

The Ego-Function of the Rhetoric of Protest

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In recent years rhetorical analysts have been concerned with the problem of understanding and accounting for the rhetoric of protest. Their studies examine a variety of rhetorical dimensions; we have seen explorations of the nature of "coercive" as opposed to "persuasive" rhetoric, examinations of the legality of acts of protest and confrontation, descriptions of the rhetorical strategies of certain protest movements, essays on the psycho-symbolic aspects of confrontation, analyses of the rhetorical tensions of moderate and extremist political leaders, and discussions of the potential meanings underlying such current idiomatic expressions as "Black Power."¹ I hope to augment understanding by suggesting that an analysis of the rhetoric of contemporary protest reveals certain prominent patterns and that an examination of those patterns leads to the conclusion that we are witnessing on the public stage a rhetorical function which has been largely ignored in rhetorical study. Specifically, I refer to a particular *ego-function* of rhetoric.

The thesis of this paper will be developed in the following way: first, I shall take cognizance of the rhetorical transaction as it is usually viewed by rhetorical analysts. Once we establish the essential features of the communicative act typically labeled "rhetorical," we can more clearly delineate peculiar characteristics of contemporary protest rhetoric which seem to abrogate the kind of public discussion we have always approved of. Next, I shall broaden the analysis by granting that a person may choose to address himself, and that regardless of his reasons for such behavior, this primary transaction of self with self may properly be designated "rhetorical." At this point, I hope to clarify the concept, "ego-function," as it is used in the analytical portion of the paper. I shall then examine the patterns of protest rhetoric which demonstrate the ego-function

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of discourse and, finally, reflect on some of the results and effects of such discourse.

I

Typically, when we refer to a rhetorical transaction, we have in mind a situation wherein a speaker undertakes to produce a message for the purpose of affecting the perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of a listener or group of listeners. The end goals of such discourse are seen as pragmatic in some sense, and the speaker is successful insofar as he can maneuver his listener to assent to the point of view, claims, or actions proposed by the speaker. This point of view operates on the basic assumption that when people communicate with each other, they somehow physically or symbolically face toward each other. And if the act of communication is to be successful, there must be a mutual willingness and commitment to interact. Carroll C. Arnold, in his discussion of the qualities of oral rhetoric, describes several distinctive features of rhetoric viewed in this perspective:

- A. A speaker and some listeners are *knowingly engaged* in a mutual, working relationship of considerable intellectual and psychological interdependence. [As Arnold explains it, in this relationship the listener, insofar as he allows the relationship to continue] concedes to his speaker the privilege of *trying* to direct his perceptions of reality.
- B. Speaker and listener know, or think they know, that each will behave according to his own purposes and has the right to so behave. Because of this knowledge, speakers will sometimes seek to conceal their aims and grounds for choice but on other occasions will make their intentions and principles of choice unmistakably clear.
- C. Speaker and listener are knowingly engaged in a relationship wherein the listener's immediate definitions of "sufficient reasons" are the coin of exchange. Having chosen to exert influence through speech, the speaker entered, as it were, into a special bargain with his sovereign listeners. He accepted as determining — for each moment of relationship — his listeners' standards of "sufficiency."²

Let us examine the particular restraints which are inherent in this perspective. There is a continuum of openness and mutual inter-

action joining the parties involved. In every case, some kind of identification is required in order for communication to be effective. The communicator who wishes to get his listener to concur in an attitude or agree to a position or undertake an action must somehow establish an identification between attitudes and beliefs already held by the listener and the particular proposals of the communicator. The continuum of identification we are talking about runs the gamut from the case of a communicator who conceals his real motives as he manipulates those symbolic strategies which will be most effective with his listeners to the kind of ideal argumentative situation described by Johnstone and Natanson in which all values and strategies are laid bare by the parties involved so that one's self is uniquely open to an examination of one's basic perceptions and presuppositions.³ In every instance along this continuum, the communicator is attempting to draw his listener closer to him, and to do so he must, through appearance or reality, identify intellectually and emotionally with his target audience.

The rhetoric of protest would "logically" seem to be aimed at those in power or positions of authority who appear responsible for the conditions being protested. The usual view of rhetorical communication expects the entreaties, appeals, arguments, and exhortations of those asking for change to speak somehow to the basic reasoning and feeling capacities of those in authority. But contemporary public protest does not make this kind of appeal. Rather than raise a few specific issues which might be dealt with by programmatic changes or legislation, spokesmen for protest movements thrust forward a host of issues or demands. In many cases the demands go beyond the power of the authorities to act; it somehow seems unreasonable to expect the president of a Pennsylvania university to be able to grant amnesty to Bobby Seale. And when authority figures try to respond to individual issues, they find protest leaders moving to a perspective which includes the total social, political, and economic scene, demanding sweeping revolutionary change. [The escalation of demands, in fact the very couching of wishes in terms of demands, appears to those in positions of power, reacting to the rhetoric, to foreclose meaningful discussion. Opportunities for dialogue become further limited as protestors, at moments of confrontation reduce their verbalization to slogans, epithets, and chants, and rely upon obscene gestures and sheer body force to make their points.] Protestors appear to reject opportunities for identification, refuse to make the kinds of appeals which might

gain them a receptive audience, and in fact, flaunt and make a mockery of the values and ways of behaving which are so meaningful to the "establishment." Rhetoric, as we usually understand it, seems to flee the scene, leaving in its place coercion, threat, and intimidation.

We can better understand what is happening if we realize that the stance taken by the more radical protestors in the latter part of the 1960's was one facing deliberately away from those persons, actions, and things grouped together and identified in the construct, "establishment." The rhetoric which comes from one holding such a stance directs itself to the "establishment" only indirectly, if at all, and programmatic concerns become incidental to more personal functions. I shall argue that the primary appeal of the rhetoric of protest is to the protestors themselves, who feel the need for psychological refurbishing and affirmation. Spokesmen for protest movements also become surrogates for others who share their intimate feelings of inadequacy. The rhetoric is basically self-directed, not other-directed in the usual sense of that term, and thus it can be said to be fulfilling an ego-function. We must now clarify the concept, "ego-function."

Recently, Don Burks proposed that "just as there is an internal or self-dialectic so there is self-persuasion, and as internal dialectic is analogous to dialectic with others, so self-persuasion is analogous to persuasion of others."⁴ Burks suggests that rhetorical discourse can be pictured on a continuum having as its extremes the directing of appeals and arguments toward others and the directing of appeals and arguments to one's self. Burks' thesis encourages a useful expansion of the concept of rhetoric, and I believe the rhetoric of contemporary protest can be more fully accounted for by considering how it operates as "self-addressed" discourse. Burks identifies an aspect of the ego-function of rhetoric I shall focus on: the act of communication wherein one's self is his primary audience and where others identify with the rhetoric insofar as they share similar ego-concerns.

A second aspect of the ego-function of rhetoric has to do with *constituting* self-hood through expression; that is, with establishing, defining, and affirming one's self-hood as one engages in a rhetorical act.⁵ The idea here refers to self-persuasion in a peculiar way, for what is at stake is not the nature of the rhetorical claims or the sense and probity of appeals and arguments for their own sakes, but just the fact that the rhetoric must be verbalized in order for

one's self-hood to be realized. Rhetoric, in this sense, takes on the aspects of both act and appeal, the two occurring simultaneously. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that rhetoric is part of act, and the adoption of a particular rhetorical stance is self-confirming and enhancing.

One remark made earlier bears repeating. We must be aware that at the same time an individual is engaged in a rhetorical act for the primary purpose of establishing his own identity to himself, he may also, acting as surrogate, aid in the establishment of identities for others. Sometimes interacting affirmations accomplish the ego-identification of a number of selves.

What I am proposing is that an examination of the rhetoric of protest — to be specific, the rhetoric of Black Power, the student rebellion, and the Women's Liberation Movement — reveals the above aspects of ego-function to be conjoined and that this feature of this rhetoric is responsible for much of the emotional consternation and response it arouses. I do not claim that the ego-function of rhetoric I am going to talk about is new. It has always been present in rhetorical acts. I am suggesting that we have not considered it sufficiently before, essentially because it has not been forced upon our attention in so pronounced a manner as in our own time.

When discussing the status of one's ego, there are three general conditions we may refer to. There is the condition of ego-forming and building, the stage where various kinds of activities affirm the being and boundaries of personhood. Once the ego is fairly well established, there is the ever-continuing process of ego-maintenance, the repeated reaffirmation of one's self-hood, and one may argue along with the Existentialists that in an evolutionary sense one's ego is constantly undergoing modification. But changes at this stage are incremental, not revolutionary, and are undergirded by a basic stability. Finally, just as ego can be established and affirmed, so it can be denied and destroyed, traumatically or by slow attrition.

The process of ego establishment has been viewed in a number of perspectives. We know that the relationship between infant and parents is crucial to the establishment of ego. From the standpoint of communication, we understand that physical stroking imparts early feelings of security to the infant, and that as he matures he will replace physical stroking as a means of affirmation. Before too many years, the peer group will play a significant role in the affirmation of self-hood. Throughout all these interactions a person constructs an order; he weighs, evaluates, and orients toward goals so

that a symbolic hierarchy is established in which he locates himself. Unless this process of ego-establishment is specifically focused on, it will be overlooked in the day-to-day events of one's existence. But when the search for identity of ego takes place on the public stage, when large numbers of individuals are engaged in a struggle to achieve affirmation, and when the drama of the struggle is intensified by media coverage, the social scene becomes streaked with exacerbating tensions. In such a scene, the rhetorical act exhibits a number of peculiar characteristics relating to ego-function.

II

One of the most notable components of the protest rhetoric of recent years is the number of allusions to self-hood. Such allusions spring from three different postures. There appears to be a strong need to recognize and proclaim that one's ego is somehow ignored, or damaged, or disenfranchised. A second posture, following logically from the first, proclaims, extols, and describes in exaggerated fashion the strengths and virtues of the ego sought after. A third posture, operating on the psychological principle of victimage, decries and attacks the ignorance or malicious qualities of an enemy: a foreign ego which stands in dislogistic juxtaposition to the desired ego.

The spokesmen for Black Power in the 1960's took some pains to point out to their black brothers that they had succumbed to and been emasculated by white society. For example, Stokely Carmichael, speaking to students at Morgan State in 1967,⁶ refers to the shame blacks feel about themselves. "You need to stop being ashamed of being black and come on home," he says. Later in the speech he exhorts, "We have to learn to love and respect ourselves. That's where it should begin. That's where it must begin. Because if we don't love us, ain't nobody going to love us." Throughout the speech Carmichael deplores the fact that blacks allowed whites to define status and existence for them, rather than resolutely and forthrightly declaring their own black self-hood. For too many years, says Carmichael, blacks tried to gain respectability and status (or we might say self-hood) by imitating whites, i.e., by establishing black fraternities and sororities which catered to light skinned "Negroes" when admission to white social organizations was denied.

Can you begin to get the guts to develop a criteria for beauty for black people? That your nose is boss; your lips are thick, you are black and you are beautiful? Can you begin to do it so that you are not ashamed of your hair and you don't cut it to the scalp so that naps won't show? Girls, are you ready? Obviously it is your responsibility to begin to define the criteria for black people about their beauty. Because you are running around with your Nadinola cream. Your campus, the black campuses of this country, are becoming infested with wigs and Mustangs and you are to blame for it. You are to blame for it.⁷

There is a clear element of self-deprecation in Carmichael's remarks, which effects impact because of negative self-imagery perceived by many blacks. There is obviously a chink in the ego armor of one who resigns himself to repeated seduction or emasculation by others. The theme of a great deal of black rhetoric in the 1960's held that blacks had been stripped of their heritage and culture and therefore suffered because of their lack of self-identification.

Sometimes, the charge that the black ego lacked strength was left at the implicative stage. At other times it was clearly expressed:

You haven't got a revolution that doesn't involve bloodshed. And you're afraid to bleed. I said, you're afraid to bleed.

As long as the white man sent you to Korea, you bled. He sent you to Germany, you bled. He sent you to the South Pacific to fight the Japanese, you bled. You bleed for white people, but when it comes to seeing your own churches being bombed and little black girls murdered, you haven't got any blood. You bleed when the white man says bleed; you bite when the white man says bite; and you bark when the white man says bark. I hate to say this about us, but it's true.⁸

The rhetoric of black revolution does not place sole blame for the black condition on the weaknesses of the black race. By far the greatest culprits are the white man and his society; and it is "Whitney" who must ultimately pay a price for his immoral treatment of blacks. Again, Malcolm X:

...the black man in America has been colonized mentally, his mind has been destroyed. And today, even though he goes to college, he comes out and still doesn't even know he is a

black man. He is ashamed of what he is, because his culture has been destroyed, his identity has been destroyed, he has been made to hate his black skin, he has been made to hate the texture of his hair, he has been made to hate the features that God gave him.⁹

There are many more examples of rhetoric from black revolutionary leaders revealing images of negative self-hood which must be exorcised by blacks and replaced by qualities of strength, self-love, determination, and action. Black spokesmen seem to be pointing out that the struggles to achieve acceptance into white society by trying to imitate whites, adopting white standards and accepting the roles whites force them into, have aimed at chimerical goals and resulted in degradation. The perception that choosing to play "Whitey's" game is a mistake leads black spokesmen to eulogize blackness and exhort blacks to discover the positive qualities of their unique blackness.

The rhetoric of student revolution takes up the question of self-hood in terms of depersonalization and castigation of "the system" or "the power structure" for perpetrating numerous acts of suppression. Revolutionary notions spring from a set of images picturing various institutional and bureaucratic structures of society operating to homogenize the spirits of those touched by them, treating individuals as objects, and causing the loss of individual identity. The relatively programmatic "Port Huron Statement" states it thus:

We regard *men* as infinitely precious and possessed of unfulfilled capacities for reason, freedom, and love. In affirming these principles we are aware of countering perhaps the dominant conceptions of man in the twentieth century: that he is a thing to be manipulated and that he is inherently incapable of directing his own affairs. We oppose depersonalization that reduces human beings to the status of things.¹⁰

Mario Savio, sitting in at Sproul Hall on the Berkeley campus, further delineated the ego problems of students as he described his perception of their alienated plight and the pressures of "the system" which demanded a sacrifice of self-hood:

Many students here at the University, many people in society, are wandering aimlessly about. Strangers in their own lives, there is no place for them. They are people who have not

learned to compromise, who for example have come to the University to learn to question, to grow, to learn — all the standard things that sound like clichés because no one takes them seriously. And they find at one point or another that for them to become part of society — very often they must compromise those principles which were most dear to them. They must suppress the most creative impulses they have, this is a prior condition for being part of the system. The university is well structured, well tooled, to turn out people with all the sharp edges worn off — the well-rounded person. The university is well equipped to produce that sort of person, and this means that the best among the people who enter must for four years wander aimlessly much of the time questioning why they are on campus at all, doubting whether there is any point in what they are doing, and looking toward a very bleak existence afterward in a game in which all of the rules have been made up — rules which one cannot really amend.¹¹

Here is as good an expression of helplessness as one can find from a student revolutionary. To be aware that one has an ego, to know of the existence of one's self-hood, there must be not only a feeling of being noticed, of being attended to, but a perception of being able to control at least a portion of the situations in which one finds himself. The perception that totally impersonal forces direct the destinies of the individual leads many to feelings of emptiness and despair.

A few years later, the rhetoric of student revolution took on a more ominously personal tone. A few days after the student occupation of Harvard's University Hall, Nick Gagarin, executive editor of the *Crimson*, wrote:

We all agonize over the fate of the oppressed people of South Vietnam, and the oppressed people of Black America, and the oppressed people of Roxbury. But the realization that lies just around the corner is that we too are an oppressed people. Any radical movement at Harvard should base itself on our own needs — the needs of the oppressed student class.¹²

If one feels oppressed, he implies that there is an oppressor — someone responsible for the oppression. Oppression is a stronger and somehow more personal term than "depersonalization." Yet there is also a tension in the call for personal ego-affirmation and coun-

terattack against such impersonal perceptual constructs as "the system" and "the establishment." There are, necessarily, difficulties involved when one struggles to establish his self-concept, his personhood, over against impersonal things. One does better if he chooses to identify with and against other *persons*, and we shall shortly see the ambiguity arising from student protestors' difficulties in identifying personalized "enemies."

Spokeswomen for the Women's Liberation Movement reveal the same concern for their egos that is found in the rhetoric of Black Power and in the student rebellion. To be a typical, domiciled woman is to be stripped of identity. As Nanette Rainone says, "The guy on the assembly line doesn't want to be a woman. It's not that the work at home is worse than at the factory. It's that he realizes it's nothingness, total nothingness."¹³ American womanhood is seen by Lib followers as misrepresented by the false imagery of television. Jo Freeman declares that genuine women have been rendered invisible. "I look at the T.V. screen and the ads, and there is this person who's either sexy or shrill, and that's what's called a woman. I'm not that person, nor is any one of my friends. But you never see any of us."¹⁴ The heart of the matter seems to be that women are reduced to sexual receptacles, objects, or toys to be enjoyed at the whims of men. Dana Densmore, a spokeswoman for the Feminine Liberation Movement, makes the point as she addresses "liberal" men:

No thanks, Mr. Smug Liberal, I've tried your delicious masochistic sex and it nauseates me to think about it. I'm a person, not a delectable little screwing machine equipped with sub-routines for cocktail-mixing and souffle-making and listening enchanted to all the pompous drivel you pour out to impress me.¹⁵

In a recent article in *Esquire*, Sally Kempton described her early feelings about herself in relation to her sexual role and to men as feelings in tune with the imagery of the 1950's; "...Marilyn Monroe was the feminine archetype of the period, and Marilyn Monroe was sexy because of her childishness. It is not much of a step from seeing oneself as a child in relation to men to seeing oneself as their victim; obviously a child does not control its environment, obviously a child is powerless before adults."¹⁶ Kempton lands squarely on woman's negative self-image when describing her necessity to eschew self-love in order to get along in traditional society.

Self-love is indeed a handicap to a being whose primary function is supportive, for how is a woman adequately to support another ego when her self-love demands the primacy of her own. Women learn in many ways to suppress their selfishness, and by doing so they suppress also their self-esteem. If most men hold women in contempt it is no greater than the contempt in which women hold themselves. Self-love depressed becomes self-loathing. Men are brought up to command, women to seduce; to admit the necessity of seduction is to admit that one has not the strength to command. It is in fact to accept one's own objecthood, to internalize one's oppression.¹⁷

So there we have it. In all three instances of protest rhetoric, the Woman's Lib Movement, the student revolution, and the rhetoric of Black Power, we see reflections of intense feelings of self-deprecation and ego-deprivation. In each case the rhetoric contains statements which express a sense of guilt about inadequacy, stronger perhaps among blacks and women than among students, but present by implication even among the latter. It is not my purpose to explore the psychological realities of, or reasons for, the explicit or implicit statements of personal concern, inadequacy, ineptitude, and guilt, though this subject deserves extended study. My object is to show that these are present in contemporary protest rhetoric. It is enough for my purpose to point out that protest spokesmen and followers do choose even to proclaim their perceptions of ego-deprivation and their need for self-affirmation.

III

The acknowledgements just summarized place those who share the perceptions in symbolically defensive positions from which they must extricate themselves before they can realize more positive identities. One way of extrication is to locate what one perceives as the persons, behaviors, actions, or conditions which cause or contribute to feelings of inadequacy, then to take a positive stand against them. In the protest movements we are examining, the struggle for a resurrected self seems to be aided by locating other selves, establishing personality typologies among them, and using these as targets for arrows of scorn, ridicule, condemnation, and

charges of character defect. This rhetorical identification of personalized enemies enhances establishment of self-hood in several ways. By identifying against an other, one may delineate his own position — locate himself by contrast. By painting the enemy in dark hued imagery of vice, corruption, evil, and weakness, one may more easily convince himself of his own superior virtue and thereby gain a symbolic victory of ego-enhancement. The rhetoric of attack becomes at the same time a rhetoric of ego-building, and the very act of assuming such a rhetorical stance becomes self-persuasive and confirmatory.

We need not take long to establish that the rhetoric of all three protest movements we are examining contains clear images of the enemy. Black spokesmen are eloquent in their elaboration of suppression by the white man. Political and economic exploitation is enlarged upon, but inevitably, "Whitey's" moral character is scrutinized and found wanting. Floyd McKissick, for instance, explained to his audience at a national conference on Black Power that white supremacy and white fear of blacks stems from deep-seated feelings of inferiority. "Whitey" is neurotic, psychotic, and determined to maintain his position even if it means extermination of all blacks: "Yes. The Man has the capacity to neglect, to destroy, to shoot, to kill — if his victim is not white. He has the capacity for genocide."¹⁸ Carmichael wrote in a SNCC pamphlet that Blacks must undertake to condemn the white system, for whites are morally incapable of self-condemnation.¹⁹

An element of ambiguity enters the rhetoric of student protest where the purpose becomes that of identifying the enemy. For example, at the November 1965 peace march on Washington, past SDS President Carl Ogelsby identified such personages as Lyndon Johnson, McGeorge Bundy, bank presidents, beardless liberals, Kermit Roosevelt, Ellsworth Bunker, Jr., Adolph Berle, Averill Harriman, and Joseph Farland as representatives of those perpetuating suppression. But Ogelsby went on to declare that these men could not be called evil. Rather, they were "divided from their compassion by the institutional system that inherits us all."²⁰ The ambiguity here is that when one perceives a construct such as "the system" as the cause of evil, he is forced to a basic and total condemnation. Yet "the system" or "the establishment" does not present a localized or personalized enemy. Consequently, spokesmen for student rebellion often denounced individuals in positions of authority in a way which charged them with responsibility for a

monolithic system and implied that they had the ability to make sweeping changes unilaterally. On April 22, 1968, Mark Rudd sent a letter to Columbia University's President of the moment, Grayson Kirk. It contained language placing responsibility in a more personal manner than Ogelby's:

You might want to know what is wrong with this society, since after all, you live in a very tight self-created world. We can point to the war in Vietnam as an example of the unimaginable wars of aggression you are prepared to fight to maintain your control over your empire. ... We can point to your using us as cannon fodder to fight your war. We can point out your mansion window to the ghetto below you've helped to create through your racist University policies, through your unfair labor practices, through your city government and your police.²¹

After such events as those at the Chicago Democratic Convention and at Kent State, the student revolutionaries' rhetoric became yet more personal as cops were labelled "pigs" and government officials referred to as "imperialists" and "warmongers." Such terminology seems intended to reduce those labelled to a subhuman or de-personalized status, and this is precisely what makes the attack so personal to those who are targets of the labelling.

Spokeswomen for Women's Liberation pick out the chauvinistically dominated male society as their revolutionary target, and men, quite naturally, become the enemy. Says Kempton:

For insofar as a woman lives by the standards of the world, she lives according to the standards set by men. Men have laid down the rules and definitions by which the world is run, and one of the objects of their definitions is women. Men define intelligence, men define usefulness, men tell us what is beautiful, men even tell us what is womanly.²²

The manifesto for SCUM (Society for Cutting Up Men) rhetorically creates the ultimate negative male image: "...the male is a biological accident... an incomplete female, a walking abortion. ... To be male is to be deficient, emotionally limited; maleness is a deficiency disease and males are emotionally crippled."²³ The images of the enemy of all three protest movements are clearly drawn in a rhetorical way which enhances the ego images of protest followers.

IV

As the result of attacking enemies, protestors appear to experience and express feelings of ego-enhancement, ego-affirmation, and even ego-superiority. For blacks, the continued repetition of the theme, "Black is beautiful," coupled with the charge, "White is inferior," will lead to a hoped for redefinition of the black man, cast in a more favorable image. Black spokesmen have made a point of enumerating special strengths of blacks, ranging from McKissick's observation that blacks because of their oppression experienced a "privileged perception" of reality not enjoyed by the white man,²⁴ to Malcolm X's proclamation that America is a great and rich nation because the forefathers of contemporary blacks, the slaves, made it rich through their strenuous exertions without compensation.²⁵

For students, there is less public pronouncement of ego-affirmation than of a private, communal sharing of ego-well-being in participation and in the excitement, dangers, and crusading joys of participating in a movement which encourages the rhetorical stance of self-stroking. I return to the words of Nick Gagarin, reflecting on his feelings while occupying a university building: "What was most euphoric was us and what we were to each other. For those few hours we WERE brothers and sisters. We did reach out and hold onto each other. ... You had to realize — whatever your politics and whatever your tactics — that we were very beautiful in University Hall, we were very human, we were very together. ..." ²⁶

Here is a clear expression of the discovery and enjoyment of group self-hood; it becomes easily transposed to a feeling of individual ego-satisfaction. A clearer expression of individual self-hood is recorded by Wayne Booth, who quotes a student allegedly finding himself by virtue of participating in a sit-in: "Until I went into that building... I wasn't even alive; I didn't know what life was about. Something permanent happened to me in there; I'll never be the same." ²⁷

For many students, political protest can become the covering activity that conveys a sense of importance, power, exhilaration, and danger, all feelings related to self-affirmation and expression.

The rhetoric of the Women's Lib movement, with the symbolic and personal interaction that takes place wherever Lib members gather to explore their status, seems to achieve positive ego-affects similar to those experienced by students who identify in adversity.

Poetess Susan Sands reports her personal experience while attending the November 1969 Congress to Unite Women:

It was so very inspiring and yet so strange that Friday evening, the first night of the congress, when all these women came together, everyone opening up to one another for the first time. ...First Women came to express their theories, give voice to their complaints. But by the time the congress was over, a beautiful feeling of unity existed.²⁸

The spirit of ego-affirmation is strong and it is catching. Helen Dudar, who wrote a special report for *Newsweek* on Women's Lib, ends with personal ruminations about her emotional and attitudinal state following an interview with a follower of the Lib movement:

I came home that night with the first of many anxiety-produced pains in the stomach and head. Superiority is precisely what I had felt and enjoyed and it was going to be hard to give up. That was an important discovery. One of the rare and real rewards of reporting is learning about yourself. Grateful though I am for the education, it hasn't done much for the mental stress. Women's Lib questions everything; and while intellectually I approve of that, emotionally I am unstrung by a lot of it.

Never mind. The ambivalence is gone; the distance is gone. What is left is a sense of pride and kinship with all those women who have been asking all the hard questions.²⁹

The content of the rhetoric we have examined reveals a central concern of protest movements. The concern expressed publicly is nonetheless a personal concern, often seeking affirmation of individual identity through group unity. The thrust of protest rhetoric is disturbing precisely because it is so blatantly personal and because it reflects a stance which seems to thwart the idealized kind of problem discussion we like to see on the public stage.

Style becomes very important in a rhetorical stance dictated by a concern for self. (Style, as I use the term here, is all inclusive. It refers to style of behaving, style of dress, style of speaking, style of total identification.) Black's extol their freedom of body movement, students proclaim the virtues of their pot-smoking reveries, Women's Lib followers will undertake the chivalrous actions of men

themselves. Blacks proudly wear their Afro hairdos, students make a quasi-religious symbol of hair, and women's lib members dramatically cast off their bras and forego make-up. And all three protest movements harangue the enemy with obscenities, take delight in the linguistic unmasking of the proclaimed values of what they label "the establishment," and construct a privileged language all their own. Style is so terribly important because it relates so directly to self-hood. One's style is what one is, in a publicly demonstrable sense.

What is most directly at stake in contemporary public rhetoric is precisely life-style, or self-hood. In our present polarized society, to attack the life style of "the establishment" helps in the identification of one's own style. To defend one's life style publicly is, by implication, to attack the life styles of others who adhere to dissimilar styles. For those engaging in protest, to attempt to argue, convince, or plead in the style of "the establishment" is to be "co-opted" by "the establishment." I am emphasizing a point made by Edwin Black in his recent analysis of a portion of the discourse of the Radical Right. He concludes that we find in such rhetoric enticements not simply to believe something but to *be* something,³⁰ and Parke Burgess, when discussing the rhetoric of moral conflict, says:

The strategies and motives of any rhetoric...represents an invitation to a life-style, an invitation to adopt a pattern of strategies and motives, verbal and nonverbal, that determine how men and women will function together in culture.³¹

Blacks have repeatedly referred to linguistic style when they have disavowed white definitions of beauty, strength, and virtue and exhorted their black audiences to redefine themselves. Mark Rudd acknowledges linguistic style in a slightly different vein when he says: "'Up against the wall, motherfucker' defines the terms. It puts the administration and the interests they represent on one side, leftist students and the interests of humanity on the other."³² Women's Lib spokesmen are also cognizant of the definitive qualities of linguistic style. Recall Sally Kempton's warning, quoted above, about the dangers of allowing men to define women's existence. All of this points to a need for stylistic distance from the opposition in order to enhance one's self-hood. If one perceives that the linguistic devices of others are factors that reduce self-concept, it becomes imperative to reject those linguistic devices.

V

What can we now say about the rhetoric of protest? We can say that one of the major aspects of protest rhetoric is its concern for the ego. The concern is revealed both in the way the symbolic motif of personal confrontation is developed in rhetoric and in the emphasis on style. The particular stance from which the rhetoric springs, and which the rhetoric reinforces, yields the following advantages to protestors:

1. It encourages the maintenance of distance from an adversary. The results here are several-fold: the perceived adversary becomes a symbolic enemy, helpful in the process of purging the ills of self and in the process of identifying self by identifying against others; it also helps secure the self against the possibility of being co-opted by others. At the same time, it enhances self-identification by beckoning to kindred spirits who may provide the essential friendly "other" for self-establishment.
2. It aids in the protestor's definition of situation, and definition helps give one symbolic control. The reflexive aspect of protest rhetoric, in this sense, cannot be overestimated. Symbolic reconstruction of situation, which recasts the exigencies and individuals, with whom one cannot or does not want to cope, into images of "enemyness," allows one to reject them, flaunt them, strike out against them, and so gain some initiative of action.
3. The establishment of distance, referred to above, will generate attention and perhaps fear, or even grudging respect from the adversary. As Erving Goffman says, "The image that one status grouping is able to maintain in the eyes of an audience of other status groupings will depend upon the performer's capacity to restrict communicative contact with the audience."³³ As we have seen, protest rhetoric seems purposely to ignore the styles of communication that might result in meaningful communication with the establishment.
4. In a perverse kind of way, protest rhetoric and protest behavior can force the kind of counter-reaction which is ego-gratifying to some individuals. The exhilaration obtained from calling the "power structure": "fascists," "repressive," and "violent" is one thing. To experience the cracking of heads, to see the blood, to face the wall of bayonets, or to receive some milder kind of "bust" from the "establishment" is proof for some that their views of reality, their perspectives which focus toward the establishment of self-hood are

correct. The victory so obtained is symbolic, but nonetheless psychologically valid and important.

Counter-reaction is occurring, both physically and rhetorically. There are various motives for such physical reprisals as the moving of police to campuses or calling in the National Guard, ranging from sheer psychological frustration to attempts to save lives and property perceived to be threatened. But one factor which cannot be overlooked is the threat to self-hood felt by those who identify themselves and their ways of life with the institutions, mores, and folkways which are condemned by protestors.

It is easy to understand how individuals perceiving themselves, their life styles, their values threatened by an intensifying rhetoric of counter-identification become frightened by behaviors which disrupt their hitherto predictable world and sense the need to reassert themselves and to defend their own ego-identifications. Such persons would find comfort in knowing that they were not alone and powerless and insignificant in the face of what they view to be threatening situations. For such persons Richard Nixon's eulogistic references to the "Silent Majority" and the "quiet American" provide identifying labels. Mayor Richard Daley becomes a useful surrogate self; but perhaps Spiro Agnew best typifies the identifications of the "Silent American." As Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. pointed out, "It is cultural politics, and not public policy, which is the Vice-President's bag. He has emerged as hero, or villain, not in the battle of programs but in the battle of life styles."³⁴ Agnew takes self-proclaimed pride in such things as incentive, respect for law, and patriotism. He inveighs against the enemy: the "glib activist element who would tell us our values are lies," the "arrogant ones" who are "asking us to repudiate principles that have made this country great. Their course is one of applause for our enemies and condemnation for our leaders." Agnew calls for a "positive polarization" against "kooks," "demagogues," "cynics," "learned idiocy," and the "radical or criminal left," against the whole "effete corps of impudent snobs" "with their masochistic tendencies." Tit for tat, style for style, Agnew holds his own with the protestors. And the Silent American feels better. The hardhat Joe Kelly, whose profile appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* of June 28, 1970,³⁵ is energized and reaffirmed by the rhetorical stance of those who oppose protest movements.

VI

There are distinctive patterns in contemporary rhetoric which reflect a newly prominent personal stance. The peculiar characteristics and effects of this stance have not commonly received attention from students of rhetoric. Historically much of rhetorical and philosophical analysis and criticism tends to set "rhetorical discourse" within moral ideals which presuppose the principles of "rational" discussion. Such critical perspectives grant approbative notice to discourse which appears to coincide with the demands and constraints of "rationality" and disregard or deprecate discourse which falls outside these domains. My proposition is that analytical views which presuppose that "communicative intent" and "reasoning together" or even "feeling together" exhaust the primary goals of men's and women's serious discourse do not yield either useful or plausible descriptive and critical accounts of much current discourse. A chorus of "protest rhetoric" cannot be ignored; it is present, and its critical disclosure is required.

I hope this essay illustrates that consideration of the ego-functions of rhetoric can produce fruitful understandings of rhetorical transactions. Precisely *how* these understandings are best obtained and *why* ego-rewarding rhetoric seems "cacophonous" to others are topics that richly deserve the attention of philosophical rhetoricians and philosophers of rhetoric.

NOTES

I wish to thank Professor Carroll C. Arnold, Professor Gerard A. Hauser, A. Jackson McCormack, and Sara Pitzer, all of whom helped me to clarify the ideas presented here.

¹ The following studies are examples of the kinds of analysis referred to: James R. Andrews, "Confrontation at Columbia: A Case Study in Coercive Rhetoric," *QJS*, LV (February, 1969), 9-16; and "The Rhetoric of Coercion and Persuasion: The Reform Bill of 1832," *QJS*, LVI (April, 1970), 187-195; Franklyn Haiman, "The Rhetoric of the Streets: Some Legal and Ethical Considerations," *QJS*, LIII (April, 1967), 99-114; Arthur L. Smith, *Rhetoric of Black Revolution* (Boston, 1969); Herbert R. Simons, "Patterns of Persuasion in the Civil Rights Struggle," *Today's Speech*, XV (February, 1967) 25-27, and "Requirements, Problems, and Strategies: A Theory of Persuasion for Social Movements," *QJS*, LVI (February, 1970), 1-11; Robert L. Scott and Donald K. Smith, "The Rhetoric of Confrontation," *QJS*, LV (February, 1969), 1-8; Robert L. Scott and Wayne Brockreide, *The Rhetoric of Black Power* (New York, 1969); Parke G. Burgess, "The Rhetoric of Black Power: A Moral Demand?" *QJS*, LIV (April, 1968), 122-133; Robert D. Brooks, "Black Power: The Dimensions of a Slogan," *Western Speech*, XXXIV (Spring, 1970), 108-114;

Richard B. Gregg, A. Jackson McCormack, and Douglas J. Pedersen, "The Rhetoric of Black Power: A Street-Level Interpretation," *QJS*, LV (April 1969), 151-160.

² Carroll C. Arnold, "Oral Rhetoric, Rhetoric, and Literature," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 1 (Fall, 1968), 202-204.

³ For example, see Henry W. Johnstone, Jr., "Some Reflections on Argumentation" and Maurice Natanson, "The Claims of Immediacy," both in *Philosophy, Rhetoric and Argumentation* (University Park, Pennsylvania, 1965), ed. by Maurice Natanson and Henry W. Johnstone, Jr.

⁴ Don M. Burks, "Persuasion, Self-Persuasion, and Rhetorical Discourse," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 3 (Spring, 1970), 109-119. I do not see Burks' conceptualization in any way negating the dimensions of commitment and openness described by Arnold, cited above. Rather, when thinking of self-rhetoric, one simply needs to transpose the dimensions discussed by Arnold into the terms of an intra-personal transaction. Thus, one opens himself, in some fashion, to self-examination, to appeals and arguments to self, and even to rationalization and self-deception.

⁵ The term "constitutive," as I use it here, corresponds with Sesonske's discussion of constitutive speech. Alexander Sesonske, "Saying, Being, and Freedom of Speech," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 1 (January, 1968), 25-37. Sesonske points out that "... speech may be constitutive not merely in the sense of providing one way, among others, in which a certain state or character trait may be realized, but may be necessary for the occurrence of some traits of personality or character. That is, it is not merely that in talking a certain way one is being a person of a certain sort, but also that one cannot be a person of some sorts unless he talks in a certain way."

⁶ The text of the speech appears in *The Rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. by Haig A. and Hamida Bosmajian (New York, 1969), pp. 109-125.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁸ Malcolm X, "Message to the Grass Roots," in *Malcolm X Speaks*, ed. by George Breitman (New York, 1965), p. 7.

⁹ These remarks were made by Malcolm X during a debate with James Farmer at Cornell University on March 7, 1962. The transcript appears in *The Rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement*, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-87. The particular quotation cited appears on page 74.

¹⁰ "From the Port Huron Statement," in *The New Student Left*, ed. by Mitchell Cohen and Dennis Hale (Boston, 1967), p. 12.

¹¹ Mario Savio, "An End to History," in *The New Student Left*, p. 252.

¹² This statement comes from an editorial entitled "Non-Politics on the Battlefield," which appeared in the Harvard *Crimson*. Part of the editorial is reprinted in Steven Kelman, *Push Comes to Shove* (Boston, 1970), pp. 162-163.

¹³ *Newsweek*, March 23, 1970, p. 71.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁵ Quoted in Julie Ellis, *Revolt of the Second Sex* (New York, 1970), p. 53.

¹⁶ Sally Kempton, "Cutting Loose," *Esquire*, July, 1970, p. 54.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹⁸ Floyd McKissick, "Speech at the National Conference on Black Power," in *The Rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement*, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

¹⁹ *The Rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement*, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

²⁰ Carl Ogelsby, "Let Us Shape the Future," in *The New Student Left*, *op. cit.*, pp. 312-321.

²¹ Jerry L. Avorn, *et al.*, *Up Against the Ivy Wall* (New York, 1969), pp. 25-26.

²² Sally Kempton, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

²³ Quoted in *Revolt of the Second Sex*, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

²⁴ *The Rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement*, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

²⁵ Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet," in *Malcolm X Speaks*, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

²⁶ Quoted in Stephen Kelman, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

²⁷ Wayne C. Booth, "The Scope of Rhetoric Today," paper presented at the Wingspread Conference, National Project on Rhetoric, January 26, 1970.

²⁸ Ellis, *op. cit.*, pp. 44, 45.

²⁹ *Newsweek*, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

³⁰ Edwin Black, "The Second Persona," *QJS*, LVI (April, 1970), 119.

³¹ Parke Burgess, "The Rhetoric of Moral Conflict: Two Critical Dimensions," *QJS*, LVI (April, 1970), 120.

³² Mark Rudd, "Symbols of the Revolution," in Jerry L. Avorn, *et al.*, *Up Against the Ivy Wall*, *op. cit.*

³³ Irving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York, 1959), p. 241.

³⁴ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "The Amazing Success Story of 'Spiro Who?'" *The New York Times Magazine* (July 26, 1970), p. 5.

³⁵ Richard Rogin, "Joe Kelly Has Reached His Boiling Point," *The New York Times Magazine* (June 28, 1970) pp. 12-24.

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