaching.

Taking the Burkean models from *Permanence and Change* to their close, however, suggests that further study of the poetic dimensions of orientations and corrections might prove fruitful. Burke, in hypothesizing a corrective to the “scientific” orientation, suggests that a “poetic” or “humanistic” rationalization, a “corrective rationalization [that] must certainly move” in that direction would provide the means for moving forward to higher orders of orientation (65). He writes that this corrective would be “‘biologically’ grounded,” or grounded in the individual being (as opposed to the

²⁴ Recall that this is in direct response to what Thompson noted as the “common center” in Bush’s rhetoric (363). There, Ivie suggested that the White House rhetoric took as a necessary feature New York City as a geographical center for understanding the events.

institutions of church or science) and that being's desires (66). We see this as well in the above counter-rhetorics. In Morrison's desire to "speak to" the victims of the September 11 attacks, she wants to feel sympathetically with those who were trapped in the Towers:

[...] I have nothing to give either—except this gesture, this thread thrown between your humanity and mine: *I want to hold you in my arms* and as your soul got shot of its box of flesh to understand, as you have done, the wit of eternity: its gift of unhinged release tearing through the darkness of its knell. (2)

This desire to "hold" the individual body and to "understand" human experience suggests some affinity between the artistic and the "biological" and hints toward more fully defined dimensions a "poetic," "humanistic" corrective. And taking that one correction of place, reading it as implicated into the desire to understand the "biological," shows that an implicit, humanistically based corrective does work in this situation. That component of her corrective, at least, was not inherently troublesome. Morrison's more direct iterations of "evil" and "wickedness" prove to be the site of her impiety.

This study provides productive directions if only because it uncovers various types of attempted correctives and understands them by the degree to which they disturb an orientation's sense of piety. It reaffirms the vital position of piety within the orientation-corrective models. And by exploring the dimensions therein, greater or lesser symbolic importance of individual components is found through examining the attempted corrective acts, their own rhetorics, and the rapidity with which the one correction began to enact collateral damage on those symbolically connected to it. Yet the possibility of implicit and explicit correctives complicates the varying symbolic strengths, as some counter-rhetorics, such as Morrison's and Mercado's, enact correctives that for Žižek were deemed too impious. Thus, this study calls for a return to the Burkean model with

an appeal for greater consideration of implicitness and explicitness in future study. And the application of these models to this one social milieu points in a direction that implies that piety is more dire in traumatic situations, but that correctives can still operate through artistic, indirect means.

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