ISSA Proceedings 1998 – 'Blocking The Enthymeme' – Does It Unblock Identity Problems In Argumentation?

"There are some men. . . so wild and boorish in feature and gesture, that even though sound in talent and art, they cannot enter the ranks of the orators (Cicero 1942, 1988: 81)."

This is a quote from Cicero's *De Oratore*. Cicero argued that appearance trumps oratorical skill, thereby keeping otherwise articulate people from being able to effectively use their discursive powers. Cicero did not suggest that these "wild and boorish" men would be unsuccessful orators, instead, their appearance served as an insurmountable barrier forcing their silence. While acknowledging the effect of a speaker's appearance on a rhetorical situation, Cicero removes appearance from the realm of rhetoric. This position is consistent with rhetorical theory both before Cicero and today.

The appearance of a speaker has been largely ignored within the field of rhetoric. When appearance is addressed, it usually serves as background information rather than an analytic focal point. One reason for this may be that much of rhetorical criticism engages texts that are in written form and removed from the original speech situation. This explanation is inadequate because text-based rhetorical criticism allows contextual readings, based on both textual and extra-textual historical information. Therefore, there must be another reason. I hypothesize that appearance is not considered rhetorical. When I use the term rhetorical, I am referring to an Aristotelian definition of rhetoric. According to Aristotle, rhetoric is composed of arguments constructed by the speaker during the speech (artistic proofs) made up of enthymemes and examples. I turn to Aristotle in part because his well-known handbook, The Rhetoric, is the oldest known treatise on rhetoric, and because his theory of rhetoric serves as the cornerstone of the contemporary incarnation of rhetorical studies.

Aristotle did not discuss the physical appearance of orators. He argued that a speaker's character (*ethos*) is constructed during the speech with words (Aristotle 1954, 1984: 24). Aristotle maintained that there was a clean separation between a person's public identity and his/her private identity. It is also important to note that the cultural perspective from which Aristotle wrote required that to be an orator one must be a male Greek citizen. The specific appearance issues with which I am concerned, namely race, gender, and ethnicity, were not relevant in ancient Athens.

However, it is time for rhetoricians to stop regarding appearance issues as being the realm of rhetoric and, therefore, not our theoretical responsibility. Visual characteristics can, and do, prevent otherwise articulate speakers from effectively addressing audiences. In the multi-cultural world in which we live, it cannot be the case that discourse is only persuasively powerful for those born looking a certain way. If rhetoric, as a field of study, dooms to failure all people who are not completely void of non-dominant features, then the field itself is doomed.

Fortunately, appearance does function rhetorically. If we understand how it works, we can create rhetorical strategies which will allow all people, regardless of their appearance, to use their discursive powers effectively. A speaker's appearance, although unchanging, has different meanings to different people in different situations. According to Stuart Hall, race (and by extension gender and ethnicity) are "floating signifiers." Hall's "floating signifiers" are signifiers whose meaning can never be fixed because they are based on relations not essences (Hall 1996). The inability to fix the signification of a person's appearance makes it contingent. This contingency designates appearance as potentially rhetorical. In order to understand why appearance can be understood as rhetorical we must understand what exactly rhetoric is. Aristotle contended that different methods of argumentation beget different types of understanding. According to Aristotle, there are three methods of argumentation: demonstration, dialectic, and rhetoric. Demonstration is a scientific procedure for discovering and demonstrating universal non-changing verifiable truths. Demonstration can be composed of inductive or deductive (syllogistic) reasoning. Induction constructs a conclusion based on numerous pieces of specific evidence. For example, by examining many individual orchids and determining that they do not smell, a conclusion that all orchids are odorless is inductively construed. On the other hand, deduction is the process of moving from major premise, to minor premise(s), to a conclusion. For example, "any animal that breathes through its gills is a fish. A tuna breathes through gills. Therefore, a tuna is a fish."

Although dialectic argumentation is also composed of inductions and deductions, it differs from demonstration as it is a process of critique rather than a scientific process of discovery. Argument through dialectic involves a conversation between the dialectician (speaker) and the interlocutor (audience). The dialectician asks the interlocutor a question. If they agree on the answer, the answer becomes a premise and the argument can continue. Dialectic argumentation works inductively when a speaker asks a series of related specific questions and uses the answers as the foundation for a conclusion. Such as, "did your friend pass Introduction to Argumentation? Did your roommate pass Introduction to Argumentation? Did your sister pass Introduction to Argumentation? Did your classmate pass Introduction to Argumentation?" Consecutive affirmative responses allow the speaker to effectively argue that the interlocutor will also pass the introductory course on argumentation. Deductive dialectic occurs when the interlocutor asks questions the answers to which provide the major and minor premises. For example, the dialectician may begin, "do you think Meryl Streep makes good movies?" After getting an affirmative answer, the dialectician asks "was *Out of Africa* a Meryl Streep movie?" If the answer is again affirmative, the dialectician can deductively conclude that the interlocutor will agree with the conclusion that *Out of Africa* is a good movie. Because dialectic argumentation uses a "human" rather than scientific approach to creating the premises, dialectic argumentation produces probable truths rather than universal truths.

The third method of argumentation is rhetoric. Unlike demonstration and dialectic, rhetoric does not produce a truth of any kind. It does not use induction or deduction. Rather, a rhetorical argument is composed either of examples or enthymemes. If a rhetor wanted to make the argument that President Clinton lied about his affair with Monica Lewinsky, she might use as an example the fact that he previously lied about having an affair with Gennifer Flowers. The rhetor assumes that the audience will be persuaded that the example about Flowers is representative enough to warrant the conclusion that he lied about the affair with Lewinsky. An example can be viewed as a truncated induction with only one piece of powerful evidence rather than multiple minor related pieces. Similarly, an enthymeme can be seen as a syllogism, except that either the major premise, minor premise or conclusion, is "missing." The missing element(s) is not orally provided by either the speaker or the audience. Rather, it is supplied as a silent understanding between the parties involved. For example, an enthymeme is constructed when a speaker says: "more women die of breast cancer each year than all of the American soldiers that died in the Viet Nam War." The premise that

a large number of soldiers died in the war is an unspoken understanding between the speaker and the hearer. Likewise, both parties are brought to the silently agreed upon conclusion that too many women are dying of breast cancer each year. The use of examples and enthymemes often involves using far less propositions than is used in demonstration or dialectic. Aristotle explained, "[f]or if any of these propositions is a familiar fact, there is no need even to mention it; the hearer adds it himself (Aristotle 1954, 1984: 28)." It is this process of the audience silently responding to the speaker that makes an argument rhetorical. By relying on commonalities between the speaker and the audience, an enthymematic argument appears to be unable to produce new ideas. Given that the speaker relies on the audience to fill in the missing premises and/or conclusions, it is possible that enthymemes may merely reinforce and disseminate prejudice.

In order to clarify how a rhetorical enthymeme functions I will lay out an obvious example, that of the stereotype. George P. Boss gave the example of the stereotype that Jewish people are thought to be, "shrewd, mercenary, industrious, grasping, intelligent, and ambitious (Boss 1979: 25)." Boss argued that when a speaker says, "Joe Greenblatt is a Jew. What else could you expect (Boss 1979: 25)?" the speaker has verbalized the minor premise. The minor premise, according to Boss, inspires the listener to "create[d] the major premise, 'All Jews are shrewd, etc.,' and the conclusion that 'Joe is shrewd, industrious, etc.' (Boss: 1979: 25)." The minor premise, the articulation of Joe's identity, engages the audience. It invites them to construct the rest of the enthymeme using their own ideas about Jewish people.

This process works similarly for visible identities. In Boss' example the only verbalized part of the argument is the minor premise: "Joe Greenblatt is a Jew." When dealing with visible identities this verbal naming is not required to instigate the enthymeme. When a speaker is visibly female or black, the minor premise "Robin is a woman" or "Samantha is black" is not spoken. Although unspoken, the identity is known to the audience and allows the audience to create a major premise, based on stereotypes associated with that identity, and a conclusion that the individual has those stereotyped traits.

Former United States Representative of Texas, Barbara Jordan, is an excellent case in point. Barbara Jordan, an African-American women, was a champion debater, trained as a lawyer, and was a successful politician. In 1976, she gave a keynote address at the Democratic National Party's convention. At the

convention, the party nominates its candidates for president and vice-president and articulates the party's platform. The keynote speaker(s) is responsible for expressing the essence of the platform not the details. In 1976, Jordan was not the only keynote speaker. She was balanced by a white man: United States Senator from Ohio, John Glenn. Glenn is famous for being the first American to orbit the globe.

Jordan opened her 1976 Democratic Convention keynote address with the statement: "there is something different about tonight. There is something special about tonight. What is different? What is special? I, Barbara Jordan, am a keynote speaker (Jordan: 1976: 359)." This statement does not make sense when read as disembodied words. Every keynote address is made by someone, usually someone who has not given it before, making it a unique experience. Why did she focus on the fact that she was the speaker?

Jordan immediately clarified her questions in her next utterance: A lot of years have passed since 1832**[i]**, and during that time it would have been most unusual for any national political party to ask that a Barbara Jordan deliver a keynote address . . . but tonight here I am. And I feel notwithstanding the past that my presence here is one additional bit of evidence that the American Dream need not forever be deferred (Jordan 1976: 359).

Jordan never states exactly what it is about her that would have made it "most unusual" for her to be giving the speech. She presents her selection as if it were obvious. In doing so she invites, if not demands, her audience to infer their own conclusion. She asks them: what is the obvious thing about "a Barbara Jordan" that would make her selection as keynoter an "unusual" choice?

Looking at her, they decide it is because she is a black woman. By filling in the premise that black women have been kept from delivering keynote addresses, Jordan establishes the fact that her audience was constructing enthymemes regarding her race and gender, similar to the "Joe is a Jew" example. Instead of allowing her audience to use her appearance to unconsciously prejudge her, she forced them to face their own prejudices. In doing so, she created a new enthymeme that suggested that her race and gender was a symbol for the essence of the new Democratic Party and its platform.

This example illustrates how an enthymeme could exist entirely within the audience's mind. In the mind of the audience, it exists, in its entirety, before the speech begins. This type of an argument, where there is no collaboration between

the speaker and the audience, seems more akin to demonstration than rhetoric. This is exactly the reason appearance issues are not seen as rhetorical. People's preconceived opinions about appearance have an argument structure that precedes the speech situation making it an *inartistic proof* not an *artistic proof*. Given this understanding of how unspoken enthymemes can be constructed merely by viewing a person it would seem that all a speaker could do is block the audience from being able to construct the enthymeme.

Kathryn Olson and G. Thomas Goodnight in their article, "Entanglements of Consumption, Cruelty, Privacy, and Fashion: The Social Controversy Over Fur," offer "blocking the enthymeme" as positive oppositional strategy (Olson and Goodnight 1979: 250). Olson and Goodnight present the controversy in the United States in the 1980's and 90's over the wearing of animal fur. They identify two enthymemes as obstacles to the anti-fur advocates position. These two enthymemes are:
1. it is acceptable to use animals for clothing as long it is done humanely (Olson and Goodnight 1979:259) and
2. the wearing of fur reflects positively on the wearer in terms of wealth, status, and/or glamour (Olson and Goodnight 1979: 262). Olson and Goodnight found that the anti-fur advocates successfully engaged in an opposition strategy which they called "blocking the enthymeme." They explained that:

Whereas the Aristotelian enthymeme accomplishes the end of persuasion by affiliating the claims of the speaker to the conventional knowledge or opinions of an audience, oppositional argument functions to block enthymematic associations and so disrupt the taken-for-granted realm of the uncontested and commonplace. So, oppositional argument unsettles the appropriateness of social conventions, draws attention to the taken-for-granted means of communication, and provokes discussion. The work of oppositional argument, thus, is not 'adjusting ideas to people and . . . people to ideas' as much as rendering evident and sustaining challenges to communication practices that delimit the proper expression of opinion and constrain the legitimate formation of judgement within personal and public spheres (Olson and Goodnight 1994: 250).
This oppositional strategy of "blocking the enthymeme" seems to describe the strategy employed by Jordan in her 1976 keynote address. Clearly she is blocking enthymematic associations and disrupting taken-for-granted conclusions. She is unsettling the appropriateness of social conventions and provoking discussion.

Finally, I believe her speech was a sustaining challenge to communication practices that constrain the legitimate formation of judgement within personal and public spheres. Given the effectiveness of Jordan's speech and the theoretical possibilities of "blocking the enthymeme" as an oppositional strategy, it would seem to be the strategy of choice for responding to appearance constraints in a rhetorical situations.

I have found four dominant strategies which speakers use to reduce the negative effects of their appearance: separatism, anonymity, physical transformation (recasting), and discursive strategies by "blocking the enthymeme." Even though all four block enthymemes around appearance only the discursive strategy offers a way for people in a multicultural and gendered world to speak from within their bodies. The first three strategies allows speakers to express ideas but not from within their marked bodies. Separatism is a strategy where the speaker chooses to speak only with those who will not be hostile to her appearance, such as, when a woman speaks to an entirely female audience. Anonymity refers to a situation in which a speaker engages in discourse when her body is not in the scene. Examples of this include writing, computer mediated communication, speaking over radio waves, or puppetry. Physical transformation occurs when a speaker alters the audience's visual experience of the appearance's appearance. Dressing in drag is an example of this strategy, as is the long-term deception carried on by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to hide the extent of his physical infirmity. Finally, in the discursive strategy, the speaker makes a verbal argument in which her appearance is a premise and the effect of the appearance on the rhetorical situation is the conclusion.

All four of these strategies have the ability to be effective and all four of them engage in "blocking the enthymeme." The strategies of separatism, anonymity, and physical transformation "block" the preexisting enthymeme, but they do not replace it with a new enthymeme. Rather than take the minor premise from the audience and construct an argument for a favorable conclusion, they accept the audience's prejudice and work around it by attempting to "block" the audience from using the premise to reach a "prejudicial" conclusion. Accordingly, these strategies are non-rhetorical.

Take the enthymeme:
The speaker is visually an X
All X's are Y

The speaker who employs separatism avoids a situation were Y has a negative value by refusing to speak to certain audiences at all. By using either the anonymity strategy or physical transformation, the speakers prevents the audience from knowing that she is an X thereby completely avoiding the association of the X identity with the Y characteristic. All three strategies successfully block audiences from physically seeing the speaker and therefore from drawing negative conclusions based on their visible identities.

However, the ultimate effectiveness of these strategies is limited. First, such strategies are not always possible. If a black woman wants to be able to give the televised keynote address at the Democratic National Party, she can not engage in separatism, anonymity or physical transformation. Second, they are temporal solutions.

These strategies do not offer "sustaining challenges to communication practices that delimit the proper expression of opinion and constrain the legitimate formation of judgement within personal and public spheres (Olson and Goodnight 1979: 250)." Every time a speaker's body is visible she will be confronted with the same problem. Third, these strategies accept the prejudicial interpretation of the speaker's appearance instead of enacting the idea that a visible identity may have different meanings to different audiences in different situations. These three strategies do not allow for a rhetorical transformation of the audience's ideas.

In contrast, the discursive strategy does not only "block" the enthymeme, it replaces it. The minor premise (the appearance) remains in tact, and the major premise (the stereotype, preconceived notion or prejudicial belief) is blocked when the speaker argues that the audience's preconceived ideas about the speaker's visual identity does not take into account all the specifics of the rhetorical situation. Thus, the distinction between this strategy and the other three is that the discursive approach blocks the enthymeme by replacing the major premise with a new premise. Using discourse, the speaker argues that the audience should reinterpret the speaker's appearance in terms of the specific speech situation. When Barbara Jordan gave the keynote address, she used the fact that she was a woman of color as evidence of the Democratic Party's progressive platform. Moreover, she took the audience's predisposition regarding her appearance, and used those prejudices as premises for a new enthymeme with a favorable conclusion regarding the party's future. The

discursive approach is based on the belief that while a person's appearance is a constant (inartistic proof), the interpretation of the meaning of that appearance is contingent (artistic proof) and able to be rhetorically constructed. By offering an alternative major premise, the speaker directs the interpretation of her appearance resulting in a positive enthymematic conclusion.

Olson and Goodnight hint that successful blocking of the enthymeme requires replacing the enthymeme:
[t]o block audience completion of this enthymeme, anti-fur advocates invert the valence of fur from a social positive to a social negative. If the move is successful, people will be deterred from uncritically supplying the unspoken assumption that a fur garment comments on its wearer in an unambiguously positive way (Olson and Goodnight 1979: 262).

Clearly Olson and Goodnight are not arguing that "blocking the enthymeme" is enough. A successful speaker must not only block the enthymeme (through use of separatism, anonymity and physical transformation) but must also replace the enthymeme in order to sustain challenges to communication practices that delimit the proper expression of opinion and constrain the legitimate formation of judgment within personal and public spheres (Olson and Goodnight 1979: 262). Accordingly, the field of rhetoric must begin to acknowledge that enthymemes do not need to be verbal and that appearances can function enthymematically. Once we embrace the idea that a speaker's visual identity can be rhetorically constructed, we can find rhetorical solutions to appearance based obstacles. Enthymemes which would otherwise prevent the "wild and boorish" from speaking, can be blocked and replaced with powerful rhetorical arguments. All people throughout the world can learn to discursively overcome appearance issues and communicate effectively.

NOTES
i. 1832 was the year of the first Democratic National Convention.

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