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UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

ETHOS AND THE POLITICS OF HABIT:
CLASS, CHARACTER, AND COERCION IN
ARISTOTELIAN RHETORICS

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

DIANNE L. JUBY
Norman, Oklahoma
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ETHOS AND THE POLITICS OF HABIT:
CLASS, CHARACTER, AND COERCION IN
ARISTOTELIAN RHETORICS

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

BY

Kathleen E. Welch
Susan Laird
David O'Connell
John H. H. H.
David H. H.

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Abstract

This dissertation argues that a sociological definition of *ethos* as a signifier of hierarchized differences among classes or groups offers a productive expansion of Aristotle's rhetorical teaching on *ethos*. Mass/elite tensions in democratic Athens forced a renegotiation of aristocratic *ethos* by elite orators and provided the context for Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. The inadequacy of agent-centered, intentional models of Aristotle's rhetoric for contemporary theory can be partially resolved through an awareness of the class-demarcating function of *ethos* in contemporary culture.

Middle-class professional *ethos* has undergone significant shifts from the "personality market" described by Erich Fromm and C. Wright Mills to the postmodern knowledge worker or "symbolic analyst" described by Robert Reich. The composition classroom, long acknowledged as a training ground for the inculcation of middle-class *ethos*, has undergone an analogous shift as computer-mediated writing instruction encourages students to perform a postmodern *ethos*. In contemporary culture, *ethos* still functions to demarcate various classes of knowledge producers. Robert Merton's analysis of scientific *ethos*, while superseded by subsequent

sociology, still offers insights into the rhetorical strategies of scientists and humanists in the Sokal-*Social Text* affair.

***Ethos* and the Politics of Habit:
Class, Character, and Coercion in Aristotelian Rhetorics**

Introduction

In an early passage of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle identifies *ethos*, persuasion through character, as perhaps the most important element, or “controlling factor,” in persuasion. In the case of rhetoric, “where there is not exact knowledge but room for doubt,” an audience’s perception of the rhetor’s character takes on much greater persuasive significance than it does in the discursive realms of demonstration or dialectic, where, for Aristotle, the logical processes leading an audience or interlocutor through deductive chains of premises and conclusions makes the speaker’s character irrelevant. In this passage Aristotle also makes his claim that *ethos* “should result from the speech, not from a previous opinion that the speaker is a certain kind of person.” In twentieth-century rhetorical criticism, this imperative has been understood to distinguish Aristotle’s notion of *ethos* from those of his contemporaries, Plato and Isocrates.

Although Plato did not actually use the term *ethos* in conjunction with his critiques of rhetoric, from his insistence on ethical argument and language use we can infer a Platonic notion of *ethos*. For Plato, James Baumlin explains, *ethos* is based on a philosophical model of the self, “defined by the space where language and truth meet or are made incarnate within the individual,” and “premised on the moral and, ultimately, theological inseparability of the speaker-agent from the speech-act” (xiii). Isocrates responded to Plato’s attacks on unethical rhetorical practices by arguing that the practice of the art of rhetoric by the orator-statesman actually inculcated honorable values into his character, “for who does not know that words carry greater conviction when spoken by men of good repute . . . and that the argument which is made by a man’s life is of more weight than that which is furnished by words?” (*Antidosis* §278). For Aristotle, though, it is sufficient for persuasion that the rhetor *seems* to be of high character. Baumlin credits Aristotle with the development of a “social rhetoric” and a “sociolinguistic model” of discourse in which the speaker becomes, through the discursive representation of his character, an aspect of a socially shared language, rather than a separate intending consciousness standing outside of and originating that discourse (xvi–xvii).

Aristotle also specifies a social view when he explains the impact of the *ethe* of different groups on the rhetor. He instructs rhetors to understand “all forms of constitution [*politeia*] and to distinguish the customs and legal usages and advantages of each; for all people are persuaded by what is advantageous, and preserving the constitution is advantageous” (1.8.1–2). He briefly outlines the organization and “ends” of democratic, oligarchic, and aristocratic constitutions, adding that “one should distinguish customs and legal usages and benefits on the basis of the ‘end’ of each [type of constitution], since choices are made in reference to this.” Finally, arguing that *pisteis*, or elements of persuasion, come not only through logical demonstration “but from speech that reveals character,” rhetors “should be acquainted with the kinds of character [*ethe*] distinctive of each form of constitution; for the character distinctive of each is necessarily most persuasive to each” (1.8.4–5). Thus the rhetor should “reveal” through linguistic construction in the speech an *ethos* in accord with that of his audience.

Twentieth-century sociologists typically refer to William Graham Sumner’s 1906 *Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages*,

Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals, for a sociological definition of *ethos*.¹

In that text Sumner appropriates the Greek use of *ethos*, defining it as “the sum of the characteristic usages, ideas, standards, and codes by which a group was differentiated and individualized in character from other groups. ‘Ethics’ were things which pertained to the ethos and therefore the things which were the standard of right” (36–37). Twentieth-century sociologists have, in adopting this definition, understood *ethos* as a reflection of the demarcation of classes or groups. Although “ethica” in this Greek sense, Sumner claims, would be an appropriate name for the work he undertakes, he chooses the Latin “mores” because of its greater familiarity and practical convenience. Through his investigation into mores, or *ethos*, Sumner hoped to rescue the social sciences from the domination of philosophical perspectives on morality, or ethics:

Ethics, having lost connection with the ethos of a people, is an attempt to systematize the current notions of right and wrong upon some basic principle, generally with the purpose of establishing

¹ In the sociological literature *ethos* is typically not italicized, since it has been absorbed into the English lexicon. However, I italicize *ethos* throughout to emphasize not only its appropriation from classical Greek, but its status as a keyword with polysemic complexities that are undermined, for rhetorical theory, by attempts at precise translation.

morals on an absolute doctrine, so that it shall be universal, absolute, and everlasting . . . [These methods] help to hold the social sciences under the dominion of metaphysics. (37)

Sumner locates the roots of these philosophical approaches to ethics in Greek philosophy, thus marking a split between sociological and philosophical notions of *ethos* similar to the division Baumlin outlines between Aristotelian and Platonic notions. In contemporary composition theory, competing appropriations of *ethos* perpetuate this division: the social view emphasizes the development of effective *ethos* through socialization into a particular discourse community and the adoption of its mores as a way to make one's discourse credible, while another school emphasizes *ethos* as "authentic voice," reflecting "the moral and ultimately, theological inseparability of the speaker-agent from the speech-act" that Baumlin traces to Plato.

While the three chapters that follow are grounded in a social perspective on *ethos*, they pursue two themes that have been neglected in much of the research and theory on discourse communities. I am interested, first, in the coerciveness of the audience's role, a view that complicates both the agent-centered appropriation of Aristotle (in which it is the rhetor who coerces the audience) and the dialogical or social

constructionist appropriation (in which rhetor and audience communicate via a shared set of values or agreed-upon premises). Secondly, I focus on the class-demarcating function of *ethos* that undermines dialogical appropriations of Aristotle. Much of the important rhetoric and composition scholarship on the workings of discourse communities focus on *internal* analysis, that is, on the rhetorical practices that a particular group shares within its own group boundaries. I am interested, rather, in *external* analysis that examines how *ethos* functions to bolster the authority of a particular group or class for a public audience when one discourse community finds itself in conflict with other groups and its status, relative to other groups, threatened.

Addressing the coercive power of the group, Sumner emphasizes the dominion of the mores over the individual:

They bring to him codes of action, standards, and rules of ethics.

They have a model of the man-as-he-should-be to which they mold him, in spite of himself and without his knowledge. If he submits and consents, he is taken up and may attain great social success. If he resists and dissents, he is thrown out and may be trodden under foot.

The mores are therefore an engine of social selection. Their coercion

of the individual is the mode in which they operate the selection, and the details of the process deserve study. (173–74).

Although a postmodern view of the audience-rhetor relationship deconstructs the social/individual binary that Sumner relies on in this passage, the essentially coercive nature of that relationship is still evident. For example, in his chapter on “Poststructuralism, Social Constructionism, and Audience as Community,” James Porter writes: “the community provides speaking and writing roles for its members— an *ethos* in other words. The ‘individual person’ who wishes to ‘identify’ with the community adopts the role provided” (81–82). This view also “grants the audience considerable power in the production of discourse; the audience is a ‘discourse community’ constraining, defining, and in effect creating the writer. ‘The writer’ is a role, a subject position, constituted by community constraints” (83).

Porter goes on to draw distinctions between the sociological notion of discourse community that assumes “a realist perspective” on actual sociological groups and a poststructuralist view that “sees the discourse community not as an a priori sociological group but as a set of local practices or paradigms defined by discourse” (86). In what follows I have proceeded on the assumption that this is a distinction without a difference:

I find in Aristotle an understanding of *ethos* that is tied both to “local practices defined by discourse” and to materially enacted habits that extend beyond their textuality. Porter critiques the sociological view by arguing that it simply substitutes the “group” for the “writer” in an agent-centered, management communication model, and that from this perspective “we have not changed our attitude toward the audience much, and we still do not have a model accounting for the influence of the social on the rhetor” (90). On the contrary, it is my contention that sociological perspectives on *ethos* and character have offered such a model for a long time; rhetoricians simply have yet to appropriate it.

In Chapter One, “Habit, Topoi, and Audience in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*,” I begin by addressing contemporary responses to Aristotle’s rhetorical theory that dismiss him as an elitist teaching elite rhetors to manipulate audiences with the enthymeme and emotional ploys in a monological communication model. Opponents of this view argue that Aristotle’s rhetorical theory is in fact dialogical, based in a social view of rhetorical invention that understands communication within the shared context and common cultural values of rhetor and audience. Both monological and dialogical views of Aristotle’s rhetorical theory, however, undervalue his notion of *ethos*.

I argue that *ethos* cannot be understood as simply as the monological/ dialogical debate would have it, and suggest that Aristotle's discussion of *ethos* evokes a more problematic relationship between elite rhetors and the politically empowered demos to whom they presented their arguments. Rather than *ethos* simply functioning as another strategic tool in an agent-centered intentional model, or as a reflection of the shared communal values of the dialogical model, I argue that Aristotle's notion of *ethos* is more adequately understood in sociological terms as the sum of habits that demarcate one group or class from another, and is therefore contextually bound to the ideological tensions between mass and elite in fourth century Athens. The relationship between *ethos* and habit in Aristotle's rhetorical, political, and ethical treatises suggests that Aristotle understood habit as an indicator of class; thus the etymological connections between *ethos* as "character" and *ethos* as "habit" are essential to understanding Aristotle's theory of *ethos*. By defining *ethos* as the politics of habit, I read Sumner's understanding of *ethos* as the collection of traits, values, and mores that distinguish or demarcate one social class from another through a rhetorical lens. Thus I argue that the *ethe* of social groups or classes are constructed in order to establish or maintain a demarcation from other classes or communities with which they are in

present or potential conflict, and that appropriations of the classical notion of *ethos* by contemporary rhetoricians can be enhanced by historical and sociological perspectives on those classes.

In Chapter Two, “The Managed Character: *Ethos* and Work at the End of the Twentieth Century,” I turn to contemporary notions of *ethos* and character that sparked sociological analyses of the middle-class worker in this century. I begin with the mid-century fascination with middle-class character as evidenced in classic works such as David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*, and C. Wright Mills’ *White Collar: The American Middle Classes*. It has long been acknowledged that middle-class values provide the characterological grounding for freshman writing classes; however, even theoretically sophisticated composition textbooks that deploy classical terminology present *ethos* in terms of the agent-centered strategic and intentional model, teaching students that the rhetorical choices they make affect their audience as in the monologic interpretation of Aristotle. Students are taught to present an *ethos* in their texts that will be acceptable to their middle-class professors and to prepare them for the successful performance of *ethos* when they are on the job. Needless to say, learning to persuasively deploy the topoi of

middle-class *ethos* is more difficult for non-middle-class students than for those who have long been socialized to those norms.

I also analyze in Chapter Two how computer-mediated composition reflects broad cultural changes in what counts as acceptable *ethos* in a late twentieth-century workplace that has itself been radically transformed by electronic writing practices. I use former Labor Secretary Robert Reich's category of "symbolic analyst" to describe what has become a new middle class of postmodern knowledge workers, and examine popular management literature to develop a list of topoi from which the *ethos* of that class is constructed. The "management revolution" has superseded the older mid-century notion of middle-class *ethos* and has adjusted postmodern *ethos* to the needs of a high-tech economy. This *ethos* is reflected not only in computer-mediated classrooms, but in broader postmodern reforms in humanities curricula in general, assuring the affective and characterological education of knowledge workers for the needs of a new economy. In particular, Lester Faigley's discussion of his computer-mediated classroom reflects the so-called "radical democratizing" of the workplace, and an online discussion among computer classroom teachers demonstrates the coercive nature of this pedagogical medium, despite claims that it democratizes and decenters the classroom.

In Chapter Three, “Demarcating Science: *Ethos* and Knowledge Production in the Science Wars,” I look at the demarcation of science from other realms of knowledge-making through the sociological lens of Robert Merton’s analysis of scientific *ethos*. Porter, in the same chapter discussed above, examines the scientific community as an important example that highlights his problems with the “realist” sociological model of discourse communities, using Foucault’s work to make his case:

Foucault’s work leads us to ask such questions as, why does ‘science’ constitute itself as such, giving itself a separate status under the rubric ‘science’? What function does the signifier ‘science’ serve for authors who claim the role of ‘scientist’? . . . [Science is] a signifier with a certain rhetorical purpose, exercising certain dividing strategies (science versus what? literature? humanities? culture?).

(91–92)

The demarcation of science from other spheres of activity is a theme with a long history in philosophy and sociology of science. Merton’s analysis of scientific *ethos*, written in 1942, reflects my dual focus on coercion and conflict in social models of the audience/rhetor relationship. He recognizes the coercive power of *ethos* in his description of the norms, or mores, of science as “prescriptions, proscriptions, preferences, and permissions,”

imperatives that constrain scientists' representations of themselves and of science itself. He also understands *ethos* as a demarcation strategy that enhances science's methodological and epistemological privileges when the status of scientific knowledge is threatened by attacks from outside groups. This chapter examines the deployment of scientific *ethos* in two public disputes over the epistemic privilege of science: the *McLean v. Arkansas* case, in which scientific *ethos* successfully functioned to deny scientific status to creation-scientists, and the Alan Sokal-*Social Text* affair, in which scientists and their supporters again rely on scientific *ethos* to fortify the class boundaries defiled by incursions from humanists and sociologists.

Chapter One

Habit, Topoi, and Audience in Aristotle's Theory of *Ethos*

Introduction

The championing, debunking, and rethinking of classical Greek rhetorical theories have been prominent concerns of rhetoric and composition scholars since the beginnings of their discipline in the early 1960s. Although this work has focused on a variety of issues, one recurrent theme has been the relationship between the Greek development of rhetorical theory and emerging forms of democratic political institutions. Interpretations of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* that form the background for this chapter have ranged from a recuperation of Aristotelian rhetorical theory as dialogical and hence reflective of his rhetoric as participatory and democratic, to harsh critiques of his essentially elitist goal of teaching aristocratic rhetors to control monologically the mass audience that held nominal political power in democratic Athens.

This chapter examines Aristotle's notion of *ethos* and its role in the ideological webs that structured the conflicted politics of mass and elite in

fourth century BCE Athens. I begin by reviewing two analyses of the anti-democratic tendencies in the *Rhetoric*: James Berlin's "Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in Context: Interpreting Historically" and Arthur Walzer's "Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Dialogism, and Contemporary Research in Composition." I then focus on two issues that are important in my attempt to rehistoricize Aristotle's insistence that *ethos* be an effect only of the speech itself, not of the rhetor's previous reputation, position of authority, or habits of life. First, using arguments by twentieth-century communications and classics scholars, I complicate the monological and dialogical interpretations of Aristotle as explained by Berlin and Walzer by demonstrating the close connection that Aristotle makes between character and habits and the role of habits in constructing *ethos*. With this connection in mind, I then examine the function of Aristotle's epideictic topoi in establishing character within the ideological webs that structure the habits and practices of elite statesmen-orators in democratic Athens. By understanding these topoi as both linguistic markers of *ethos* and as material practices (habits) that demarcate one social class from another, I complicate traditional rhetorical notions of topoi with a sociological perspective on *ethos*, and argue that Aristotle's separation of the linguistic markers of *ethos* in public address

from their manifestation in material relations results from his politicized, class-based understanding of the role of habit in the development of *arete*.

The Elitism of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*

Aristotle opposed democracy, particularly in those extreme forms which, he claimed, bred demagogues who pandered to the debased desires of the demos. Barry Strauss's analysis of the *Politics* concludes that Aristotle "considered the kind of democracy that existed in most of the Greek *poleis* of his day— what he calls in the *Politics* the most recent (*neotate*), last (*hystate*), final (*teleutaia*) or extreme (*eschate*) democracy—to be undisciplined, lawless, despotic, vulgar, hostile to the upper classes, and likely to be unstable" (213).

A notoriously conflicted text, the *Rhetoric* functioned to teach elite future orators strategies for speaking to mass audiences. Although elitist in its ideology, it does, then, make necessary concessions to democracy. In "Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in Context: Interpreting Historically," James Berlin argues that the conflicted and competing perspectives contained in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* have fueled diverse rationalist, social constructionist,

elitist, and democratic interpretations of his rhetorical theory.² These competing appropriations by twentieth-century rhetoric scholars engaged in contemporary ideological battles are made possible not only because their readings, like all readings, are culturally and ideologically situated, but, Berlin claims, because the political conflicts of Aristotle's century are inscribed within the text itself in ways that Aristotle does not neatly resolve. Teaching rhetoric in an Athenian polis that had extended the franchise to all native-born adult males, Aristotle instructed elite future orators who were likely committed to reinstating a modified oligarchy or who were reactionaries in favor of monarchy. As a "conflicted response to its own conflicted moment," the *Rhetoric*, Berlin claims, stands as evidence that "Aristotle remains committed to an elitist politics while offering enough contradictory concessions to the democratic polis to give support to those who later appropriate him in the service of an egalitarian rhetoric" (56). While I agree that a wholesale democratic appropriation of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is untenable, Berlin's claim that his rhetorical theory is grounded in a monologic model of communication between rhetor and audience is

² I would add "sexist" to Berlin's list of competing interpretations.

oversimplified, particularly in regard to Berlin's analysis of *ethos*.³

Berlin traces some of the well-known passages in the *Rhetoric* regarding the inability of an audience made up of ordinary citizens to grasp an intricately logical argument and their preference for sophistic appeals to their emotions, noting that these passages are contradicted elsewhere. For instance, Aristotle appears to appeal to the Athenian belief in the superiority of the mass decision-making process when he writes that "humans have a natural disposition for the true and to a large extent hit on the truth" (*Rhetoric* 1.1.11; Berlin 62). The same conflict, Berlin argues, arises in Aristotle's discussion of *ethos*. Six of the eight *topoi* that Aristotle lists for the construction of a praiseworthy character are qualities, Berlin writes, "that derive from birth, wealth, and extensive education [and are] exemplified through the wise management of one's money and possessions."⁴ The passage under analysis is from Chapter One, Book

³ It should be noted that Berlin devoted very little of his influential and valuable scholarship to classical rhetoric. I use this particular article here because it offers a compact description of the monological interpretation of the *Rhetoric*, and his trenchant critique of Aristotle's elitism provides a useful introduction to my own argument. For a more detailed analysis of Berlin's version of classical rhetoric, see Welch, 52–59.

⁴ *Topoi*, "places," is generally understood to refer to the "places" in memory (or, later, in written catalogues) where lines of argument are stored and made available for rhetorical invention. The precise nature and function of Aristotle's twenty-eight *koinoi* (common) *topoi* for the construction of enthymemes in *Rhetoric* Book 2, Chapter 23, and their relationship to the dialectical *topoi* in his *Topics* have long been the subject of scholarly discussion. Aristotle also distinguishes *koinoi topoi*, applicable to any discourse, from *idia*

Nine of the *Rhetoric*, where Aristotle lists the epideictic *topoi* (and their opposites) for constructing praiseworthy (and blameworthy) character in speeches:

Now virtue [*arete*] is an ability, as it seems, that is productive and preservative of goods, and an ability for doing good in many and great ways, actually in all ways in all things. The parts of virtue are justice, manly courage, self-control, magnificence, magnanimity, liberality, gentleness, prudence, and wisdom. Since virtue is defined as an ability for doing good, the greatest virtues are necessarily those most useful to others. For that reason people most honor the just and the courageous; for the latter is useful to others in war, and the former in peace as well. Next is liberality; for the liberal make contributions freely and do not quarrel about the money, which others care most about. Justice is a virtue by which all, individually,

topoi, arguments applicable to specific disciplines, such as physics or ethics. The term *koinoi topoi*, as “common topics,” has also been, perhaps problematically, identified with the Latin *loci communes* and Vico’s *sensus communis*. However, Aristotle uses “*topoi*” in this more general sense in *Rhetoric* 3.19.1 regarding the conclusion of speeches, where he teaches that the *ethos* of the speaker should again be emphasized: “One should aim at showing one or the other of two things: either that the speaker is a good man in terms of the issues or that he is good generally; or either that the opponent is a bad man in terms of the issues or that he is bad generally. The *topoi* from which such characterizations are derived have been discussed” (i.e., in the section of Book 1, Chapter 9 that I quote here). My use of “*topoi*” in the discussion to follow reflects Aristotle’s more general use of the term in this passage.

have what is due to them and as the law required; and injustice [is a vice] by which they have what belongs to others and not as the law requires. Manly courage [is a virtue] by which people perform fine actions in times of danger and as the law orders and obedient to the law, and cowardice is the opposite. Self-control is the virtue through which people behave as the law orders in regard to the pleasures of the body, and lack of control [is] the opposite. Liberality is the disposition to do good with money, illiberality the opposite. Magnanimity is a virtue productive of great benefits [for others], and magnificence is a virtue in expenditures, productive of something great, while little-mindedness and stinginess are the opposites. Prudence is a virtue of intelligence whereby people are able to plan well for happiness in regard to the good and bad things that have been mentioned earlier. (1.9.4–13)

I have quoted this section of the *Rhetoric* in its entirety because it will figure heavily in my later discussion. Here it will suffice to note that Berlin concludes, based on his reading of these topoi, that the construction of a credible or praiseworthy *ethos* “requires membership in a privileged social class,” the class for which Aristotle’s rhetorical training offered the means to control an unruly and ill-educated demos. Recognizing the political

power of the demos and the improbability of an aristocratic coup, Aristotle provided his elite audience with discursive strategies “designed to render hegemonic the ideology of a rich and politically ambitious elite.” Berlin even suggests a parallel between the function of modern mass media and Aristotle’s recognition of the power of discourse to ideologically control the demos (63).

Berlin does not explore or explain, however, why the Athenian demos would find an elite *ethos* compelling enough to continue voting in favor of orators who presented themselves in these aristocratic terms. His notion of these elite discursive strategies provided by Aristotle invokes a problematic understanding of ideology as false consciousness imposed from above onto the masses, and an understanding of Aristotle’s rhetoric as a theory of coercive control of a passive audience in a system of one-way communication. Such an imposition of a twentieth-century understanding of the technocratic control of mass ideology in representative democracies by powerful media elites is not applicable to Aristotle’s century, when mass audiences had the opportunity to immediately respond to verbal constructions of elite *ethos* not only through catcalls and inattention in the assembly and courts, but also through the direct democratic process of voting immediately on their deliberative proposals and forensic arguments.

Arthur Walzer makes an argument similar to Berlin's in "Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Dialogism, and Contemporary Research in Composition."

Walzer contextualizes his claim that the goal of Aristotle's rhetoric is audience control by first debunking the arguments for a dialogical interpretation. According to Walzer, contemporary claims that Aristotle's rhetorical theory is dialogical are based on a misunderstanding of Lloyd Bitzer's classic essay, "Aristotle's Enthymeme Revisited." In that essay, Bitzer offered a new analysis of the enthymeme as an inferential structure that requires an audience to supply missing premises by drawing on "common cultural beliefs" that the rhetor has tacitly assumed. This analysis, according to Walzer, has been improperly deployed by contemporary composition scholars to argue that, if the enthymeme requires the participation of the audience, however passive that participation may be, then Aristotle's *Rhetoric* presents a dialogical understanding of persuasive discourse.

Walzer on the contrary makes a case for a monological Aristotelian rhetoric, one whose goal is the control of audience response rather than equal, dialogic participation from it. Echoing Berlin's comparison to modern mass media, Walzer calls on modern advertising as a parallel instance of Aristotle's focus on controlling the audience. He agrees with the

dialogical interpretations that, certainly, Aristotle's rhetoric "assumes that the audience's needs influence the message," but sees little room for true dialogism in that concession, since the monologic and control-driven discourse of modern advertising assumes the same thing, drawing on "common cultural assumptions" and audience beliefs while promoting a speaker-audience relationship that is "directive and unilateral, not interactive and reciprocal" (49–50). Walzer concludes that in the *Rhetoric* there is no ambiguity concerning the rhetor's relationship with the audience: "The influence is one-way, and the speaker seeks to control the response and direct the judgment of a . . . cognitively limited audience" (51).

Walzer's essay limits the possibilities for understanding the relationship between rhetor and audience in Aristotle to two options: either the relationship is a dialogic, mutually interactive one based on the cultural assumptions shared between rhetor and audience (and a misreading of Bitzer), or it is a manipulative, control-driven relationship based on the rhetor's strategic deployment of those same cultural assumptions. I propose in this chapter another option unexamined by Walzer and ignored by Berlin. Rather than the rhetor controlling the audience, it is the audience, I suggest, through its demand for a credible *ethos* from the rhetor, that

coerces *him* into conforming to *its habits*.⁵ This relationship is a complex one, ideologically structuring the tensions between mass and elite in fourth century Athens. Given Aristotle's critique of democracy and his recognition of the relationship between habit and *ethos*, this power of the demos to coerce the orator-statesman into conformity to its own inferior habits creates a tension in Aristotle's theory of *ethos*. It will be necessary to begin by examining the relationship between *ethos* and habit, a thorny problem for elite teachers of rhetoric like Aristotle. The relationship between *ethos* and habit created an "ethical" problem in the political context of Athenian democracy and led Aristotle to insist that *ethos* be an effect only of the speech, not of the rhetor's previously established reputation.

Ethos and Habit

Both monological and dialogical appropriations of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* neglect the rich ambiguities associated with the keyword *ethos*. To briefly outline several interpretations of Aristotle's notion of *ethos* in this

⁵ Since my discussion in this chapter confines itself to Aristotle's context of public speech-making in fourth century Athens, I use the masculine pronoun in its specific, not generic, sense.

century, providing a background for my definition of *ethos* as the politics of habit, I begin somewhat arbitrarily with William Sattler. In his 1947 contribution to the ongoing controversy among rhetoric scholars over the precise denotation of *ethos*, Sattler maintains that an overly precise definition would only preclude the productive ambiguity of the word. *Ethos*, he argues, did not have “a single and standard meaning among ancient classical writers” but was rather “of complex and somewhat fluid, or at least changing, denotation.” His own definitions waver between the sociological notion of the *ethos* of a group or class and the rhetorical notion of *ethos* as conscious, strategy-driven choices made by rhetors in individual speech acts. Citing William Graham Sumner’s 1906 *Folkways*, Sattler defines *ethos* in essentially sociological terms as the “totality of characteristic traits,” suggesting that the term easily slides toward denoting “ethical argument,” since “customs of any class or society are obviously given a stamp of approval” (55).

He does seem to recognize, in a limited way, the connection between *ethos* and social hierarchy. Drawing on the etymological branch of *ethos* meaning “habits” and following Sumner’s lead, Sattler claims that in its early manifestations *ethos* denotes “usages, habits, and traditions of one social group as distinguished from another” (55). Shifting from his

sociological focus to a rhetorical one, he notes Aristotle's recognition of the power of custom: "the speaker who conforms to the *ethos* of the class—who likes what we like— will be highly regarded" (59). But Sattler stops here, without exploring the implications of this intersection of a sociological definition with a rhetorical one. The sociological definition of *ethos* as "usages, habits, and traditions of one social group as distinguished from another" suggests that *ethos* bears some essential function in relation to a larger cultural process of manifesting, maintaining, and reproducing the distinctions or demarcations between social groups or classes. *Ethos* as class-demarcating habits, then, creates a greater problem for the would-be rhetor whose discourse attempts to cross class lines, as was the case for the elite orator of democratic Athens, than would *ethos* as a technical choice of, say, which ethical topoi to deploy in a speech addressed to class cohorts with shared habits. Aristotle, I argue below, was well aware of this problem, for the rhetorical training recorded in the *Rhetoric* was addressed to students who belonged to a social group that was clearly demarcated from the group making up the rhetorical audience.

Twenty years after Sattler's discussion appeared, Thomas Corts criticized his definition, arguing that problems arise because of Sattler's confusion of two "distantly related" Greek words: *ethos*, which means

custom or habit, and *ἦθος*, which means custom, disposition, character, or bearing. The second of these is the word used by Aristotle to denote one of the three *pisteis*. According to Corts, Sattler makes a “strained comparison” to “folkways” that conflates these separate Greek words, and complains that this kind of “inaccurate transliteration is responsible for a nebulous understanding of ancient rhetoricians’ concept of *ethos*” (201). Sattler makes “dubious etymological generalizations” that “fog a distinction made by writers of antiquity” (202). Corts’s argument that *εθος*, meaning habits, is morally neutral, while *ἦθος* carries connotations of right and wrong, is intended to create as wide a gulf as possible between these two terms. This moralizing position leads him to urge rhetoric scholars to “emphasize the positive moral quality of *ἦθος*, rather than the behavioral neutrality of its sister term which is not vital to ancient rhetoric” (202). This plea stands, it seems to me, in contradiction to Corts’s own quotation of Plato’s *Laws* (792e), where Plato states that *ἦθος* is the result of *εθος*, character is the result of habit. Corts cites this passage to show that the ancients made a clear distinction between these terms, but Plato hardly seems to insist on the moral neutrality of *εθος* if it is so integrally connected to the formation of (moral) character. Corts seems to miss Plato’s and Sattler’s point that,

although perhaps distinct, the terms definitely share a meaningful relationship which we can interrogate and productively exploit as a rich ambiguity. By arguing for monovocal meanings of both *εθος* and *ηθος*, Corts attempts to restrict the polysemy of their multiple meanings and intersections to a narrow philosophical understanding of *ethos* as “ethical argument,” with a philosophical notion of ethical virtue attached to it. Hence the possibilities nascent in Sattler’s sociological definition and in his rhetorical definition are precluded, as well as any fruitful analysis of the interconnected relationship between them. By insisting on the “moral neutrality” of *εθος*, he also precludes any further probing into Sattler’s sociological recognition that these habits, and constructions of character based on them, are deeply marked by class. In light of his plea for a narrow ethical understanding of *ethos* (*ηθος*) that excludes any consideration of habit (*εθος*), Corts claims that the meaning of *εθος* “may be subsumed under *ηθος*, but *ηθος* will not bear the converse relationship” (201 n.1).

I disagree. The *ηθος* that Aristotle used for one of the three entechnic *pisteis* certainly *can* bear the converse relationship: *ηθος* as character can be subsumed under *εθος* as habit. Corts would disapprove of my transliteration *ethos* since it does not distinguish between *ηθος* and

ἔθος. I persist in my orthography, minus diacritical markers to distinguish the eta and epsilon, for precisely this reason, to maintain what I argue is the relevant ambiguity and productive polysemy.

In 1974, Arthur B. Miller, complicating Sattler's discussion of habit (ἔθος, which he transliterates *ethos*) and character (ἦθος, which he transliterates *eethos*), disagrees with Corts's position that ἔθος carries no moral importance. Miller opens with a passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics* in which Aristotle states that "ἠθικὴ⁶ is the product of habit (ἔθος), and has indeed derived its name, with a slight variation of form, from that word" (2.1.1). Relying on Aristotle's own etymology to argue that both *eethikee* and *eethos* are derived from *ethos* (habit), Miller even claims that, some differences of nuance notwithstanding, a "basic consubstantiality" exists between *eethos* and *ethos* (309). His point is that, for Aristotle, "when one portrays character (*eethos*) he does it best by showing its origin in habit and disposition" (311). Miller's argument thus raises the issue of the relationship between *ethos* and the *topoi* from which it is constructed, which I return to in a later section of this chapter.

⁶ *Ethike*, problematically rendered as "moral or ethical virtue" here by Miller. But cf. W. D. Ross's translation, which uses "moral excellence," and explains in a footnote: "'Moral', here and hereafter, is used in the archaic sense of 'pertaining to character or *mores*'."

In many ways the most provocative of these essays, certainly the most useful for understanding the cultural baggage that circulated with connotations of *ηθος* before Aristotle, Charles Chamberlain's "From 'Haunts' to 'Character': The Meaning of *Ethos* and its Relation to Ethics," delves into uses of *ηθος* before the fifth century BCE. According to Chamberlain, the word appears three times in Homer, each time in reference to animals and the "arena or range in which the animal naturally belongs" (97). Chamberlain cites a particularly useful passage from the *Iliad*:

As when a stabled horse, having been fed at a manger, breaks his bonds and runs galloping over the plain, since he is accustomed [*eiiothos*—habituated] to bathe in the flowing river, glorying. He holds his head high, and his mane leaps on his shoulders on both sides. His knees swiftly bear him, trusting in his splendor, to the *ethea* and pasture of horses. (*Iliad* 6.506–11, qtd in Chamberlain 98)

As Chamberlain explains, in the manger, humans manipulate the horse, through its hunger, in an attempt to domesticate it, to rehabilitate it, to change its habits to serve human ends. When released from the bonds of this "second nature," the horse returns to earlier *habits* to which he is more strongly accustomed than he is to the habits of the manger. This power of

his previous, “first nature” habituation (*eiothos*), Chamberlain writes, “is too strong to be overcome” (98). Chamberlain goes on to explain that, “for later Greeks at least, animals differed from humans in having no share in *logos*, ‘reason,’ or what we might call the principle of order” (98). However, he argues, the horse in Homer’s simile clearly *does* follow some principle of order by returning to its *ethea*, which is not simply a random place or set of habits. Animals, Homer seems to suggest, demonstrate some measure of *logos* because they, like humans, are susceptible to the ordering process of habituation which, we shall see, ultimately functions to keep them— or put them— “in their place.” I will return to the close connection between *logos* and *ethos* below.

Chamberlain goes on to discuss uses of *ethos* in Hesiod and Theognis, where some significant developments occur. In Hesiod, for example, *ethos* is “now applied to human beings, made singular, and used in a derogatory sense” (98). Theognis, too, sees *ethos* “as potentially bad or deceptive” (99). In other words, *ethos* as habit becomes entangled in the pre-Socratic fascination with appearance and reality, as the following verse from Theognis indicates:

Many who have a tricky and counterfeit *ethos* hide it and put on a temporary show of desire. But time shows forth the *ethos* of all

these. I too made a great mistake in judgment: I praised you before learning your *ethea* thoroughly. But now like a ship I steer clear.

(qtd in Chamberlain 99)

Chamberlain avoids reading these uses of *ethos* and *ethea* as “character.”

Instead, he claims, “*ethos* refers to the range or arena where someone is most truly at home and which underlies all the fine appearances that people adopt” (99). As I explain in the next section, this understanding of *ethos* as deeply entrenched habits related to one’s “place” is congruent with Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of habitus. Chamberlain argues for an essential similarity between this *ethea* of the false friend and the Homeric horse’s old *ethea* and pasture: just as the horse is unaffected by attempts to rehabilitate it in the stable, so too is the false friend unchanged by the pleasing, artful *ethos* he adopts for purposes of temporary gain. Similarly, Pindar writes: “The fox and the lion could not exchange their innate *ethos*” (qtd in Chamberlain 100). Like the horse and the false friend, *ethos* in this context seems to be unchangeable, highly resistant to reconstructive attempts, an “unreachable essence” (100).

On the other hand, Chamberlain offers a few textual examples from ancient sources which suggest that *ethea* can be affected through education, although only to a limited extent. Concerning gender, for instance, an

occurrence in Hesiod advises a man to marry a young woman, so that he may “teach her shrewd *ethea*,” concerning barbarians, the Ethiopians, after “learning Egyptian *ethea*,” are then considered to be more civilized; and Salmoxis, a Thracian slave of Pythagoras, acquired “deeper *ethea*” than other Thracians because of his habituation to Greek culture. Although Chamberlain almost treats these instances as anomalies, I would argue that they are highly significant for demonstrating the evolution of *ethos* into a signifier of the hierarchized differences among political or socially classed groups of humans, with the attendant suggestion that the *habits* exhibited by members of those groups, whether inculcated by elite education or through the socialization practices of uneducated classes, become essential to their natures and virtually unchangeable.

Ethos and Ideology

Habits make a second nature. This long-lived maxim has roots in Aristotle’s ethical treatises and makes a cameo appearance in the *Rhetoric*. In its Aristotelian guise, the maxim suggests that the control of an (elite) agent over his habitual actions will result in *arete*, if proper habits are inculcated at an early age and continually practiced as a conscious, rational choice-making process. In the twentieth century, the power of rationally

chosen and practiced habits to construct a praiseworthy *ethos* has been appropriated by management theorists in such texts as Steven Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. These folk philosophies for the businessman and woman derive from an Aristotelian theory of aristocratic character. I discuss them in Chapter Two.

The maxim also appears, with different consequences, in Hegelian and Marxist traditions that deny agents conscious choice-making control over their *ethos*. In traditions that define ideology as mystification leading to the false consciousness of oppressed groups, habits of mind, institutional practices, and relations of production create a "second nature" that alienates the potential agent from his "first nature," from an awareness of the real relations of production that oppress him. In "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," Georg Lukács argues that Marx's analysis shows how the commodity structure *conceals* "every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people" (83). That is, the relationship between ideology and relations of production requires practices that *hide* a "first nature." With the advent of modern capitalism, "the commodity become[s] crucial for the subjugation of men's consciousness . . . and for their attempts to comprehend the process or to rebel against its disastrous effects and liberate themselves from servitude to

the 'second nature' so created" (86). Like the domesticated, stabled horse that is rehabilitated to serve its master's ends, ideology as false consciousness presupposes the possibility of liberation and a return to a "first nature."

Departing from traditions of ideology as "false consciousness," Louis Althusser defines ideology as a necessary medium through which human subjects are interpellated and produced. Ideology becomes a structure that is in many ways imposed upon us unconsciously, a structure which we "live" as habitual behaviors, "actions inserted into practices" that "are governed by the rituals in which these practices are inscribed . . . a small mass in a small church, a funeral, a minor match at a sports' club, a school day, a political party meeting, etc." (168). Hence we live "naturally" in ideology: "man is an ideological animal by nature," and, "[a]s St Paul admirably put it, it is in the 'Logos,' meaning in ideology, that we 'live, move and have our being'" (171). Rather than false consciousness as "second nature," ideology here is simply "first nature." Althusser's use of "Logos" resonates with Chamberlain's analysis of the Homeric horse: the "liberated" horse follows a *logos*, or principle of order, by returning to its *ethea*, the habits with which it feels most at home.

Similarly, Bourdieu's explanation of habitus emphasizes structures that inculcate particular habits into subjects, but Bourdieu highlights habitus as a class marker:

The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures. (72)

The colligation of habits, or disposition, is inculcated and performed, as in earlier Marxist traditions, largely unconsciously: habitus is regulated without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor. (72)

Bourdieu's rejection of strategic agency does not proclaim a simplistic determinism here: habitus does provide subjects with various strategies or "regulated improvisations," but "without being the product of a genuine strategic intention" (73). Habitus functions as a cultural unconscious, constructing, I suggest, a *logos* of *ethos*, as for Chamberlain's Homeric

horse. Humans, too, are susceptible to an ordering principle that seems “natural” (*logos*), and *ethos*, the collection of habits inscribed by that ordering principle, becomes a signifier of hierarchized differences between differently habituated classes. Bourdieu writes that “the unconscious principles of the *ethos* which, being the product of a learning process dominated by a determinate type of objective regularities, determines ‘reasonable’ and ‘unreasonable’ conduct for every agent subjected to those regularities” (77). Habitus is “history turned into nature,” the unconscious being “the forgetting of history which history itself produces by incorporating the objective structures it produces in the second natures of habitus” (78–79).

Thus it would appear that the maxim “habits make a second nature” functions ideologically within two competing constellations of meaning: (1) for the Greek elite (or for the professional middle class who must construct an *ethos* appropriate to their status and economic function, as I discuss in Chapter Two), Aristotle’s notion of habits and *ethos* imply an agency, a rational choice-making strategizing of habitual performances leading to *arete*; (2) for the ideological critic, the “second nature” inculcated by the ideological pressures of habitus is imposed by a structure which offers minimal strategizing, a nature that still bears the mark of an

earlier generation of Marxists for whom “second nature” meant alienation and false consciousness. Terry Eagleton explains that for Bourdieu habitus tends to induce in social agents such aspirations and actions as are compatible with the objective requirements of their social circumstances. At its strongest, it rules out all other modes of desiring and behaving as simply unthinkable. Habitus is thus ‘history turned into nature,’ and for Bourdieu it is through this matching of the subjective and the objective, what we feel spontaneously disposed to do and what our social conditions demand of us, that power secures itself. (156)

The “second nature” generated by the spontaneous actions and practices required by the habitus and performed through *ethos* naturalizes, or makes tacit, an arbitrary structure.

Aristotle’s theory of *ethos*, however, was presented within the context of class warfare in which the “naturalness” of previous class structures and political organization were contested. Thus power “secured itself” through more complex channels than is suggested by Berlin’s and Walzer’s monological interpretations, which assume an agent-centered model of the rhetor who seeks to control a cognitively limited audience. Aristotle’s recognition of the power of habit in the *Politics* and

Nicomachean Ethics sheds light on his theory of *ethos* as it functioned within class struggle for political power.

Habits of Mass and Elite in the *Politics*⁷

Aristotle's arguments for performing habits that lead to *arete* were intended for an elite class. Democracy was marked by extending citizenship to those of low birth and slavish employment, those whose conditions required them to work as artisans, merchants, or manual labor to make a living, banausic employments that required habits that could not lead to excellence. In Books Seven and Eight of the *Politics*, Aristotle describes his vision of the best polis, one whose end is the kind of "good life" (eudaimonia) only possible through the achievement of *arete* by its citizens. To achieve this "best state," those laboring in banausic and mercantile occupations would be denied citizenship: "the citizens must not lead the life of artisans or tradesmen, for such a life is ignoble and inimical to

⁷ I follow Josiah Ober's definitions of mass and elite. "Masses" refers to citizens who had political rights but were not members of an elite that was distinguished by education, wealth, or birth. His definition of "masses," therefore, excludes slaves, women, and laboring-class aliens (metics) who were denied political enfranchisement in fourth-century Athens. *To plethos* (the mass), *hoi polloi* (the many), and *ho ochlos* (the mob) are among the ancient Greek terms that Ober renders as the citizen-masses. Elites were referred to as *gnorimoi* (notables), *kaloi k'agathoi* (the beautiful and good), *charientes* (worthies), *aristoi* (the excellent), and *chrestoi* (the prominent). See Ober 11-13.

excellence. Neither must they be farmers, since leisure is necessary both for the development of excellence and the performance of political duties” (1328b39–41). And, “artisans or any other class which is not a producer of excellence have no share in the state” (1329a19–20). Obviously, democracy could never achieve political excellence.

In his perfect state, “the good man is absolutely the same as the good citizen; whereas in other states the good citizen is only good relatively to his own form of government” (*Politics* 1293b5–8). Aristotle is not here suggesting, as some of his democratic appropriators might hope, that in *any* kind of state the role of a “good citizen” will be that of a “good man,” but rather that in an aristocracy, the rule of the best, *only* the best men have the status of citizens. Aristotle specifically outlines the difference that labor makes in the potential achievement of *arete*: the “good man” and the “good citizen” clearly are not the same thing:

The good citizen need not of necessity possess the excellence which makes a good man. If the state cannot be entirely composed of good men, and yet each citizen is expected to do his own business well, and must therefore have excellence, still, inasmuch as all the citizens cannot be alike, the excellence of the citizen and of the good man cannot coincide. (1276b35–1277a1)

Banausic employments, Aristotle explains, cannot lead to *arete* because they are in essence slavish. In fact, those employed as artisans or in mechanical trades are in some ways more slavish than the slave:

for the slave shares in his master's life; the artisan is less closely connected with him, and only attains excellence in proportion as he becomes a slave. The meaner sort of mechanic has a special and separate slavery; and whereas the slave exists by nature, not so the shoemaker or other artisan. (1260a40–1260b2)

The slave, by the nature of his relationship to his master, attains a higher excellence through his proper service to the master than does the artisan or the mechanic, who, through their labor, are deprived of the opportunity to achieve excellence. These laborers, although granted citizenship in democratic Athens, are hardly fit to make decisions that would lead to Aristotle's "best state."

For the aristocrat who would pursue *arete*, danger lies in his practice of the habits of those who perform banausic labor: "Certainly the good man and the statesman and the good citizen ought not to learn the crafts of inferiors except for their own occasional use; *if they habitually practise them*, there will cease to be a distinction between master and slave" (1277a31–1277b7, my italics). There are, then, distinct habits for the good man (the

elite who seek *arete*) and the ordinary laboring citizen, habits which create and maintain the demarcation between their respective potentials for excellence, and “no man can practise excellence who is living the life of a mechanic or labourer” (1278a20). Thus Sattler’s definition of *ethos* that hinted at class-demarcating habits is easily discernible in Aristotle’s treatises.

As Aristotle continues his critique of democracy and makes clear his preference for small ruling bodies of elites, he notes another problem related to *ethos*:

But if the citizens of a state are to judge and to distribute offices according to merit, then they must know each other’s characters; where they do not possess this knowledge, both the election to offices and the decision of lawsuits will go wrong. When the population is very large they are manifestly settled at haphazard, which clearly ought not to be. (*Politics* 1326b14–20).

In a large democracy, the entire voting demos does not have personal knowledge of the character of each political official. Is, then, Aristotle’s statement in *Rhetoric* 1.2.4 that persuasion through character should result from the speech rather than the speaker’s reputation, to be interpreted as a concession to democracy? Or is he attempting to negotiate a position on

ethos that takes into consideration the power of habit, consistent with his statement in the *Politics* that those striving for *arete* must not “habitually practice” the habits of ordinary laboring citizens, who nevertheless exercised control over elite representations of *ethos* in the assembly and courts?

Of the three debased regimes he details in the *Politics* (tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy) democracy is the best. One reason for this status is that it provides an opportunity for the function of Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean. The middling classes act as arbiters between rich and poor: “the arbiter is always the one most trusted, and he who is in the middle is an arbiter” (1297a5–6). This does not suggest that the “middle class” makes the best rulers; only that, based on his doctrine of the mean, an *ethos* that reflects the mean holds in check the excesses of both the wealthy and the poor. He goes on to explain that aristocratic governments can go wrong if they give too much power to the rich; they err by cheating or deceiving the demos. This relationship between the mean and “trust” is clearly shown to be a rhetorical process, through the ideological and rhetorical functioning of *topoi*, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

The *Ethos* of the Mean

Aristotle opens the *Nicomachean Ethics* by situating the study of ethics within the larger study of politics. The contradictions of this text have long fueled controversy over whether Aristotle presents intellectual virtue (through philosophical contemplation) or moral virtue (through practical action) as the high road to the best life (*eudaimonia*). Aristide Tessitore negotiates this controversy by reading the *Ethics* to determine its implied audience. He argues that the *Ethics* is addressed to legislators, politicians who shape citizen behavior by implementing laws that habituate citizens to virtue. Thus, Aristotle addresses a politically minded elite audience, specifically the *kalos k'agathos*, the citizen of a certain social and political class whose “way of life requires both economic well-being and the presence of others” in order to practice the virtues embodying the highest aims of the polis (17–18).

In the *Ethics*, two things become clear about those *topoi* useful for establishing *ethos* that Berlin criticizes because they are available only to the elite: first, these qualities of character are means between extremes, and second, as *topoi*, they are linguistic labels for habits that are praised by a particular community. Although Aristotle discusses the proper mean of other states, such as honor, anger, and friendliness, several of the *topoi*

listed in *Rhetoric* 1.9 are discussed in detail here. For example, Aristotle explains:

With regard to giving and taking of money the mean is liberality, the excess and the defect prodigality and meanness. They exceed and fall short in contrary ways to one another: the prodigal exceeds in spending and falls short in taking, while the mean man exceeds in taking and falls short in spending. (*NE* 1107b9–14)

Likewise in regard to magnificence: an excess in this category produces tastelessness and vulgarity in the spending of large sums of money, the deficiency, stinginess.

Aristotle's language suggests that epideictic topoi are actually structuring his discussion of the mean. He frequently explains the value of the mean by couching his discussion in the language of praise or blame attached to these states by the community: "for our excellences and our vices we are praised or blamed" (*NE* 1106a1–2), and "excellence is concerned with passions and actions, in which excess is a form of failure, and so is defect, while the intermediate is praised and is a form of success" (1106b25–28). The mean, then, is regarded as "excellent" by the habits of thought and action in a particular culture that structures mores or character traits along a continuum from defect to excess. It is the mores of

the community that result in praise of the intermediate and blame of the extremes; hence the intermediate is the excellence to be striven for, because it is what is praised by the community. Aristotle writes, “the man who exceeds in his desires *is called* ambitious” (1107b28), “*we call* the intermediate person good-tempered” (1108a5), “one man *is said to be* intermediate, and another to exceed” (1108a33). In Bourdieu’s terms, achieving the mean produces symbolic capital for the orator, or, *topoi* that can be most successfully manipulated in an oratorical contest by making the orator least susceptible to the opponents’ arguments against his *ethos*.

Arete, then, is a language game. Although Aristotle discusses several states for which no specific word exists naming either the mean or its deviations, structural slots exist for the excess, the deficiency, and the mean, each of which is praised or blamed by the culture: “With regard to feelings of fear and confidence courage is the mean; of the people who exceed, he who exceeds in fearlessness has no name (many of the states have no name), while the man who exceeds in confidence is rash” (NE 1107a35–1107b2). One is a coward, or rash, or courageous, because the communal language names him thus, judging his actions on a continuum from deficiency to excess. Hence, Aristotle rightly notes, “it is no easy task to be good,” to find this mean in our actions (1109a24). Especially in democratic

Athens, it is no easy task for the aristocrat, the elite orator or statesman, to act in ways that will be consistently praiseworthy. It is easy to get angry, or to give or spend money, Aristotle writes, “but to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right aim, and in the right way, that is not for every one, nor is it easy; that is why goodness is both rare and laudable and noble” (1109a26–29). Berlin’s “demanding demos” will always be eager to label aristocratic actions as deviating from the mean, veering off toward the edges of deficiency or excess on the character continuum.

This understanding of the shared language of the epideictic topoi seems close to the dialogical interpretations of Aristotle’s rhetoric that Walzer criticizes. Walzer bases his critique on misappropriations of Bitzer’s article about enthymemes in which he argued that the unstated premises of enthymemes are drawn from “common cultural beliefs.” What I am suggesting here is an expansion of this notion of “common cultural beliefs” into a notion of common cultural *habits and practices*, a collection of common cultural habits of discourse, habits of belief, and the material and institutional habits by which a culture arranges classed subgroups into relations of production. In addition, I suggest that the topoi can be productively understood as the linguistic markers, manifestations, or

organizers of these habits and practices. These “common cultural habits” accepted and practiced by the audience fully determine what that audience understands as acceptable *ethos* in the rhetor. These topoi, tacitly held by the audience through years of habituation to their material equivalents, are not simply a pool of resources for the rhetor to use to manipulate the audience; they also act coercively on his or her own discourse, and thereby on his or her own position in the social hierarchy.

Aristotle’s discussions and listings of topoi in the *Rhetoric* are shot through with references to character and *ethos*. His exhaustive lists of topoi are not simply a source of enthymemes, but they are actually the source of *ethos*; as habitual practices and valuations held by the audience, the topoi are a source for the establishment of a credible character, enabling one to speak the habits of a particular political field, discourse community, constitution, or class. In Chapter Nine of Book One of the *Rhetoric* (cited above in my discussion of Berlin’s article), Aristotle lists topoi regarding virtue and the honorable, sources of arguments that make another person seem praiseworthy in epideictic oratory as well as sources for enhancing the rhetor’s own *ethos*. The habits and practices that structure Athenian relations of production are evident in this list. Justice is defined in terms of the legalities involved in property ownership; courage is also defined in

terms of obedience to the law. Athenian hierarchy is embedded in these topoi: “the virtues and actions of those who are superior by nature are more honorable, for example, those of a man more than those of a woman (1.9.22); and “possessions that bring no fruit [are more honorable]; for [they are] more characteristic of a free man,” that is, of a member of the aristocratic class, who does not work for a living (1.9.25).

These topoi—habits of thought that reflect and organize habits of social relations—function as a rhetorical resource for establishing credibility. Topoi are the places where social relations are kept *in language*, a linguistic, rhetorical storehouse of the elements of discourse that reflect the stratification and organization of social groups in any given culture. *Ethos*, then, may be defined both as the rhetor’s skillful rhetorical use of those topoi to make himself or herself appear credible and of high excellence, and as the material, habitual living-out of the relations that those topoi reflect and construct. Like “common cultural beliefs,” those social relations are, in the vast majority of communicative interchanges, assumed, unspoken, unquestioned. *Ethos* as the politics of habit is, then, the material living out of these social relations, habitually, unquestioningly. And *ethos* in the rhetor’s speech is his skillful drawing from that linguistic pool that reflects/constructs social relations, to make himself not only

appear to be, but, through habituation, to become a credible, upstanding member of the culture that maintains those social relations. This power of discourse to habituate its practitioners to existing social relations by an audience that demands an appropriate *ethos* creates a problem for Aristotle, for, as we have seen, elite orators damage their potential for achieving *arete* if they engage habitually in the practices of the demos.

Just because Aristotle understood the importance of communally shared topoi for constructing symbolic capital in service of elite *ethos* hardly makes his rhetorical theory dialogical in any Bakhtinian sense, as Walzer argues. But, neither does it mean, as Walzer suggests, that Aristotle's rhetoric was based on a monological, one-way, top-down control of the audience. The ideological function of those topoi useful for constructing an elite *ethos* acceptable to the voting demos also involves powerful constraints on the elite. In his investigation of the political sociology of democratic Athens, Josiah Ober offers a detailed rhetorical analysis of numerous speeches of Attic orators (Lysias, Andocides, Isaeus, Demosthenes, and others, between 404 and 322 BCE) to discover how the ideology of mass and elite structured the political conflicts of fourth century Athens. Ober suggests an explicit equation between *ethos* and ideology:

As Aristotle clearly recognized, an orator who wishes to persuade a mass audience must accommodate himself to the *ethos*—the ideology—of his audience. He must therefore in general speak well of what the audience thinks is good and ill of what the audience thinks is evil. He will present his own behavior and character as conforming to the values of his audience, his opponent's as failing to conform. (43)

The vast majority of orators speaking to the mass audiences in the assembly and courts were male elites. Ober emphasizes the ideological function of the manipulation of public discourse, some elements of which were standardized into *topoi*, in maintaining the relationship between elite orators and the mass audience that functioned as judges of their deliberative proposals and forensic arguments. Many of these orators, he claims, were “men whose reputations, and sometimes lives, rested upon their ability to manipulate symbols to good advantage” (45). Thus the elite litigant had a pressing need to appeal to the ideology, or *ethos*, of the mass audience, and Ober analyzes these speeches in terms of their ideological function rather than in terms of the immediate motives of the speakers. The *ethos* demonstrated in the speeches not only manifest Athenian political ideology, but to a large extent provide a means to regulate mass-elite

tensions. Ober's detailed analyses of two particular problems facing the elite orator are particularly useful in complicating both Berlin's and Walzer's claims: how the elite orator managed to construct an *ethos* acceptable to the demos with regard to (1) his superior education and (2) his wealth.

Education and Wealth Topoi in Elite *Ethos*

In the 440s, with Pericles' institution of jury pay, the masses were empowered to judge the behavior of all citizens regardless of social rank. Ober presents a detailed study of jury pay and demographic analysis to contradict scholars who argue that the voting assembly was predominantly attended by leisured elites. His extensive evidence suggests, rather, that the assembly must have been composed largely of ordinary laboring citizens and large numbers of rural residents and farmers who, depending on the season, had the time to journey to Athens. Indeed, many assembly voters might have been very poor Athenian citizens, attending regularly to collect jury pay. The scorn of elitists like Aristotle for the democratic audience is further evidence that the assembly was not dominated by elites.

The elite orator or litigant was, then, scrutinized and judged by the standards of a class of citizens whose property and education were inferior

to his own. Ober suggests that it was no accident that elites formalized the study of rhetoric: "Rhetoric and acknowledgement of mass control over public behavior were intimately connected: rhetoric provided the means not only to promote policy and to 'oppose' the people but also to demonstrate to them one's own conformity to mass ideology" (90). Like Berlin's and Walzer's interpretations of Aristotle, Ober's analysis of Attic speeches proceeds on the unstated assumption of an agent-centered strategic model of communication. However, unlike Berlin's and Walzer's vision of an Aristotelian rhetoric that teaches the manipulation of a passive audience, Ober recognizes the power of the audience to force the representation, if not the habitual lived practices, of the *ethos* they demand. Certainly the construction of such an *ethos* required that the elite rhetor draw from the ideology of the mass audience, as the dialogical model suggests. But Ober presents a vision of an empowered demos that actually had the upper hand, having the power to impose a particular *ethos* onto the elite: "The decisions of juries could . . . be regarded as a means of forcing elite citizens to conform to the norms established by the masses" (162). Given Aristotle's understanding of the power of habit, demotic control over elite *ethos* presented a tangible threat to aristocratic "nature."

As I discussed above, Berlin argues that Aristotle's *topoi* for the construction of *ethos* reflect qualities of character that derived from wealth and education, and that these qualities were possessed by the elite orator prior to the rhetorical situation. The use of these elements of aristocratic habitus for the representation of elite character reflects my definition of *ethos* as class-demarcating habits. But rather than suggesting that they are used to control the "worst impulses" of the masses or "render hegemonic the ideology of a rich and politically ambitious elite" (Berlin 63), Ober complicates the deployment of education and wealth *topoi*, emphasizing the power of the audience to force elites' conformity to democratic ideology—at least in their speeches.

The superior education of elites clearly demarcated them from their audience. The demos was suspicious of rhetorical education in particular, because rhetorical skill could lead jurors astray, subverting their judicial and legislative powers and threatening the validity of democratic decision-making processes: "an orator who attempted to use his power of speech to deceive a mass audience into voting against its collective interests was obviously setting himself up as superior to the masses, a situation the demos must regard as anathema" (Ober 166). Thus the rhetorically educated elite orator was in a difficult position. He must, in his speech,

construct an *ethos* that aligned his interests with those of the audience, demonstrating that his preferences and desires were the same as the majority of his listeners. Demosthenes displays this tactic in *Against Theocrines*:

The honorable course for you, men of the jury, is not to put the laws or your own selves in the power of the expert speakers but to keep the speakers in your own power and to make a distinction between those who speak well and lucidly and those who speak what is just; for it is concerning justice that you have sworn to cast your votes. (qtd in Ober 176)

The elite orator reminds the audience of the anti-democratic potential of his elite opponent's seductive rhetoric, often at the same time emphasizing his own inarticulateness. Demarcating himself from his opponent by de-emphasizing his own rhetorical skill and training, the rhetor aligns his interests with those of the demos, predisposing them to distrust any arguments that might be made against *him* as a cleverly trained speaker. Ober identifies this "unskilled speaker" topos in numerous speeches. For this strategy to work, however, the audience must bring a willing suspension of disbelief to the drama of the oratorical contest, accepting "the fiction that those who warned them of the danger were as innocent of

rhetorical skill and preparation as they claimed to be” (Ober 177). In fact, Ober suggests that Greek theater had helped to train the demos as audiences for forensic and deliberative oratory.

Critics of Aristotle’s elitism point out, correctly, his constant deprecation of the audience’s limited cognitive abilities, but, following Aristotle’s lead, they ignore that audience’s potential power over elite speakers. For instance, when Aristotle discusses the use of maxims, he says they “make one great contribution to speeches because of the uncultivated mind of the audience. . . . Thus, one should guess what sort of assumptions people have and then speak in general terms consistent with these views” (*Rhetoric* 2.21.15). Aristotle goes on to explain, in the discussion of enthymemes that immediately follows, that the mass audience of rhetoric cannot follow a complete syllogism (as in dialectical reasoning), and that

[t]his is the reason why the uneducated are more persuasive than the educated before a crowd . . . for [the educated] reason with axioms and universals, [the uneducated] on the basis of what [particulars] they know and instances near their experience. Thus, one should not speak on the basis of all opinions but of those held by an identified group, for example, either the judges or those whom they respect.

(*Rhetoric* 2.22.3)

Aristotle seems to allude to what Ober identifies as the unskilled speaker topos here, tying it to his “social view” of rhetoric that demands arguments drawn from the common beliefs of the audience. For Aristotle, this strategy simply speaks to the lack of the audience’s reasoning abilities and the rhetor’s need to adjust his own superior reasoning capacities to the lower level of the uneducated mass audience. Ober’s analysis, on the other hand, complicates this strategy in a way that emphasizes the power of the audience to force the skilled speaker into certain stances. Although the demos feared that elite rhetorical training presented a danger to democratic practices, they also recognized its usefulness to the polis. These antithetical attitudes toward elite education were bound up with the clash between egalitarian and elitist ideologies. Ober concludes that the elite, when addressing the demos, “participated in a drama in which they were required to play the roles of common men and to voice their solidarity with egalitarian ideals” (191). Although Aristotle’s own aristocratic stance led him to articulate a rhetorical theory that continually deprecated the audience’s reasoning abilities, his rhetoric demonstrates Ober’s emphasis on dramatic performance that established demarcation between elite and mass—the elite “play the roles of common men,” but only in their

speeches. Thus for Aristotle rhetorical speech is separated from the lived discursive practices that could actually effect a change in character.

Like superior education, the possession of superior wealth also had the potential to prejudice a jury against elite orators. In *Antidosis*, for example, Isocrates defends himself against what he claims are misrepresentations of his own wealth, and writes:

When I was a boy, wealth was regarded as a thing so secure as well as admirable that almost every one affected to own more property than he actually possessed, because he wanted to enjoy the standing which it gave. Now, on the other hand, a man has to be ready to defend himself against being rich as if it were the worst of crimes . . . for it has become far more dangerous to be suspected of being well off than to be detected in crime; for criminals are pardoned or let off with slight penalties, while the rich are ruined utterly, and it will be found that the number of men who have been spoiled of their property is greater than those who have been punished for their misdeeds. (§§159–60)

Ober locates in numerous speeches the “dramatic fiction” that elite speakers possessed no greater wealth than the ordinary citizens of his audience, or at least that they used their wealth in the common interest.

Through these “fictions” they evoked a sense of their own solidarity with poorer citizens while constructing their opponents as selfish aristocrats whose wealth and power endangered the polis. In the oratorical drama of elite versus elite, each side castigated the other for pointing out his opponent’s superior wealth. However, orators and litigants did not want to appear poor, either, because Athenian juries would then suspect them of being susceptible to bribery. The state’s dependence on aristocratic wealth and the desire to avoid open warfare between classes created a tension between rich and poor that was ideologically mediated through the dramatic use of wealth topoi (Ober 220–223).

Aristocratic *ethos*, clearly demarcated from that of the ordinary laboring citizen, continued to be important to Athenian democracy. But Ober demonstrates that this continued influence was not achieved by “direct domination,” as Berlin’s comments on elite *ethos* seem to suggest. The demos had the power to force elite *ethos* into a shape that met with its approval and to harness aristocratic behavior for the good of the masses (Ober 289–91). Aristotle resisted what he considered to be an unjust, forced equalization of the elite, and this is the tension, Berlin rightly argues, that we see reflected in the contradictions of the *Rhetoric*. My concluding section presents a case for interpreting Aristotle’s teaching on *ethos* in light

of his understanding of habit in this political tension. He *limits* demotic control of aristocratic *ethos* to the speech.

Ethos in the Speech

In the *Rhetoric* Aristotle instructs his students that persuasion is effected “through character whenever the speech is spoken in such a way as to make the speaker worthy of credence; . . . And this should result from the speech, not from a previous opinion that the speaker is a certain kind of person (1.2.4). Aristotle’s insistence that the rhetor construct a persuasive *ethos* in the speech itself rather than depend on a previously established position or reputation in the polis to establish character is typically explained in terms of Aristotle’s distinctions between entechnic *pisteis* (methods of persuasion invented by the rhetor) and atechnic *pisteis* (“non-artistic” means of persuasion, such as previously-established reputation, available for the rhetor’s use but not invented as a part of the “art” of rhetoric). For example, George Kennedy, in a footnote to this passage, situates Aristotle’s discussion of *ethos* here as an entechnic *pistis* in the context of the Greek practice of logography, professional speech-writing paid for by defendants who were required to argue their own cases but did not have the training to compose their own defenses. To write a

persuasive speech for a person who may not have held a position of authority or even of high repute, the logographer had to construct in the speech itself a credible character for his client to present to the jurors. Similarly, in her textbook based on classical rhetoric, Sharon Crowley updates this distinction between “invented *ethos*” and “situated *ethos*” by pointing out that contemporary writers are read by large audiences who do not have first-hand knowledge of the writer’s lived character or reputation; therefore modern writers largely depend on invented *ethos* within their texts to carry the conviction that they are reputable, knowledgeable, and trustworthy (84, 86).

I offer a different interpretation that reads Aristotle’s instruction in the context of competing notions of *ethos* that circulated in the various rhetorical schools during this period of continuing political conflict between aristocratic elites and the newly empowered demos. Unlike Aristotle, who specifically dismisses the “argument which is made by a man’s life,” Isocrates taught that the rhetor’s character must be in evidence through his personal history of behavior in the polis:

the man who wishes to persuade people will not be negligent as to the matter of character; no, on the contrary, he will apply himself above all to establish a most honourable name among his fellow-

citizens; for who does not know that words carry greater conviction when spoken by men of good repute than when spoken by men who live under a cloud, and that the argument which is made by a man's life is of more weight than that which is furnished by words? Therefore, the stronger a man's desire to persuade his hearers, the more zealously will he strive to be honourable and to have the esteem of his fellow-citizens. (*Antidosis* §278)

In the passage immediately preceding this one, Isocrates has conceded that the study of the art of rhetoric cannot "implant honesty and justice in depraved natures," but he still argues that those who deeply engage in the art of speaking well "can become better and worthier." This moral improvement, as for Aristotle, is achieved by means of habituation, but Isocrates grants a higher place than does Aristotle to the practice of rhetoric in this process: the student of rhetoric

will select from all the actions of men which bear upon his subject those examples which are the most illustrious and the most edifying; and, habituating himself to contemplate and appraise such examples, he will feel their influence not only in the preparation of a given discourse but in all the actions of his life. (§277)

Rhetoric, for Isocrates, does not merely teach orators how to perform a dramatic fiction that persuades an audience that he has a certain character, nor does it teach him simply to maintain his public reputation because it will enhance his *ethos* in his oratory; rather, habits learned through rhetorical study are actually embodied in the rhetor and materialized in “all the actions of his life.” Rhetorical habits, for Isocrates, make a second nature.

Such a thesis, I suggest, would horrify Aristotle, given his assiduous attention to the inferior habits and practices of the demos, and, throughout the *Rhetoric*, his constant awareness of that audience’s power to determine elite public discourse. Thus his politics forces him into his teaching that *ethos*, controlled by *topoi* acceptable to the masses, be restricted to speeches. Habits construct character, and those habits standardized into *topoi* for discursive use function to demarcate one social class from another. As Aristotle’s *Politics* and *Ethics* demonstrate, the habits of the ordinary laborer make him “slavish,” unable to achieve *arete*; the habits of aristocrats make them better or worse aristocrats. His explicit framing of his rhetorical theory around the power of the audience and their inferior habits precludes his adoption of an Isocratean stance on the power of rhetoric to remake aristocratic “nature.”

Chapter Two

The Managed Character: *Ethos* and Work at the End of the Twentieth Century

Introduction

Aristotle introduces his list of epideictic topoi in Book One, Chapter Nine of the *Rhetoric* by saying:

Moreover, as we speak of these, we shall incidentally also make clear those things from which we shall be regarded as persons of a certain quality in character, which was the second form of *pistis*; for from the same sources we shall be able to make both ourselves and any other person worthy of credence in regard to virtue [excellence].

(*Rhetoric* 1.9.1)

In the previous chapter I addressed Aristotle's list of epideictic topoi and how they were negotiated as markers of an elite, "virtuous" class while being approved of, and even demanded by, a demos that was not defined by these characteristics, and indeed to whom these habits were denied. This chapter continues to examine epideictic topoi that rhetorically and materially construct the evolving dominant social *ethos* of the late

twentieth century. My field of exploration in this chapter is not the political arena of direct democracy in fourth-century Athens, but the twentieth-century workplace, where employees on a daily, habitual basis must perform an *ethos* that makes them “worthy of credence.” In democratic Athens one’s participation in direct democracy made one’s citizenship an important part of one’s identity.⁸ In twentieth-century America, however, I begin with the assumption that one’s position in the workforce (which largely but not completely also defines one by social class) is the main determiner of identity and the main shaping force of character. To emphasize the shift in middle-class *ethos* that has occurred in the second half of this century, I begin by examining the *ethos*-forming topoi that were prevalent at mid-century.⁹ In the 1950s a new middle-class character, the product of American affluence and corporate expansion, created a cultural fascination that was evidenced by best-sellers like David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd*, William H. Whyte’s *The Organization Man*,

⁸ Of course, my generic pronoun here excludes from citizenship, as did Athenian democracy, large numbers of the population of the “democratic” polis based on gender, freeborn status, and alien origin.

⁹ I will use the construction “*ethos*-forming topoi” rather than the more traditional “ethical topoi” to avoid any possible connotation of “ethical” in the philosophical sense that I discussed in the Introduction.

C. Wright Mills' *White Collar*, and Erich Fromm's *The Sane Society* and *Man for Himself*. The epideictic topoi gleaned from mid-century already mark a shift from an even older middle-class *ethos*. I will disagree to an extent with Lynn Bloom, who claims that freshman composition is still a middle-class enterprise based on the inculcation of habits largely derived from Benjamin Franklin's list of virtues. Drawing from popular management materials (which are great storehouses for the topoi that structure the new middle-class *ethos*, and the forum in which they are urged upon large middle-class audiences), I devise my own list of topoi for a postmodern *ethos*, and locate their emergence in several texts by teachers of computer-mediated composition.

Since Aristotle categorizes his *ethos*-forming topoi under the epideictic genre, a brief discussion of contemporary understandings of that genre will introduce some themes of this chapter. Classical epideictic oratory is traditionally explained as "praise and blame" speech that provides instruction and reinforcement in the audience of the commonly held, orthodox community values. Dale Sullivan sums up the traditional understanding: "Theoretically, the orator's praising virtuous acts and blaming vicious acts moves the audience to admiration; feeling emulation, they then imitate the praiseworthy characteristics and the value system of

one generation is passed on to the next” (115). I address two problems with this view: first, the notion that *the audience* is being urged to emulate and imitate the values presented, and second, the notion that the epideictic genre and its *ethos*-forming topoi reinforce and pass on *traditional*, orthodox values of a culture. With regard to the first problem, as I discussed in Chapter One, if *ethos* is understood as class-demarcating habits, then the *ethos* presented by the elite orator was *not* intended to be emulated by the demos. As Berlin argued, such an *ethos* was not even available to the demos. How, for instance would a member of the demos, of even the middling economic class, emulate the virtue of magnificence (*megalooprepeia*), the praiseworthy disposition of large sums of money? A simple understanding of epideictic topoi as the presentation of values to be emulated by the audience is insufficient, and ignores complex power relations between the Athenian elite and demos. Epideictic, or *ethos*-forming topoi, I suggested in Chapter One, more likely functioned to force at least apparent conformity with demos-approved values onto the elite rhetor rather than to inculcate desired qualities into the audience. In a direct democracy, where the demos had immediate control over decisions that affected the entire polis, this coercive function of *ethos* benefited the demos by providing a check on the powers of the elite. The magnificence

of the elite, for instance, while unavailable for emulation by the demos, could certainly benefit those in less privileged classes.

Sullivan expands this traditional understanding of the epideictic genre somewhat by defining the *ethos* constructed in the epideictic encounter as “not primarily an attribute of the speaker, nor even an audience perception: It is, instead, the common dwelling place of both, the timeless, consubstantial space that enfolds participants in epideictic exchange” (127). If, however, *ethos* is more productively seen as class-demarcating habits, this “common dwelling place” is a forced relocation (like the horse to the stable) into a space where any “consubstantiality” is coerced. Of course, consubstantiality with regard to *ethos*-forming topoi does exist when rhetors address an audience of their class peers, but consubstantiality also acts coercively here to hold the class peers in check; they all help each other keep themselves in their places. If we look at *ethos* not as a consubstantial glue that binds together the whole community through shared values, but rather see *ethos* as the rhetorical power to keep us or put us in our place in the class system, and indeed even as an argument for particular class habits constructed through class-demarcating topoi, then *ethos* becomes an important element of power. The ways in which that power devolved to the Athenian demos are not directly

transferable to our own brand of democracy that offers little of the Athenian function of *ethos* for holding elite excesses in check. What has been called the “revolt of the elites” (Christopher Lasch) or the “secession” of the professional-managerial class (whom Robert Reich dubs “symbolic analysts”) translates into a widening gap between rich and poor with little of the old aristocracy’s *noblesse oblige* left to counter its abusive potential. What this means with regard to shifting work demands and the “management revolution” is one of the pursuits of this chapter. Certainly the new breed of managers touts a “consubstantiality” among themselves, lower-level employees, and the highest corporate elites with wild claims of the radical democratizing of the workplace, but the “common dwelling place” is really a new set of *ethos*-forming habits that are coercively inculcated into the working demos in service of profit.

Regarding the second problem with the standard view of the epideictic genre, that is, that *ethos*-forming topoi have the conservative function of passing on traditional values, this claim does not help us understand how shifts occur in the dominant social *ethos*, or, put another way, how or why one list of topoi might come to supersede an outdated one. What happens when a particular constellation of *ethos*-forming topoi no longer serves those in power? In particular, what new arguments for

character-forming habits arise when the “modern” *ethos* of the mid-twentieth-century white-collar worker becomes outdated, no longer serviceable in a radically altered economy that now focuses on the marketable labor of knowledge workers in the “nanosecond nineties”? A new *ethos*, structured through revised *topoi*, meets the needs of “the emerging (post)modern labor force of late capitalism” (Zavarzadeh and Morton 67). This chapter examines the shift from the mid-century *ethos* of the white-collar, middle-class employee of the core corporation to the late-century postmodern *ethos* that makes a person “worthy of credence in regard to virtue” in decentered, unpredictable, disaggregated global enterprise webs.

The Personality Market and the Commodification of Character

Ethos is sometimes, particularly in textbooks, defined as the “personality” of the rhetor. For instance, in her chapter on *ethos* in *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*, Sharon Crowley writes, “I use the terms character and ethical proof in this chapter to refer to proofs that rely on a rhetor’s personality or reputation” (81). She does explain that “personality” is an inadequate word to convey the rich connotation of *ethos* in Greek. But “personality” has been, and remains, a powerful component

of *ethos* in the second half of the twentieth century, even though these two terms cannot be directly equated with each other. In this section I examine some of the relationships between personality and character, how they are used to talk about the behavioral and attitudinal habits of the middle class, particularly in regard to work, and how they are related to *ethos* and to *ethos*-forming topoi.

In his 1953 *White Collar: The American Middle Classes*, C. Wright Mills writes:

When white-collar people get jobs, they sell not only their time and energy but their personalities as well. They sell by the week or month their smiles and their kindly gestures, and they must practice the prompt repression of resentment and aggression. For these intimate traits are of commercial relevance and required for the more efficient and profitable distribution of goods and services. Here are the new little Machiavellians, practicing their personable crafts for hire and for the profit of others, according to rules laid down by those above them. (xvii)

Personality here seems to have to do with one's efforts to repress hostile or negative emotions and to display pleasing emotions while on the job.

Reading this description of personality against Aristotle's *pisteis*, I

understand Mills here to be examining work-related instances of *pathos* rather than *ethos*. Of course, Aristotle's *pisteis* are complexly intertwined in their persuasive effects and in their relationship to each other, but for my purposes here I will attempt to partially disentangle *pathos* from *ethos* for the purpose of distinguishing Mills' use of "personality" from my own focus on "character." That Mills' "personality market" concerns *pathos* is made clear by a later work influenced by his.

Sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild, in *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, does not use rhetorical terminology, but I would argue that her subject is actually the commodification of *pathos*, influenced as she is by Mills' analysis of the personality market. Hochschild studies service jobs, especially flight attendants and bill collectors, who, in her analysis, are paid to engage in "emotional labor." She defines emotional labor as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display;" here she refers to the management of the worker's *own* feeling, which is a necessary precursor to the rhetorical work of producing the marketed product—"a state of mind" in the customer (6, 7). Flight attendants, for instance, suppress their spontaneous feelings of anger toward obnoxious passengers and create *in them* a *feeling* of safety and of their own concern for the passengers'

comfort, while bill collectors suppress their spontaneous feelings of empathy and create *in the debtor* feelings of anxiety, guilt, or fear. For both, “the problem for the worker becomes how to create and sustain the appropriate feeling” in the customer, client, or client’s debtor (138). This is precisely the process of “disposing the listener in some way” that Aristotle describes concerning *pathos*: “[There is persuasion] through the hearers when they are led to feel emotion [*pathos*] by the speech; for we do not give the same judgment when grieved and rejoicing or when being friendly and hostile” (*Rhetoric* 1.2.3, 5). Of course, given Aristotle’s focus on public oratory, he is not concerned with the emotional habits *of the rhetor*, the habitual labor of suppressing feelings so the marketable product can be manifested. But for the twentieth-century middle-class worker who must alter her own emotional habits in order to create a product— a desired emotional state in another—the situation is quite different. *Ethos* and *pathos*— the worker’s character and the emotional state she creates in her customers— become intertwined with each other and with her own emotional well being. Hochschild suggests that this management of one’s own feeling in order to create desired emotional states in customers can be damaging to the worker’s psyche. She has to change herself through emotional labor that “calls for a coordination of mind and feeling, and it

sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality.” Thus the worker’s face, body, and feelings become company resources for making money. For the flight attendant, “smiling is separated from its usual function, which is to express a personal feeling, and attached to another one— expressing a company feeling” (127). This habitual emotional performance alienates the worker from her non-working self.¹⁰

As will Hochschild thirty years later, Mills claims that self-alienation is a result of the commodification of personality: “In many strata of white-collar employment, such traits as courtesy, helpfulness, and kindness, once intimate, are now part of the impersonal means of livelihood. Self-alienation is thus an accompaniment of his alienated labor” (xvii). Mills analyzes the major shifts in the labor force and the resulting changes in definitions of “middle-class” from the nineteenth century, when the old middle class of small farmers and entrepreneurs frequently owned the property with which they worked, to the mid-twentieth century, when the white-collar middle class, contrary to some definitions, is “*not* between

¹⁰ Of course, even when not at work, we engage, more or less, in what Hochschild calls “emotion work” or “emotion management” with family and friends in a private context. Hochschild explains the difference in terms of “use value” and “exchange value,” the production of emotions in strangers for a wage being by definition alienating.

Capital and Labor: they are in exactly the same property-class position as the wage-workers;" that is, they do not own the means of production, even though they exercise some authority, derived from above, over wage workers (71). Another of these major shifts meant that in middle-class labor, "few individuals manipulate *things*, more handle *people* and *symbols*." The white-collar worker therefore needs skills to deal with large numbers of people "transiently and impersonally; they are masters of the commercial, professional, and technical relationship" (65). Although they may have management functions, they are not the source of their managerial authority: at mid-century, the managerial class was "a link in the chains of commands, persuasions, notices, bills, which bind together the men who make decisions and the men who make things" (80). Their functions of working with symbols and with other people are still carried out as dependent employees.

Mills' analysis of the personality market is an attempt to understand the effect on personality of the major economic shift from selling goods to selling services. Rather than buying a worker's physical labor and skill, the employer of white-collar labor buys employees' "social personalities:" "Whenever there is a transfer of control over one individual's personal traits to another for a price, a sale of those traits which affect one's

impressions upon others, a personality market arises. . . . With anonymous insincerity the Successful Person thus makes an instrument of his own appearance and personality” (182). This instrumentalization of the worker’s feelings and personal traits, through the habitual repression of his feelings, finally, Mills claims, shapes workers into personalities with acceptable, effective, salable traits. Personality “must now also be managed, must become the alert yet obsequious instrument by which goods are distributed”(184). Through management, which in this case means the repression of certain feelings and their replacement by more marketable ones, these changed habits eventually result in a changed person, one whose very being has been molded by the forces of the personality market into a marketable one: “Sincerity is detrimental to one’s job, until the rules of salesmanship and business become a ‘genuine’ aspect of oneself” (183). Thus, for Mills, “personality” is a collection of personal traits that can be managed, altered through habits, and instrumentalized to market products and services. In the workings of personality-market capitalism, “[m]en are estranged from one another as each secretly tries to make an instrument of the other, and in time a full circle is made: one makes an instrument of himself, and is estranged from It also” (188). This emphasis on “self-estrangement” and “alienation” sounds oddly outdated, even quaint, in our

postmodern era, like an adolescent fascination with the existential condition, perhaps, or the product of a superseded Marxism that naively believed there was something to be alienated *from*, a “first nature,” or a “real self,” as if the habituated middle-class workers in the personality market, suddenly released from the constraints of the workplace, would freely bound back to a place in which they were more truly “at home.” By the end of the century, technological communication habits and changing market needs dissolve the distinction between work and leisure, and the “second nature” of work absorbs the subjectivity of the postmodern worker completely.

Training for the personality market was instituted in public schools to accommodate evolving business needs. Mills describes one such course as offering “training in attitudes of courtesy, thoughtfulness and friendliness; skills of voice control, etc.” to train future middle-class workers to “sell themselves” (187). But as we have seen, Mills and Hochschild both emphasize the *affective* training in new emotional habits that accompanies success in many of these middle class jobs: emotions must be managed, both by the individual worker and by management; the necessary traits that Mills describes as necessary for the personality market are largely emotional management habits that, through what Hochschild later calls

“emotional labor,” sell products and services by creating a particular feeling in the audience. My discussion below avoids the use of “personality” because I define it as explicitly referring to these affective traits, which, since their function is to make profit through *pathos*, I distinguish from character and *ethos*.

Addressing many of the same mid-century concerns as Mills, Erich Fromm couches his analysis of middle-class work alienation in terms of character rather than personality. In one place, Fromm defines character in evolutionary terms, hypothesizing that human character evolved as a substitute for instincts that humans lost as they evolved. The substitute “had to have the *function* of instincts: enabling man to act *as if* he were motivated by instincts.” The biological function of instincts, and the social function of character, then, allow the (human) animal to act “without being delayed by too much doubt and in a relatively integrated manner” (*Anatomy* 251). This dynamic function of character, its potential for action, becomes a central theme in Chaim Perelman’s and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca’s discussion of the epideictic genre. They expand the traditional notions of this genre that I outlined in the introduction to this chapter by arguing that epideictic rhetoric has considerable relevance for their study of argumentation “because it strengthens the disposition toward action by

increasing adherence to the values it lauds” (50). When the epideictic topoi are deployed for persuasive purposes, the aim is not an immediate decision or intellectual adherence to a proposed probability, but future action. As adherence to these topoi is achieved, they are acted upon, made habitual, and thus the formation of character out of them allows future action, in Fromm’s terms, without delay or undue deliberation, habituated traits that allow action as if it were instinctual, a second nature. This is a more subtle and insidious process than the simple presentation of values to be emulated. In addition, as we have seen, the process is also highly coercive for the rhetor: she must impress upon herself those epideictic topoi most favorable to her audiences, thereby increasing her own disposition toward actions in line with the character she performs for that audience. In the workplace, this habitual performance means she acts her way into an acceptable character, that, if she had not been early habituated to it, is for her a “second nature.”

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca thus use a rhetorical genre to analyze the same social process that Fromm approaches through social psychology. For Fromm, every social group, culture or social class, needs to channel and shape human energy into specific forms, or characters, that allow for the continued functioning of that group: “Its members must *want*

to do what they *have* to do if the society is to function properly. This process of transforming general psychic energy into specific psychosocial energy is mediated by the social character” (*Anatomy* 252–253). Fromm details several character types which have developed to support capitalistic modes of production. Twentieth-century capitalism needed a worker who had been

molded into a person who was eager to spend most of his energy for the purpose of work, who acquired discipline, particularly orderliness and punctuality, to a degree unknown in most other cultures. . . . The *necessity* for work, for punctuality and orderliness had to be transformed into an inner *drive* for these aims. This means that society had to produce a social character in which these strivings were inherent. (*Sane Society* 77)

Fromm outlines several character orientations produced by twentieth-century capitalism. Here I will discuss only one, which Fromm calls the marketing orientation, because of its similarity to Mills’ and Hochschild’s analyses of the personality market. While Mills and Hochschild seemed concerned specifically with the emotional and affective ingredients of “personality,” Fromm provides a stronger link to the rhetorical concept of

ethos through his focus on character informed by the values and needs of the market:

The function of the market has been, and still is, predominant enough to have a profound influence on the character formation of the urban middle class, and, through the latter's social and cultural influence, on the whole population. The market concept of value, the emphasis on exchange value rather than on use value, has led to a similar concept of value with regard to people and particularly to oneself. The character orientation which is rooted in the experience of oneself as a commodity and of one's value as exchange value I call the marketing orientation. (*Man for Himself* 68)

Whether these members of the middle class are salaried employees or self-employed, charging for their services, whether they are doctors, artists, clerks, lawyers, business executives, or salesmen, "all are dependent for their material success on a personal acceptance by those who need their services or who employ them" (69). By "personal acceptance," I interpret, through a rhetorical lens, Fromm to say that the audience (client, customers, employer/manager) has a particular power over not just the behaviors of the middle class worker, but over his or her very character, by demanding that the worker/rhetor display acceptable habits, or said

another way, materialize middle-class *ethos*-forming topoi. In the marketing orientation, Fromm writes, one must

find the conviction of identity not in reference to himself and his powers but in the opinion of others about him. His prestige, status, success, the fact that he is known to others as being a certain person are a substitute for the genuine feeling of identity. This situation makes him utterly dependent on the way others look at him and forces him to keep up the role in which he once had become successful. (*Man for Himself* 73)

Fromm, like Mills, was interested in what he understood as the self-estrangement that occurs when “modern man [sic] experiences himself both as the seller and as the commodity to be sold on the market.” The requirements of middle-class work at mid-century forced the worker in the personality market to create himself as “something for others to judge and to use; thus his feeling of identity . . . is constituted by the sum total of roles one can play: ‘*I am as you desire me*’ ” (*Man for Himself* 72–73). Unlike the postmodern subject who is *defined by* her collection of roles and the discourse communities to which she belongs, Fromm and Mills resist seeing the roles and the *ethos* demanded by the personality market as the worker’s “real” character. The audience, whether boss or customer or client, for this

middle-class *ethos* largely calls the shots for the character it desires. Fromm seems to argue that this kind of alienation is structured deep into the character of the middle class; it is derived from a concern for what others think, for audience, a concern which demarcates the middle class from those below and above it.

In his irreverent look at class, Paul Fussell uses this concern for audience as a demarcator of the middle class. For example, situated at a great distance from the main road, William Randolph Hearst's San Simeon might be thought to indicate his top-out-of-sight upper class status. But Fussell notes that the building's facade "is designed to evoke respect, or rather awe, in the breast of the apprehender, and that indicates how very un-top-out-of-sight Hearst remained despite his pseudo-aristocratic airs. He cared too much what effect he was having on people" (32). His concern for what others think—the effect he has on an audience—drops Hearst to upper middle-class status. Of course, as I considered in Chapter One, many of the Greek elites found in rhetoric a way to pursue their own need to care what effect they had on the demos; they had to care what their empowered audience thought in order to protect their own interests. Such concerns, Fussell claims, indicate nervousness about "status slippage" (58), certainly a condition relevant to the Greek aristocracy in an era of direct

democracy, and to the middle class in the mid- to late twentieth century. In addition to an extreme concern with audience, other characteristics of the middle class that Fussell notes include: earnestness and a psychic insecurity that leads to a desire to not offend, leading to excessive concern with cleanliness and correctness (39); the desire to belong, making “[o]ddity, introversion, and the love of privacy” enemies of the middle class (while these qualities function to demarcate it from the upper orders) (41–42); and “optimism and his belief in the likelihood of self-improvement if you’ll just hurl yourself into it” (43). The next section explores the roots of some of these middle-class *ethos*-forming topoi, and the institution of freshman composition as a significant force for instilling them into middle-class aspirants.

Middle-Class *Ethos* and Freshman Composition

The *ethos*-forming topoi for elite rhetors that Aristotle lists in *Rhetoric* 1.9 are: justice, manly courage, self-control, magnificence, magnanimity, liberality, gentleness, prudence, and wisdom. The *locus classicus* for a list of *ethos*-forming topoi for the modern era, particularly as they began to inform the work *ethos* of the ever-changing “middle class,” is found in Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography, where he lists the virtues he

desires to instill into his own character. His discussion of these desirable habits follows a story about his disappointment with a church sermon that he had anticipated would address the moral principles needed for the making of good citizens. His pretext, then, is the church's apparent inability not only to inculcate but even to articulate principles for effective public participation. His "bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection" is explicitly designed to be achieved by the daily habitual practice of these virtues (much to his frequent frustration): "contrary habits must be broken, and good ones acquired and established" (73–74). He creates his list as a clarification of the various catalogues and enumerations of moral virtues he has studied, and arrives at thirteen (four more than Aristotle's):

1. TEMPERANCE. Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.
2. SILENCE. Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation.
3. ORDER. Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time.
4. RESOLUTION. Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.
5. FRUGALITY. Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; *i.e.*, waste nothing.
6. INDUSTRY. Lose no time; be always employed in something useful; cut off all unnecessary

actions. 7. SINCERITY. Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly. 8. JUSTICE. Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty. 9. MODERATION. Avoid extremes; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve. 10. CLEANLINESS. Tolerate no uncleanness in body, cloaths, or habitation. 11. TRANQUILLITY. be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable. 12. CHASTITY. Rarely use venery but for health or offspring, never to dulness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation. 13. HUMILITY. Imitate Jesus and Socrates. (74–75)

This list bears similarities to Aristotle's, (frugality, justice, moderation), but Franklin's *topoi* are updated and resituated for his era and the fluidity of the middle class that it gave rise to. Aristotle says, after listing his "parts of virtue," that "since virtue is defined as an ability for doing good, the greatest virtues are necessarily those most useful to others" (1.9.4). Many of Franklin's "virtues" reflect this notion of benefit to others; silence, for instance, frugality, justice, and even chastity reflect a concern for others, and Franklin even suggests that estimations of his character rose as those in his company recognized how his new habits took their interests into consideration (82–83). Other of his *ethos*-forming *topoi* bespeak the

employments of an aspiring middle-class: order, resolution, industry, and cleanliness begin to impress themselves upon the middle-class *ethos* and demarcate it from the lower classes, already in Franklin's time being defined by a nascent industrial revolution. The middle classes of the nineteenth century, small property owners, farmers, and entrepreneurs, would find order, resolution, and industry necessary to the achievement and maintenance of their class status. In *White Collar*, Mills examines numerous inspirational books and "success ideologies" that appeared between 1856 and 1947, and found that these topoi were constantly reiterated: "will power and thrift, habits of order, neatness, and the constitutional inability to say Yes to the easy road;" "upright, exactly punctual, and high-minded; he will soberly refrain from liquor, tobacco, gambling, and loose women;" "self-reliance in all things;" "caution and prudence." Mills suggests that this literature was largely intended for an audience of boys from rural areas and small towns, instructing them in "polish" and conduct befitting their middle-class aspirations.

That this list changed little from Franklin's mid-eighteenth century aspirations, through the nineteenth century, to the very differently situated middle class of the mid-twentieth century United States is evidenced by the fact that these *ethos*-forming topoi have, until very recently, formed the

backbone of the value system inculcated in freshman composition. In fact, Lynn Bloom, in "Freshman Composition as a Middle-Class Enterprise," situates her own analysis in relation to Franklin's list. His autobiography, which, Bloom notes, "has for two centuries been the template for American ascendancy into the middle class," she situates in the context of eighteenth century rhetoricians (Adam Smith, Hugh Blair, George Campbell). These teachers of rhetoric and middle-class values rewrote classical rhetorical principles from their aristocratic origins, shaping them into a form that was more amenable to aspiring middle-class needs and making them available for translation into nineteenth century pedagogical practices (655-56). Bloom sees these same middle-class values articulated by Franklin still promulgated in freshman composition. She unabashedly admits her own middle-class upbringing, and makes no apology for her and her middle-class colleagues' "preach[ing] what we had been practicing all our lives . . . for all of us knew right from the start how to function as middle-class teachers" (658). Her equation of the teaching of composition to "preaching" deeply habituated, apparently unquestioned, middle-class practices suggests that her move into teaching composition must have felt "natural" for her. I want to enumerate and briefly discuss her own list of middle-class character topoi that she argues are thoroughly embodied in

writing courses, “no matter what theories, pedagogical philosophies, or content we embrace,” because in the next section I will take issue with them and devise a different list of *ethos*-forming topoi for a different kind of “middle class.”

Bloom begins with SELF-RELIANCE and RESPONSIBILITY, middle-class values that are imparted, she suggests, through an emphasis on avoiding plagiarism and an insistence that students do their own work. RESPECTABILITY is achieved through the absorption of handbook rules and proper forms, inculcating “academic assumptions about the appropriate hierarchy of authority.” That “respectability” is still a governing character value of the writing classroom becomes apparent in Bloom’s discussion of the professor’s horror at receiving an “offensive” paper, one that presents a blatant affront to middle-class morality. Likewise, DECORUM and PROPRIETY are still required of the first-year writer, whose papers must “show respect, deference, and the proper degree of formality” from a subordinate writing to someone in the hierarchy above her. Bloom then turns to style to explain the values of MODERATION and TEMPERANCE (be clear, avoid fancy language), and THRIFT (don’t use more words than you need to make your point). EFFICIENCY is instilled through effective, time-saving heuristic procedures and writing strategies, gleaned from years of

empirical research on the writing process. Believing, as teachers will, that “disorganized writing is as disreputable as disorderly conduct, for it both implies mental laxity and shows disrespect for one’s readers,” teachers can become “organization police” as they attempt to inculcate middle-class ORDER into their students. CLEANLINESS and PUNCTUALITY require that students clean up their manuscript for delivery and turn it in on time. Finally, the attempt to justify the need for a composition course to freshmen because it will help them in future courses, and in work and life beyond college, relies on another middle-class virtue, DELAYED GRATIFICATION (663–64). Needless to say, a speaker or writer, at least in the 1950s, without these qualities would have what a middle-class audience perceived as a damaged *ethos* in a rhetorical situation; should such a speaker by chance happen to have the ear of a middle-class audience, his or her persuasive powers would be severely limited. This is, of course, why freshman composition textbooks, and even those addressed to more advanced student audiences, are at such pains to instill these habits into middle-class aspirants. These middle-class topoi creep insidiously into various kinds of texts, from theoretically informed composition textbooks

to sophisticated postmodern theory, where one might expect, if not a thoughtful departure from them, at least an explicit recognition of them.¹¹

For instance, in *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*, a rhetoric and composition textbook for advanced undergraduates, Crowley discusses a letter to the editor in an Arizona newspaper to introduce a lesson on persuasive *ethos*. Complaining about a “homosexual festival,” the writer of the letter calls his readers “you narrow-minded people,” blames AIDS on homosexuals, and concludes by suggesting that if his too-liberal audience is disturbed by the way of life in Flagstaff, they are invited to move elsewhere. Crowley writes:

It is not hard to see where his *ethos* begins to go wrong. Most Americans would not *be offended* by anything in the first or second paragraphs, since these sections of the letter express commonplaces from American ideology. Perhaps sensitive readers would *be put off* by the quotation marks around ‘festival’ and the use of the term ‘narrow-minded,’ but these usages do not do serious damage to the

¹¹ For the following discussion, I have chosen the texts of two women, Sharon Crowley and Nedra Reynolds. Since my focus is on class demarcations rather than gender, one of my purposes is to suggest that middle-class *ethos* is compelling and powerful enough to absorb a potentially radical feminist *ethos*. I would argue, of course, that a truly non-middle-class *ethos* cannot be achieved within academic discourse. Barbara Ehrenreich reminds us that “[t]he university is, after all, the core institution of the professional middle class” (58).

writer's *ethos* as a *sensible and reasonable* American. In the third paragraph, however, the *writer begins to lose control* of his *ethos* when, without further proof or elaboration, he connects AIDS and the mass-murderer Jeffrey Dahmer to homosexual activity . . . [but] conceivably, this audience might read this third paragraph without *being offended*. In the final paragraph, however, the writer . . . shows himself to be not only homophobic but *provincial* as well. (83, my italics)

Well in line with Bloom's list, Crowley explains to students that they should perform an *ethos* that displays respectability and propriety, always appearing "reasonable and sensible" in order not to "offend" or "put off" their audience, whose own middle-class status remains an unspoken assumption. "Loss of control" suggests that this writer has problems living up to the middle-class requirements of moderation and temperance. The offense of provincialism is not covered by Bloom's list, but bespeaks a very old class demarcation that takes on a new flavor in a postmodern, globally webbed world.

Not only when writing for undergraduates, humanities professionals constantly rely on these middle-class topoi in texts addressed to their peers, where they can take on some unusual contours. In "*Ethos* as Location: New

Sites for Understanding Discursive Authority,” for example, Nedra Reynolds makes a useful connection between the poststructuralist keyword, “site,” and the etymological roots of *ethos* as “haunts” or “place,” to argue that *ethos* is fashioned in the shifting locations that construct the subject as a colligation of positions or sites. “These notions of identity and site,” she writes, “packed with currency from recent theories, have long been important to the rhetorical concept of *ethos*, which encompasses the individual agent as well as the location or position from which that person speaks or writes” (326). Her definition of *ethos* shares some important elements of my own: *ethos* is a social construction “in which subjects are formed by the habits of their culture,” and “[c]haracter is formed by habit, not engendered by nature, and those habits come from the community or culture” (328–29). Recognizing that the “community” or “culture” from which these habits arise is always a conflicted one, she turns to a discussion of “*ethos* from the margins,” citing Donna Haraway’s use of standpoint theory to plead for a recognition of the validity of situated knowledges and partial perspective. But even the “view from below” is constrained by the middle-class demand for responsibility: Reynolds praises those feminist writers who “earn their rhetorical authority by being *responsible*—by stating explicitly their identities, positions or locations, and political goals.

In their acknowledgment of differences and their insistence on *responsibility*, feminist theorists of location . . . contribute to a revised notion of *ethos*" (330–331, my italics). Is this the same middle-class insistence on "responsibility" that Bloom found in freshman composition? Why this requirement that those "on the margins" be "responsible" for "stating explicitly" their positions or locations and goals? Is it because their audience is middle-class, and they must therefore appeal to that *ethos*? Or is it because these writers seek the authority and status granted to the middle-class, and therefore are forced to emulate its "responsible" habits? Granted, Reynolds is challenging in important ways some forms of middle-class *ethos*, particularly the *ethos* emerging from a scientific literacy that values "objective" knowledge in ways that pretend its "authority comes from on high or from the printed page itself" (332). Haraway states her version of standpoint theory in her often cited "Situated Knowledges" essay:

Many currents in feminism attempt to theorize grounds for trusting especially the vantage points of the subjugated; there is good reason to believe vision is better from below. . . . this essay is an argument for situated and embodied knowledges and an argument against various forms of *unlocatable*, and so *irresponsible*, knowledge claims. (qtd in Reynolds 331, my italics)

Haraway's liaison here between locatedness and responsibility is quintessentially middle class and concerns only speakers or writers who are besieged by the demands of a middle-class audience. Haraway is simply labeling the enemy—unsituated, “objective,” knowledge with universal claims—as the “irresponsible” other, not deserving of their middle-class privileges because of their irresponsibility. However, Reynolds' demand that “we recognize our partial perspective” and admit that “our sight or location is never representative of all experience” (331), is largely available only to the educated middle class. Being “explicit” about one's location, she writes, “is also being responsible” and “rhetors must take responsibility for their ways of knowing” (334). But one's awareness that one's perspective *is* partial, and one's ability to be explicit about one's situatedness, are competencies that accrue only to the fortunately educated. To claim that such awareness and explicitness makes one “responsible” functions here to align rhetors from the margins with middle-class values. Since the feminist writers who acknowledge and articulate their locatedness, and are therefore praised by Reynolds (Adrienne Rich, bell hooks), are absorbed into the middle-class through readership and earning capacity if not by class origin, one wonders whether this “responsibility” is an Aristotelian construction of “character in the speech” or if it has been practiced as a middle-class

habit leading to middle-class status and acceptability. At any rate, taking “responsibility” for recognizing one’s location on the margin at least saves one from denouncement as “provincial.” The middle-class aspirant is beset on all sides with pitfalls: provincialism and sophisticated forms of irresponsibility can trap her into betraying a less than middle-class character to the watchful eyes of her middle-class audience.

Barbara Ehrenreich’s *Fear of Falling* draws from popular sources and undergraduate sociology textbooks from which (along with the *ethos* taught in composition textbooks) students absorb middle-class topoi that have been deployed in the past fifty years to demarcate the middle-class from those it defines as other than itself. Responsibility, decorum and propriety, delayed gratification, and provincialism have all enjoyed long runs in middle-class attempts to demarcate itself from the *non*-middle-class, even as it struggled with its own evolving *ethos* in the latter half of the twentieth century. Ehrenreich demonstrates how the “discovery” of the poor in the 1950s and of the working class in the early 1970s relied on many of the topoi I have discussed to define the character of these lower classes through their lack of or resistance to middle-class qualities. Drawing from mid-century undergraduate sociology textbooks, she finds that sociologists explained to students how the lower class man “sedulously avoids work,

responsibility, and the consequences of tomorrow. His life is drunkenness, momentary hedonism, sexual license, violence and street scenes” (qtd in Ehrenreich 27). Obviously he [sic] does not qualify as middle class, since he does not exhibit responsibility, moderation, thrift, efficiency, delayed gratification, or, returning to Franklin’s list, chastity, temperance, or industry. Those unfortunates mired in the “culture of poverty” discovered in the late 1950s were defined with the “blame” topoi of helplessness and dependence—not the self-praising middle-class’s self-reliance, responsibility, or resolution. Oscar Lewis, whose study of Mexican families originated the phrase “culture of poverty,” explicitly credits them with “a strong present-time orientation with relatively little disposition to defer gratification and plan for the future” (qtd in Ehrenreich 49). Middle-class *ethos*-forming topoi that had been in circulation for nearly two centuries were easily marshaled by these sociologists to demarcate themselves from what Ehrenreich calls “the invented poor.” Of course, unlike the ancient Athenian demos who could at least vote on elite constructions of *ethos*, the impoverished groups defined by sociologists had no such power to determine what went into the sociology books, and the invention of a working-class *ethos* was aided by the fact that the working class itself “was never invited to participate in the great middle-class enterprise of image-making and social ‘discovery’” (121).

The working class character “discovered” by the middle class and clearly demarcated from itself was characterized by its vulgar language (as opposed to middle class decorum and propriety), and, in the wake of the upheavals of the 1960s, class-demarcating topoi suddenly become explicitly political: the working class was bigoted (not displaying the respectability of middle-class liberals), and too intolerant and authoritarian to be very good at democracy. The lower class man’s provincialism, too, had been described in the textbooks as early as the 1950s: “His perspective is limited, and so is his ability to understand the world around him” (qtd in Ehrenreich 27).

By the 1970s the textbooks seem to shift to a different set of topoi to demarcate the working class. The blue-collar person is “more ethnocentric, more authoritarian, and more isolationist than people at higher levels,” and is “reluctant to meet new people and new situations, to form new social relationships, and above all, to initiate contact with strangers. On the contrary, he values and seeks out, more than anybody else, the routine, the familiar, the predictable” (qtd in Ehrenreich 112). I do not find middle-class topoi oppositional to these in Franklin’s and Bloom’s lists: we seem to have entered a new territory. The assumption here is that the middle class person *is not* “reluctant to meet new people,” is perhaps even eager “to form new social relationships and . . . to initiate contact with strangers,”

and *avoids* “the routine, the familiar, the predictable.” The middle-class character, it seems, has shifted away from emphasizing Bloom’s values and now busies itself with gregarious, extraverted activities that involve novel situations and even risk. The working-class person is simply old-fashioned, still bound to outdated characteristics like “loyalty” that had been, in the 1950s era of the core corporation, important for white-collar employees too, but already outdated for the middle class by the 1970s.

In the next section I will look at these new middle-class topoi and situate them in the rapidly changing work environments and the attendant “management revolution” of the late twentieth century.

Postmodern *Ethos* in the High-Value Enterprise

I set up this section by introducing central themes from former Labor Secretary Robert Reich’s *The Work of Nations*. Reich’s analysis of the evolution of the core corporation into disaggregated global enterprise webs sets the stage for my consideration of the shift from the mid-century middle-class *ethos* that fascinated Fromm and Mills to the postmodern *ethos* of a new brand of employee. This section articulates several key *ethos*-forming topoi that have emerged in the last several decades and that demarcate this class of worker from the responsible, always appropriate

middle-class *ethos* of Franklin and Bloom and the alienated, personality-market *ethos* of Mills and Fromm.

Reich discusses the mid-century worker briefly, listing “conformity and tractability” as needed traits, “perfectly consistent with the standardized, high-volume system of production he oversaw” (54). High-volume production (the large-scale mass production of standardized goods for the standardized needs of mass consumption), the supreme achievement of the twentieth-century core corporation, has shifted to high-value production, where knowledge workers in “decentralized groups and subgroups continuously contracting with similarly diffuse working units all over the world” are paid to achieve the more specialized goal of serving more individualized needs for particular customers (82–83). The high-value organization produces and sells knowledge services: “the specialized research, engineering, and design services necessary to solve problems; the specialized sales, marketing, and consulting services necessary to identify problems; and the specialized strategic, financial, and management services for brokering the first two” (85). These high-value services require a work *ethos* that shares few *topoi* with Franklin’s or Bloom’s lists. In fact, we shall see that self-reliance, efficiency, and order have become particularly suspect in a business environment where problem-solvers, problem-identifiers, and

strategic brokers all work together to continually forge new and profitable knowledge links between needs and solutions.

Reich groups problem-solving, problem-identifying, and strategic brokering into a job-class that he names symbolic-analytic services. Various symbolic analysts in the decentered corporation “need to be in direct contact with one another to continuously discover new opportunities. Messages must flow quickly and clearly” (87). Thus the much-vaunted leveling of the old hierarchical corporate order and the “management revolution” evolved alongside structure-changing communications technologies. With the elimination or radical redefining of middle management, webs are extolled over hierarchies, and communication and idea-management in webs need speed and agility. The willingness to take risks and experiment with new opportunities is paramount: the master *ethos*-forming topos becomes flexibility.

The symbolic analyst is one of three job-class categories that Reich claims are becoming more solidified in an increasing global economy where the “economic fates of Americans are beginning to diverge.” These three job-class groups are: routine production services, in-person services, and symbolic-analytic services. Routine production services include traditional blue-collar line- and piece-work with metal and other materials, but also

include routine supervisory jobs, and many “high-tech” jobs— circuit board manufacture and installation, information- and data processing, and routine software coding. These workers are “guided on the job by standard procedures and codified rules” and their required work *ethos* retains the flavor of the mid-century middle-class *ethos* that I outlined in the previous section: “their cardinal virtues are reliability, loyalty, and the capacity to take direction. Thus does a standard American education, based on the traditional premises of American education, normally suffice” (175).

In-person servers, unlike routine producers, are in direct contact with specific customers and include retail sales, waiters, janitors, cashiers, nurses aides and orderlies, taxi drivers, secretaries, flight attendants, and so on. In addition to being “as punctual, reliable, and tractable as routine production workers,” most in-person servers “must also have a pleasant demeanor. They must smile and exude confidence and good cheer, even when they feel morose. They must be courteous and helpful, even to the most obnoxious of patrons. Above all, they must make others feel happy and at ease” (176). We have seen these requirements, and the alienation they cause, explained by Hochschild and Mills. As for routine producers, the role of technology in the lives of in-person servers is often one of

automation and control (fast-food and lodging are two prominent examples).

The third category, symbolic-analytic services, includes the problem-solving, problem-identifying, and strategic-brokering services mentioned above. Workers in this job-class, “research scientists, design engineers, software engineers, civil engineers . . . investment bankers, lawyers, real estate developers . . . advertising executives, art directors, cinematographers, publishers, writers, musicians, television and film producers,” consultants of all kinds and “even university professors,” produce and market “manipulations of symbols— data, words, oral and visual representations.” These workers’ income and status depends on “quality, originality, cleverness,” teamwork, or, when not with teammates, “examining words and numbers, moving them, altering them, trying out new words and numbers, formulating and testing hypotheses, designing or strategizing.” They add value in a high-value organization by “conceptualizing the problem, devising a solution, and planning its execution.” According to Reich, this job-class is the only one of the three who is, in the 1990s, not on a sinking ship (177–179). While the job-class labeled by “symbolic analyst” might also be called the professional middle

class or the professional/managerial class¹², I have chosen to use Reich's syntactically odd term (derived from "symbolic-analytic services") for several reasons: it highlights the complex rhetorical and literacy skills required of these workers, it serves as a constant reminder of the other two job-classes (on sinking ships) against which it and its *ethos* are defined, and it locates these workers at the end of the twentieth century in global webs of high-value enterprise.

The disruptive changes resulting from the shift from high volume to high value production are also outlined by management guru Tom Peters in *Thriving on Chaos: Handbook for a Management Revolution*. In a chart he titles "A World Turned Upside Down," he lists the functions and requirements of the old, core corporation, where the emphasis was on mass markets, mass advertising, and volume, where sales and service workers were "second-class citizens" whose main function was to "move the product," and where there was a need for tight managerial control, hierarchical structure, detached leadership, and centralized strategy planning. In the latter half of the century, fueled by financial uncertainties,

¹² The professional/managerial class has been fragmented anyway, since the managerial class has been under attack "from below, by the rank-and-file, from above, by senior management and from outside, largely by university-based management scientists and theorists" (Demarest).

technological transformation, changing tastes, and market fragmentation, the successful business must now focus on market niche creation and flexibility in manufacturing; it must recognize that even its sales and service employees are a major source of value added; and its internal organization must be flexible enough to survive the flattening of old hierarchical structure (management “delaying”) by self-managed teams and new leadership models that allow strategy development from the bottom up (42–43).

These changes have been touted by many as radically democratic, a workplace revolution driven by the ideology of the knowledge revolution. Philip Brook Manville even attempts to compare the new democratic organization to the Greek democratic revolution in “Ancient Greek Democracy and the Modern Knowledge-Based Organization: Reflections on the Ideology of Two Revolutions.” Manville justifies his apples-and-oranges comparison by pointing out that in the near future “nation-states will not be the only important ‘political entities’;” hence the global enterprise web becomes the new democratic polis (378). Both the Greek democratic revolution and the late twentieth-century knowledge/management revolution, he claims, represent structural shifts based on collapsed hierarchies and the attendant reconfigurations of social roles for

redefined groups and individuals. The Greek revolution, too, led to a cultural transformation marked by “the development of a self-conscious, group identity of the demos—a collective understanding and set of behaviors that exemplified the rule of the people” (379). Manville sees a similar transformation at work in the evolving group identity of knowledge workers. The citizen of the democratic Greek polis “was *expected* to participate in public life, and one’s citizenship exemplified the obligation” (380). For Manville, a similar expectation of participation devolves to workers at all levels in the knowledge-based organization. Public debate and discussion allowed Greek citizens “to reach sounder, more sensible decisions than could individuals or any elite” (381–82). Likewise, the knowledge-based organization emphasizes “participatory leadership” through internal debate and discussion among collaborative, co-equal associates with different kinds of specialized knowledges and expertise.

What new *ethos* is required for the symbolic analyst in the new economy? Various kinds of management literature offer a range of *ethos*-forming topoi, which I have gathered under the following terms:

LABILITY. In the “world turned upside down” that Peters describes, “loving change, tumult, even chaos is a prerequisite for survival, let alone

success” (*Chaos* 45). Adaptability and flexibility become part of the requisite character structure. Margaret Wheatley, in *Leadership and the New Science*, writes that employees in the new order must learn to tolerate “fluctuations, disturbances, imbalances,” and to develop a new understanding of the order that arises out of chaos and fluctuation (20). The old character defined by mid-century topoi, like the organization struggling to survive in the new economic order, must “relinquish most of what [it has] cherished” (Wheatley 5). Wheatley uses metaphors from the sciences of quantum physics, systems theory, and chaos to contrast the management challenges of the new order with the comfortable old styles based, metaphorically at least, in a Newtonian science where predictability, planning, and hierarchical control made sense for a bureaucratic age. Now management theorists must contend with “more fluid, organic structures” and “boundaryless organizations” (13). The new economy requires a labile character that thrives in situations of unpredictability, seeking out and instigating change. The marketplace has “turned ephemeral,” so “we must turn ephemeral too” (Peters *Liberation* 18).

That lability has become an *ethos*-forming topos, and a class-demarcating one, in the new economy can be seen in jokes that dot the business literature: “What is a Luddite? A boss who doesn't know the

difference between stability and paralysis.” Recall my discussion in the previous chapter of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where the rhetor, to construct a credible *ethos*, had to steer a praiseworthy middle course between disparaged extremes. Here, “love of change” is now that necessary middle course. “Stability” lies on the belittled edge of the continuum, hardly praiseworthy in the present business climate. Wheatley writes, “I’ve observed the search for organizational equilibrium [i.e., stability] as a sure path to institutional death, a road to zero trafficked by fearful people” (76). New science gives Wheatley the metaphors she needs to argue that “staying put or keeping in balance” or “stasis” are defenses of the fearful; disequilibrium and change are part of the process of life and self-renewal. The non-labile person’s *ethos* can now be attacked with impunity: he or she is “fearful,” “paralyzed,” or, in the information age’s favorite pejorative, a Luddite. But where does this topos stop describing the worker’s character and start describing the needs of the business enterprise in the new economic order? The “adaptive organization,” Wheatley writes, will “develop a capacity to respond with great flexibility to external and internal change” (91). Wheatley’s discussion of equilibrium also targets the old middle-class topos of order. As “equilibrium busters,” managers are “no longer the caretakers of order [but] the facilitators of disorder. We stir

things up and roil the pot, looking always for those disturbances that challenge and disrupt until, finally, things become so jumbled that we reorganize work at a new level of efficacy” (116). The needs of the organization—lability and a creative tolerance of disorder—easily become the characteristics that are required of its employees, and new topoi for a new economy structure the *ethos* that will be required of its most privileged workers, the symbolic analysts.

SPONTANEITY. Although similar to lability, spontaneity captures the mode of work of many symbolic analysts who are no longer strapped to an outdated emphasis on predictability and control. Peters argues that innovation is essential, and the key players in an innovator’s market don’t ponder and plan, they “leap, then look.” They have a glimmer of an idea, cobble together a prototype, then deal with modifications. Planning is out, spontaneous decision-making is in. Peters offers these examples:

Tomorrow’s effective ‘organization’ will be conjured up anew each day. At Oticon, for example, after a quick scan of the on-line project listings, employees decide what to work on, whom to work with, and what desk to take their personal cart to for the day! At CNN, a 30-minute, 8:00 a.m., 9-bureau, on-line ‘meeting’ invents the network for the coming day—until everything changes, which it

usually does in short order. Such odd procedures will become/are becoming as commonplace in 'hardware' companies as in 'software' firms; Oticon, after all, makes hearing aids. (*Liberation* 11).

As Wheatley learns from quantum physics and chaos theory, we no longer live in the Newtonian world of linear cause-and-effect predictability, but in a "world of constant flux and unpredictability" (3); the managed *ethos* must offer up for company profit habits that conform to such a world. The fall 1998 FranklinCovey catalogue, offering a range of products marketed as "tools for highly effective living," opens its section on day planners with a full-page photograph of a man with a boy on his shoulders, enjoying a walk along a country road. The text reads, "All spontaneity seeks is the opportunity," and the facing page, picturing refill pages for a variety of high-priced planners, advises, "Effective living is something you plan." Expensive products are marketed to symbolic analysts so they can record and plan their "spontaneity;" otherwise the "effective" management of "opportunities" might elude their grasp.

GREGARIOUSNESS. This topos serves as an umbrella term for many of the new economy buzzwords: connectedness, networking, participation, team-building, collaboration. In the "symbolic-analytic zone," Reich tells us,

insights and experiences are widely shared. The sharing extends beyond the immediate working team to include friends, former associates, informal acquaintances. It occurs spontaneously over lunches, at dinner parties, over drinks, at the gym. . . . continuous chatter about who's doing what, who's discovering what, where the action is. (236)

This symbolic analyst is not simply a mid-century white-collar extravert on the personality market: the gregariousness required for networking and team-building reaches far into the psyche to redefine the very nature of the worker's "self" or subjectivity. Wheatley finds metaphors from field theory to make her case for the "web of relationships" and "unseen fabric of connectedness" that exert a powerful influence over entities (the kinds studied by physical scientists or the kinds studied by management theorists) that move within its structure. She writes:

It is well known that the era of the rugged individual has been replaced by the era of the team player. But this is only the beginning. The quantum world has demolished the concept of the unconnected individual. More and more relationships are in store for us, out there in the vast web of universal connections. (38)

Wheatley exhorts managers to “stop thinking of roles or people as fixed entities,” and echoes, for a management audience, a sense of the postmodern subject when she defines a person as “an intriguing network of interactions, a structure of processes and potential relationships.” This networked subjectivity defined by its relationships, however, neatly dovetails with the new needs of the organization; the old Enlightenment subject, defined by traditional humanist notions like individuality (a coherent, separate centeredness not dependent on webs of relationships for its identity) and certainty (control over his own individual meaning-making processes aided by reason in a predictable world), sufficed an older economy. But now, Wheatley claims, “I cannot describe a person’s role, or his or her potential contribution, without understanding the network of relationships and the energy that is required to create the work transformations that I am asking from that person. . . . I then see the person as a conduit for organizational energy” (71). The commonplace shibboleth of the postmodern humanities, “we are a collection of subject positions,” loses some of its hoped-for subversive potential in this light. I return to this argument in the final section of this chapter.

LOQUACITY. Gregariousness, as we learned from Reich, involves “continuous chatter” and widely shared informal communications.

Symbolic-analytic work requires conversation. Alan Webber, former editorial director of the *Harvard Business Review* and founder of *Fast Company* magazine claims that “the most important work in the new economy is creating conversations;” conversations are the main source of added value in a knowledge economy. His water-cooler example epitomizes the shift: while the mid-century white-collar worker who stood around the water cooler chatting with co-workers would be reprimanded and told to “get back to work,” in today’s economy the taciturn or reserved symbolic analyst aspirant would be told, “Get to work! Get talking!” In Manville’s words, “The essential tools of the new knowledge organization are language and words— whether written, electronic, or face-to-face. These are the tools whereby consensus is achieved, ideas are voiced and incorporated, and mission, purposes, and goals are challenged, tested, and refined” (389).

SELF-MANAGEMENT. As workplace flexibility becomes the postmodern ideal, early- and mid-century Taylorization becomes the burden of the symbolic analyst who now must internalize and perform his or her own time management strategies. Self-management habits become part of the worker’s very nature, erasing the earlier distinction between

work and leisure, work and home.¹³ Hochschild documents the effects of this shift in *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*. Working parents discover a “second shift” at home, where necessary tasks must be carried out in a limited amount of time. Home thus develops a Taylorized feel: “quality time” turns into job time that takes “discipline, focus, and energy, just like work;” time-saving products are marketed and consumed to increase home-shift efficiency; and functions that used to be based in the home are “outsourced:” psychological counseling, tutoring, eating, and exercise classes segment family time into a jumble of appointments and anxiety about being “on time” (49–50; 212). The postmodern workplace, by contrast, can seem leisurely, with self-managed, gregarious team workers chatting around the postmodern water cooler.

The self-help genre offers numerous books and products to assist symbolic analysts in their attempts to mold themselves— and those they manage— into effective self-managers. Stephen Covey’s *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* remains by far the most popular example of this

¹³ Of course these early- and mid-century distinctions were highly gendered, and men’s leisure time was frequently spent *away* from home, or they escaped the home by spending longer hours at work. Hochschild’s documentation of changing work habits in *The Time Bind* demonstrates that as women move into the postmodern labor force, they, too, often escape home-management tasks and find a “home” at work.

genre, having spawned its own marketing industry that offers leather-bound paper and electronic day planners (there is even “a planner for kids” in elementary, middle, and high school versions), self-help books for home and family “management,” briefcases, electronic Rolodexes, motivational office posters, and time management seminars.

Covey’s book opens with a distinction between the personality ethic and the character ethic. He distinguishes his lessons in self-management from the “superficial” success literature that addressed the needs of the personality market over the last fifty years, which understood success as “a function of personality, of public image, of attitudes and behaviors, skills and techniques, that lubricate the processes of human interaction” and whose “basic thrust was quick-fix influence techniques, power strategies, communication skills, and positive attitudes” (19). His character ethic, on the other hand, reaches back to an earlier kind of success literature that emphasized “things like integrity, humility, fidelity, temperance, courage, justice, patience, industry, simplicity, modesty, and the Golden Rule,” as represented by Franklin’s autobiography, which is “the story of one man’s effort to integrate certain principles and habits deep within his nature” (18). The problem with the personality ethic success strategies is essentially a problem of *ethos*, because it breeds distrust:

If I try to use human influence strategies and tactics of how to get other people to do what I want, to work better, to be more motivated, to like me and each other— while my character is fundamentally flawed, marked by duplicity and insincerity— then, in the long run, I cannot be successful. My duplicity will breed distrust, and everything I do— even using so-called good human relations techniques— will be perceived as manipulative. It simply makes no difference how good the rhetoric is or even how good the intentions are; if there is little or no trust, there is no foundation for permanent success. (21)

Although he connects his character ethic to the older list of middle-class topoi that I outlined above, his focus on trust as “the highest form of human motivation” is tied to a new generation management strategy of “stewardship delegation” that serves the needs of a post-industrial economy. If managers train employees in this delegation model, “the steward becomes his own boss, governed by a conscience that contains the commitment to agreed upon desired results” (178–79). His example of training his son to assume “stewardship” over yardwork illustrates this managerial method, effective both at work and at home. After a thorough training process, his son becomes “his own boss,” having internalized self-

management and self-supervision habits. Thus his son's conscience is governed by "the commitment to agreed upon desired results," which, of course, are the father's desired results about the condition of the yard. The father therefore can "trust" the son's internalized habits of self-management; having internalized his father's desires, the son's new habits create a credible *ethos*.

The above topoi function, as I have claimed all *ethos*-forming topoi do, as class demarcators. Routine producers and in-person servers are not required to perform the *ethos* described by the above topoi; in fact, the mid-century topoi in Franklin's and Bloom's lists would serve their employers better. The above list also illustrates my earlier suggestion that epideictic topoi (used to praise this new character and censure the outdated) do *not* have the conservative function of passing on traditional values; hence, *ethos*-forming topoi also operate to demarcate the new, praiseworthy character from the outdated, blameworthy one. In *The Pursuit of WOW!* Peters does a remarkable job of dismissing, one by one, nearly all of the old middle-class topoi on Franklin's and Bloom's lists. Order is definitely outdated: "beware the champions of order," he warns, who would clean up the messiness of the free market. And, on a personal level, Peters recommends the *inefficient* behavior of keeping vast amounts of disorganized

information around (being a pack rat), and counsels us, “Don’t exalt order at the cost of innovation.” The old topoi of efficiency and order have been superseded by the productive messiness of the information explosion: *efficiency* is transmuted into *effectiveness*, because in an age of information-intensive products and services, some inefficient behaviors can be very effective. (Covey’s bestseller is titled *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, not of highly efficient people, as it might have been in an earlier era.) Peters urges aspiring symbolic analysts and entrepreneurs to break the rules, to “risk the establishment’s ire” and push the boundaries—Bloom’s decorum and propriety are no longer necessary, and probably even hinder effectiveness and profits. He urges his listeners to take wild chances, engage in “raucous dissent” and innovative disorder, and, as corporations disaggregate into decentralized units, not fear thumbing their noses at the boss. In the knowledge economy, where knowledge is collaboratively negotiated, always changing, and is the hottest commodity, these topoi define the character that is required for producing it.

It comes as no surprise to find, as we might expect from a management consultant, that Wheatley is quite explicit about the important role her metaphors—many of the *ethos*-forming topoi listed

above— have in shaping new and desirable employee behaviors. In her metaphor of the “fractal organization,” she describes a “potent force” that is the combination of simply expressed expectations of acceptable behavior and the freedom available to individuals to assert themselves in non-deterministic ways. . . . [New-generation managers] trust in the power of guiding principles or values, knowing that they are strong enough influencers of behavior to shape every employee into a desired representative of the organization. These organizations expect to see similar behaviors show up at every level in the organization because those behaviors were patterned into the organizing principles at the very start. (132)

This “potent force,” from a rhetorical perspective, is the coercive power of *ethos* to shape the habits, and hence the character, of aspiring symbolic analysts.

The New *Ethos* in the Computer-Mediated Classroom

Reich devotes two chapters of *The Work of Nations* to “The Education of the Symbolic Analyst.” The learning of “facts,” which will soon be outdated in the rapidly changing knowledge economy, is practically irrelevant, a convenient by-product of more essential

educational pursuits. These more essential tasks include learning “how to conceptualize problems and solutions” by training in “abstraction, system thinking, experimentation, and collaboration. . . . discovering patterns and meanings [and] new ways to represent reality” (229). These fortunately-educated children escape being spoon-fed an already-interpreted world:

Instead of emphasizing the transmission of information, the focus is on judgment and interpretation. The student is taught to get *behind* the data—to ask why certain facts have been selected, why they are assumed to be important, how they were deduced, and how they might be contradicted. The student learns to examine reality from many angles, in different lights, and thus to visualize new possibilities and choices. (230)

In other words, the student is prepared for his or her future employment as a knowledge-producer. Collaboration and negotiation prepare even very young students for their future vocation as networkers. Although many of the *topoi* in Bloom’s list still of necessity linger in the writing classroom, computer-mediated composition has proved itself quite well suited for instilling and reinforcing the new *ethos* of the symbolic analyst. Before I look specifically at the networked classroom, I shall reiterate some main

themes from previous sections in regard to the relationship between the new economy and postmodern humanities curricula.

In “A Very Good Idea Indeed: The (Post)Modern Labor Force and Curricular Reform,” Masud Zavarzadeh and Donald Morton argue that Syracuse’s revised English and Textual Studies curriculum, and by implication others like it, was prompted by the kinds of shifts in the new economy’s labor needs that I have been examining and is therefore “complicit in (post)modern capitalist practices” (66). The post-industrial labor force must be “more capable of ‘abstract thinking’—of conceptual operations which [are] fundamental to the business culture of computers and allied technologies and new modes of management” (67). In this new economy, the real function of the humanities is, as it always has been, “to develop the *affective* makeup of the labor force: to produce in the labor force the kind of (ideological) consciousness which situates the subject of labor in a manner necessary for the reproduction and maintenance of the existing social relations” (69). The crisis in the humanities curriculum was created by the gap between the linear, concrete literacies that sufficed in an age of Taylorization and white-collar routinization, and the new needs of a “flexible and agile high-tech labor force” (68).

The specifics of the postmodern curriculum described by Zavarzadeh and Morton betray striking similarities to the concerns and needs of the management revolution described by some of the writers I have discussed above. For instance, Zavarzadeh and Morton describe what happens to “reading” in the revised curriculum:

. . . reading was no longer regarded as an activity aimed at recovering the meaning placed in the text by the author, but as an operation whose main purpose was to analyze the very processes that produce meaning itself. . . . [reading became] a demonstration of the impossibility of representation . . . an abstract process in which the issue was not the creation of meaning by the individual reader but instead the condition of possibility of meaning itself. (70–71).

The impossibility of representation and the processes that produce meaning provide the subtext for Wheatley’s fascination with the management metaphors she finds in the new science. She continually emphasizes that an outdated attachment to notions of objective reality feeds management’s desires for planning and prediction and must be supplanted: “There is only what we create through our engagement with others and with events” (7). The belief in objective reality, the Newtonian paradigm, and mimetic theories of representation served market capitalism and low-tech industry,

but became useless for coping with a high-tech economy, a world where, as Peters puts it, “Disney and J. P. Morgan (entertainment and financial services) have replaced USX and Primerica (steel and cans) on Dow Jones’s list” (*Liberation* 8). Therefore, in Zavarzadeh and Morton’s words, “reform in the humanities curriculum [was] historically necessary in order to preserve capitalism” (71). Punctuality, decorum, order, resolution, frugality, moderation—the *ethos*-forming topoi that helped manage work habits of a past economy—are rendered obsolete by a new economy in which the greatest company assets are human knowledge and imagination. And, as Peters and every other management theorist/consultant now struggles to answer, how do you *manage* human knowledge and imagination?

The new labor force, Zavarzadeh and Morton argue, needs a new subject of labor, one affectively trained by a revised and complicit humanities curriculum:

a subject who would recognize and acknowledge itself as *not* coherent, *not* unitary, *not* sovereign. . . . one that could think of itself as a split subject because a new labor force was itself a split labor force: a dispersed labor force which was appropriate to the new, pluricentral, late capitalism. . . . a new subject that no longer

thought of itself as an organic whole, but knew it was the effect of complex cultural mediations. (73)

That these concerns are not just the abstractions of postmodernists safely housed in marginalized humanities departments is made clear by business ethicist Marc Demarest. The firm is now a “knowledge system” whose main concern becomes “knowledge management,” and “[u]nderstanding how the knowledge that provides differentiation in the marketplace is (a) constructed, (b) embodied, (c) disseminated and (d) modified-through-use is increasingly ranked by CEOs as among their top strategic priorities.”

These are also priorities in the curricula of many cultural studies and rhetoric/composition programs, and it is questionable whether fine distinctions in the uses to which these “strategic priorities” are put really penetrate students’ consciousness (or our own). I am suggesting that the *ethos*-forming topoi will do their work in the service of evolving market needs regardless of our political stance toward them or our awareness of their power to coerce our students and ourselves into particular habits.

While Zavarzadeh and Morton emphasize the *affective* nature of this subject-making process, I emphasize the rhetorical power of the *ethos*-forming topoi, and how those topoi structure not only subjectivity but the character that must be performed for workplace audiences. I will look in

particular at discussions of computer-mediated composition, seeking instances of those topoi outlined in the previous section that will implant the habits future knowledge-workers will need to make them desirable and credible participants in the new economy.

The widespread availability of computer programs offering easy manipulation of text and symbols was a great boon for the segment of the middle class that would soon be called symbolic analysts by Reich. In the early years of experimentation with word processing to teach writing, teachers and researchers questioned the effects of the easy changeability of text: does it make students produce more copious texts? Are they more willing to substantially revise their texts? In a philosophical vein, the seeming fluidity and dynamic nature of electronic text raised phenomenological questions about the power of a writing medium to determine consciousness and structure subjectivity. My focus here is much more narrow: how did the incorporation of electronic writing into the composition classroom aid in the inculcation of habits that produce the new *ethos* required by the new economy?

With the development of hypertext and networked classrooms, electronic writing raised questions that go far beyond the old concern with the individual student's word-processed text production. Now the

discussion turned to the networked medium's sometimes disturbing, sometimes liberating power to "decenter" the classroom. Student groups that engage in synchronous and asynchronous electronic discussions created in many teachers the belief that here was a remarkable new tool for the student-centered classroom. Many teachers enthusiastically claimed, and students concurred, that class participation blossomed. The (at least partial or apparent) loss of teacherly authority gave students the freedom to be more self-directed and motivated in their learning with peer groups. In the most theoretically-informed classrooms, this greater student involvement and displacement of the teacher as sole dispenser of knowledge led students to discover that they themselves were the collaborative knowledge-makers: a good lesson indeed for aspiring symbolic analysts.

The *ethos*-forming topoi that accompany the evolution of these collaborative knowledge-makers we have seen emerge from contemporary management literature. The apparent dethroning of the teacher as central authority and knowledge-dispenser mirrors the much-touted leveling of corporate management hierarchies, which many new economy gurus hail as a democratizing of the workplace. Networked classrooms strongly encourage, or, as we shall see below, actually coerce students into the habits

of gregariousness and loquacity—students are required under threat of grade punishment to write/talk a great deal to their peers. Like Webber’s example of the radical shift in the meaning of “talking around the water cooler” and the essential role of conversations at work, students in the computer classroom who *aren’t* “talking” in their chat room are admonished to “get to work—get talking!” Reich defines “networking” as “the studied process of knowing what is happening and simultaneously making oneself known” (237). The “networked” environment is well-suited for instilling these necessary habits for future symbolic analysts. New configurations of authority in the classroom emerge, equipping students, through the materially-inculcated *ethos*-structuring topoi, for the symbolic-analytic workplace where they will be expected to contribute to ongoing knowledge-producing conversations, not simply follow the orders of a manager.

In *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition*, Lester Faigley discusses his own early experiments with this loss of teacherly authority in networked discussions. Analyzing a transcript of an online synchronous class discussion and referring to his own posts in third person, he writes that, because of the speed of the discussion and the large number of participants,

there is no opportunity for Lester to make a conventional evaluation statement. . . . he has lost control of the floor. . . . By the end of this section [of the transcript] we see a reversal of roles, with the teacher replying and students making evaluative comments. . . . In terms of discourse structure, Lester has become a student in his own class.

The paradox is that the class discussion has gone much farther and faster than it could have with Lester standing at the front. (180–81)

His delight in the fact that the discussion has “gone farther and faster” reflects the managerial shift of focus from the old middle-class topos of *efficiency* to the updated one of *effectiveness*. Anyone who has analyzed a synchronous-chat transcript sees immediately that efficiency is impossible to achieve; but, the outcome of the chaotic, unpredictable, non-linear (all the metaphors Wheatley takes from the new sciences) transcript can be quite “effective” in terms of the final “product” of the conversation.

Seemingly following Wheatley’s admonition to give up predictability for potential, Faigley increases potential by choosing to name himself “Lester;” thus, “Lester” rather than “Professor Faigley” appears on everyone’s screens preceding his conversational contributions. His abdication of authority or managerial control even turns into a role reversal, when he “become[s] a student in his own class,” so the students can comply with

Peters' exhortation to aspiring symbolic analysts to break the rules, push the boundaries, risk the establishment's ire, and even risk rude disagreement with the boss. The networked classroom is an ideal place to inculcate these habits of risk-taking loquacity and enforced gregariousness.

Faigley's remarks on this experience also reflect the distinction between what Wheatley called the old "Newtonian" way of doing business and the unpredictable, fluid, chaotic needs of the new economy. Setting up a distinction between traditional and computer-mediated classroom practices, he writes:

In oral class discussions [in traditional classrooms], the remarks that stand out are those that neatly state positions and seem to tie up segments of knowledge. In *InterChange* [synchronous] transcripts, however, there are no such peaks followed by nods of agreement. The movement of discourse in *InterChange* is more wavelike, with topics ebbing and flowing intermingled with many crosscurrents the movement recalls the opposition [that Bakhtin] described between the monologic centripetal forces of unity, authority, and truth and the dialogic centrifugal forces of multiplicity, equality, and uncertainty. (182–83)

The outdated, “Newtonian” managerial schemes that sought unity of corporate purpose, centralized managerial authority, and prediction-enabling objective truth have been superseded. Wheatley, Webber, and Manville urge the new conversational forces described by Faigley: the multiplicity and equality of a supposedly radically democratized workplace, and the necessary uncertainty and unpredictability of the conversations that can keep businesses profitable in the new economy. The title of one of Peters’ books sums it all up: *Liberation Management: Necessary Disorganization for the Nanosecond Nineties*. Networked classrooms, when “successful,” brazenly intrude upon the teacher’s traditional role of providing a coherent, organized metanarrative: “Electronic discussions both invite participation and seriously limit a teacher’s ability to control the direction they take” (Faigley 185). Wheatley and other management theorists and consultants have likewise tried to convince traditional managers to give up their own metanarratives of coherence and control and to invite greater participation by employees to develop new potential and new possibilities for making (marketable) knowledge.

Faigley does have a few reservations about computer-mediated composition. For example, he fears that synchronous discussions are

simply one more manifestation of the logic of the late capitalist marketplace: “Electronic written discussions are governed by the logic of consumer choice. Topics are introduced and consumed according to what students like at that moment and what they don’t like” (190). But he doesn’t appear to see any connection between this quality of electronic written discussions and what he suggests are the desirable benefits of the medium: “giving voice to difference, decentering the authority of the teacher, [and] demonstrating the social construction of knowledge” (190). The management advice books I have examined are clearer about this connection, since the “logic of consumer choice” and the “logic of late capitalism” are precisely the rapidly shifting logics that created the management revolution and the emerging new work *ethos* that is required for businesses and individuals alike to situate themselves successfully within these logics. Recall Zavarzadeh and Morton’s description of the new subject of labor: “a subject who would recognize and acknowledge itself as *not* coherent, *not* unitary, *not* sovereign. . . . one that could think of itself as a split subject because a new labor force was itself a split labor force” (73). Faigley, too, marks this shift in English pedagogical practices and how they construct student subjectivities when he writes that it is difficult “for teachers to maintain a notion of students discovering their authentic selves

through writing when student writers try on and exchange identities in electronic discussions, even from one message to the next” (191). The decentered, dispersed subject easily becomes habitual, “natural,” in this medium, ready to accept the demands of the decentered, disaggregated late capitalist organization.

Thus Faigley concludes that “electronic discourse explodes the belief in a stable unified self,” and, to assuage the uneasiness he still feels over the postmodern condition, he offers the hopeful suggestion that electronic discourse also “offers a means of exploring how identity is multiply constructed and how agency resides in the power of connecting with others and building alliances” (199). Thus agency itself, the problematic and elusive desire of the postmodern subject, is promised to us if we will only restructure our character through the habitual practice of loquacity and gregariousness. Such a promise does not sound much different from Wheatley’s promise of the restructured workplace’s ability to fulfill the deepest human desires:

We are refocusing on the deep longings we have for community, meaning, dignity, and love in our organizational lives. We are beginning to look at the strong emotions that are part of being human, rather than segmenting ourselves (love is for home,

discipline is for work) or believing that we can confine workers into narrow roles, as though they were cogs in the machinery of production. (12)

The management revolution strives, then, to convince the symbolic analyst that the white-collar alienation that so plagued the middle class at mid-century can now be overcome *at work*.¹⁴ But Wheatley immediately makes it clear that control of employee behavior is still the goal of these promises of a more human workplace. Control can be achieved through “unseen forces” if the old visible means of coercion no longer function: “We now sense that some of the best ways to create continuity of behavior are through the use of forces that we can’t really see” (12). She uses metaphors from field theory to describe these “forces” and “unseen structures” that can “turn the employees’ energy into behavior for the organization,” structuring fields that “create behavior congruent with the organization’s

¹⁴ This ploy has apparently been quite persuasive to this class, since, as Reich notes, many symbolic analysts, unlike most routine producers and in-person servers, “would ‘work’ even if money were no object” (222). Of course, this may simply be another new topos to convince these workers’ audiences of their credibility and virtue. This topos suggests that the “habit-forming” nature of symbolic-analytic work subsumes the whole self (all subject positions) under the working self (the laboring subject). Work *ethos* is the only *ethos*, there is nothing to be alienated from, and the entire character has been restructured for the needs of the market. Here is the true coercive power of the “self-management” topos, that follows the symbolic analyst home, as Hochschild points out in *The Time Bind*.

goals,” an “invisible geometry working on [the organization’s] behalf” (52, 54). To locate agency, as Faigley does, in the *ethos*-forming topoi that function as this “invisible geometry” conveniently empowers subjects of labor in the new economy to make profits for their firm, however decentered and disaggregated it (or they) may be.

These “forces” may not be as invisible as Wheatley asserts, however. In an electronic discussion entitled “Interactivity Online: Shared Environments for Teaching and Learning,” teachers of computer-mediated courses discuss via e-mail some of their problems and concerns as they adjust to the networked classroom.¹⁵ One teacher writes of his students: “They need to be made aware that *one cannot be passive on-line. If you are, you simply are not there.* This will take some time. But, once they and we are aware of this then the real fruits of on-line interactivity will be realized” (my italics). Here, the refusal to participate (by those who resist gregariousness and loquacity) in an on-line discussion constitutes self-annihilation. Such self-elimination through resistance to new, forced habits is a foreshadowing of job problems down the road. Manville (who compared the new, democratic workplace to fourth century Athens), for

instance, describes the fate of employees who were not labile enough to adjust quickly to their organization's management revolution: the employees who were

used to traditional hierarchical management structures, were confused by the newfound freedom they were given. Many people floundered about in their jobs and came to me or other senior members in the department and asked 'just to be told what to do.' Many people left or were asked to leave because they couldn't handle the responsibility implied in their roles and didn't understand that because of the knowledge intensity of what they were doing, they had to take more accountability for contributing to the work at hand. (394-95)

The mid-century middle-class topos of "responsibility" here subtly shifts to workers' "accountability" for actively and quickly adjusting their character to match that required by the new management. Wanting to be "told what to do," they are constructed by Manville as being just as "passive" as the students who resist on-line discussion. And, as the teacher above described

¹⁵ Since I will quote from many separate posts in this discussion, and since each post is archived with its own URL, I have chosen not to refer to each posting with the writer's name and to reference only the index URL, to avoid citational clutter.

those students as “simply not there,” the same fate awaited these employees—they left their jobs or were fired.

Another teacher responds to the previous post in the “Interactivity Online” forum: “You seem to be saying that one needs: 1. *to force involvement and that this leads to interaction*. At least that’s what I experienced. At any rate there was involvement if not universal interaction” (my italics). Here the coercive nature of these classrooms (contrary to their touted “freedom” and democratizing affects) is stated explicitly as the means to the desired goal of the class. Another respondent asks: “In f2f a student may be quiet but you can tell from their non-verbal behavior whether they are engaged, asleep, or somewhere else. In the online classroom, what assumptions are made about silence? *How does one bring the quieter voices into the discourse?*” (my italics). This post expresses another aspect of the lack of traditional teacher control in the networked classroom: the inability to detect resistant students’ possible motivations for their lack of loquacity. But the central theme in many of these posts is how to habituate students to that particular *ethos*-structuring topos, to get them to work by getting them talking.

The discussion turns to student complaints about lack of structure, or inadequate structure, in computer-mediated courses as one reason for

their sub-optimum participation. Less structure, or at least a more relaxed structure than these teachers were used to in traditional classrooms, it is unanimously agreed, is desirable and productive in the networked classroom, just as “necessary disorganization” has become a byword of the management revolution. Indeed, as another poster puts it, teachers should, like good new-economy managers, avoid any urge to over-structure the computer-mediated course: “there is a desire to present a ‘complete shrinkwrap package’ which militates against flexibility.” One frustrated teacher suggests that forcing students to adapt to this “flexibility” begin in the traditional classroom: “Too often my offers to students to let them design their course, select from a line of topics, create their personal outcome, have met with the same silence, or pleas— ‘what do you have in mind?’— to hostility— ‘I payed my money for you to decide.’ ” These student pleas, of course, reflect those of the flustered employees in Manville’s organization that he deemed passive and, finally, not even there. This teacher continues: “15 or so years of passive schooling has trained learners well. . . . *Solution? Some way of teaching, forcing, modeling, cajoling and habituating students in f2f to be active learners.* Then, carefully shift these skills on-line” (my italics). Whether begun in the traditional classroom or the networked, the forced habituation is the subtext of this

entire conversation. Some posters are self-aware enough to offer examples of how their own grading practices “force” participation: “So I sort of ‘force’ the participation issue by putting in my course many little deadlines for completing various assignments and by (God forbid!) ‘grading’ students’ responses in our discussion forum.” This is a far cry from Bloom’s list, where grades might be used to force adherence to older middle-class habits like punctuality, cleanliness, self-reliance, and propriety. He goes on:

There are things that I want my students to do, and most of them won’t get those experiences if I don’t somehow hold them accountable for finishing all the projects. . . . I have found that to help them most, I have to be very controlling and on top of everything that happens in the virtual classroom. And I stick by my nasty ol’ rules. And yet, even though I sound awful here—like a dictator—to myself even—the way my online course operates tends to encourage participation and not discourage.

Here the need to force particular experiences onto students is so great that the teacher risks his own *ethos*; the habituation of students to the new *ethos* is so important that he becomes a dictator, so the students’ future managers won’t have to.

S. Michael Halloran has argued that a theory of *ethos* is important for teachers of composition. Writing before the extensive implementation of computer-mediated composition, he argues:

If *ethos* is manifested in rhetorical action, and if *ethos* is formed by choosing ethical modes of action, it follows that educating a person in rhetorical action, schooling him in proper rhetorical habits, is a means of forming his character. If we adopt the view that a theory of *ethos* is an important need for teachers of composition, we take on responsibility for shaping the character of our students. My own view is that in fact this is what we are doing whether we like it or not, whether we acknowledge it or not. In directing students to write this way rather than that, we tell them in effect to be this sort of character rather than that. (61)

Halloran's statement reflects the Isocratean vision of the power of rhetorical education that I outlined at the end of Chapter One, even though it is set within the context of an article about Aristotle's theory of *ethos*. Similar to Covey's project, he also distinguishes his notion of *ethos* from those in composition who define it as "personality" or "voice." He cites the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and concludes that

Developing character, then, is a matter of pulling oneself up by one's own bootstraps. To achieve courage, an aspect of *ethos*, I must act courageously over and over again until it becomes quite natural for me to act in a courageous fashion. When I have the habit of courage, I have the virtue of courage as part of my character. (61)

As I argued in Chapter One, Aristotle's teaching on *ethos* was an attempt to negotiate the conflict between aristocratic habits that he wished to preserve and an unruly demos that he did not see as "pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps." Such middle-class, agent-centered appropriations of Aristotle's rhetoric must be complicated by a sociological investigation of class conflict. Computer-mediated classrooms shape an *ethos* in both teachers and students that conforms to the needs of knowledge workers in a new economy while demarcating that class from those with restricted access to emerging technologies.

Chapter Three

Demarcating Science: *Ethos* and Knowledge Production in the Science Wars

Introduction

My argument in the previous two chapters has been that classes or groups construct their *ethe* in order to establish or maintain a demarcation from other classes or communities with which they are in present or potential conflict, and that a rhetorical understanding of *ethos* can be enhanced by historical and sociological perspectives on those classes. This chapter examines the demarcation of science, a theme with a long history in the philosophy and sociology of science, as another instance in which *ethos*-forming topoi play a predominant role. I begin with the scientific *ethos*-forming topoi, or institutionalized norms of science, that Robert Merton, a pioneer in the sociology of science, outlined over fifty years ago. Still prevalent in contemporary scholarship in rhetoric and sociology of science, the Mertonian norms have been highly effective in this century for the demarcation of science— and scientific knowledge— from various groups— and their non-scientific knowledges— with which science has

come into conflict, including religion, the “irrational” beliefs of non-Western cultures, the humanities, and the social sciences.

Recent trends in the sociology of science have largely, although not completely, overturned many of Merton’s assumptions about the role of sociologists who investigate scientific practices. I briefly outline some of the salient features of these new developments, since they have exerted tremendous influence on rhetorical approaches to science; however, it is not my intention, nor would it be possible in a single chapter, to fully outline the complex debates that have structured the wide-ranging issues in contemporary science studies over the past thirty years. My focus remains on Merton’s topoi, and I argue that they remain highly effective in *public* debates about the nature, purpose, and validity of scientific knowledge. My first example of the public performance of scientific *ethos* grounded in Mertonian topoi is the 1982 *McLean v Arkansas* case in which creation-scientists attempted to establish “balanced treatment” of evolution and creation-science teaching in public schools. In my second example, the 1996 Sokal-*Social Text* affair, I argue that Mertonian topoi are again deployed in the attempt to fortify scientific *ethos* on a public stage.

A secondary theme of this chapter is the problematic status of the subspecialty known as rhetoric of science. I discuss Lawrence Prelli’s *A*

Rhetoric of Science as an example of the appropriation of classical terminology for the analysis of scientific discourse, and Greg Myers' *Writing Biology*, an example of the dual use of rhetorical and literary theory as tools for interpreting scientific texts. The Science Wars, a recent offshoot of the media's exploitation of the Culture Wars, have been fueled by Paul Gross and Norman Levitt's 1994 *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science*, which scathingly attacks a variety of science studies scholars in literary theory and sociology. I find it noteworthy that neither Gross and Levitt, nor any of the numerous public commentators on the Sokal hoax, ever refer—either in disparagement or in praise—to any science studies scholarship in the field of rhetoric and composition. Therefore, I raise the question of rhetoric's relation to sociology and to cultural studies, and ask if the rhetoric of science is doing something right—or something wrong.

Demarcating Science

In his classic 1942 essay, originally published under the title "Science and Technology in a Democratic Order," Merton situates his account of scientific *ethos* in the context of what he calls the "revolt from science." The anti-science that causes Gross and Levitt and Sokal so much anxiety is

nothing new, of course, having appeared in various manifestations since the era of early nineteenth-century Romanticism. Although these diverse instances of revolt from science are each distinct in their historical specificity, and although Merton's sociological description of scientific practice has been critiqued and superseded by subsequent trends in the sociology of science, I return to his account of the normative structure of science for several reasons that are important for a rhetorical understanding of scientific *ethos*. According to Merton, scientists respond to "incipient and actual attacks upon the integrity of science" by clarifying and reaffirming scientific *ethos* (267-68). Thus he outlines the topoi that construct and fortify scientific *ethos* against the backdrop of public controversy over the validity of scientific authority. I highlight his pretext for writing in connection with my Chapter One discussion of topoi as material/discursive markers and organizers of habits and practices that act coercively on the rhetor, topoi that simultaneously encode and construct the stratification and organization of social groups. Scientific *ethos*-forming topoi are, then, a powerful example of class-demarcating topoi.

In my Introduction I discussed William Graham Sumner's appropriation of the Greek notion of *ethos* for the sociological analysis of the operation of power in social groups and institutions. Merton employs

Sumner's notion of *ethos* for his functional analysis of how scientific institutions harness the habits of individuals to serve the overriding interest of the community—in the case of science, the extension of certified knowledge. Having cited Sumner's *Folkways* on the concept of *ethos*, Merton writes:

The ethos of science is that affectively toned complex of values and norms which is held to be binding on the man of science. The norms are expressed in the form of prescriptions, proscriptions, preferences, and permissions. They are legitimized in terms of institutional values. These imperatives, transmitted by precept and example and reenforced by sanctions are in varying degrees internalized by the scientist, thus fashioning his scientific conscience or, if one prefers the latter-day phrase, his superego. Although the ethos of science has not been codified, it can be inferred from the moral consensus of scientists as expressed in use and wont, in countless writings on the scientific spirit and in moral indignation directed toward contraventions of the ethos. (268–69)

In Chapter One, I introduced the notion of the *logos* of *ethos* as the habituation to ideologically informed practices which functions to keep members of a particular class “in their place.” Merton's final sentence in

this quotation suggests the constraining nature of scientific *ethos* upon the class “scientist,” a coercive social effect (also implied in “conscience” and “superego”) that, through the “moral indignation” of others in the group, functions to keep scientists “in their place” as publicly credible knowledge producers and spokespersons for the potential social uses of that knowledge. But his emphasis on social structures also makes explicit the equivalence between *ethos*-forming topoi (institutional imperatives) and scientific technical methods. Merton explains:

The institutional goal of science is the extension of certified knowledge. The technical methods employed toward this end provide the relevant definition of knowledge: empirically confirmed and logically consistent statements of regularities (which are, in effect, predictions). The institutional imperatives (mores) derive from the goal and the methods. The entire structure of technical and moral norms implements the final objective. . . . The mores of science possess a methodologic rationale but they are binding, not only because they are procedurally efficient, but because they are believed right and good. They are moral as well as technical prescriptions. (270).

Here Merton again echoes Sumner, who argued that the mores, as constitutive traits within a particular *ethos*, are considered by the group to be right and good. As I suggested in Chapter One, topoi are the places where social relations are kept in language, a linguistic, rhetorical storehouse of the elements of discourse that reflect the stratification and organization of social groups in any given culture. In other words, *ethos*-forming topoi consist of the habits and practices by which a culture arranges classed subgroups into relations of production. In the cases that I examine later in this chapter, scientific *ethos* in particular functions to arrange the classed subgroups of the humanities, social sciences, religion, and science into hierarchized relations of the production of *knowledge*. Scientific *ethos* is such a powerful demarcator of class because, Merton suggests, it is structurally equivalent to scientific methodology and epistemological privilege; therefore, justifications of science that rely on rationalist philosophies of science are, in essence, presentations of scientific *ethos*.

A brief outline of each of Merton's four elements of scientific *ethos*—universalism, communality, disinterestedness, and organized skepticism—will set up my discussion of how these topoi function to demarcate science from non-science in *McLean* and in the Sokal affair.

UNIVERSALISM guarantees that the “race, nationality, religion, class, and personal qualities” of the individual scientist are irrelevant to the knowledge produced (Merton 270). Ethnocentrism and the subjectivity of the individual scientist (relativism or cultural determinism) are incompatible with scientific objectivity.¹⁶ As the philosopher of science N. R. Campbell puts it, “Science is the study of those judgments concerning which universal agreement can be reached” (qtd. in Laudan 255). The Sokal affair generated much argument from this topos, as have recent trends in both the cultural and social studies of science.

Merton’s second element of scientific *ethos*, COMMUNISM, usually referred to as COMMUNALITY in the later literature, indicates that the “substantive findings of science are a product of social collaboration and are assigned to the community.” Scientists do not individually claim intellectual property rights over the knowledge they produce; acknowledgment is limited to recognition and esteem, sometimes commemorated by eponymy (the Copernican system, Boyle’s law). Thus

¹⁶ Updating his 1942 article in a footnote, Merton places the Western affirmation of universalism against the competing claims of Marxist-Leninist science, which in the late 1940s had attempted to prove “that science, like all culture in modern society, is national in form and class in content.” But, he concludes, “the criteria of validity of claims to scientific knowledge are not matters of national taste and culture. Sooner or later, competing claims to validity are settled by universalistic criteria” (271 n 6).

there is a moral imperative to communicate findings through publication for the scientific fraternity; the scientist who does not do so is considered “selfish and anti-social” (or, as I shall discuss below regarding the *McLean* case, not a scientist at all). This sense of communality, cooperation, and indebtedness to science’s cumulative achievements is expressed in Newton’s statement: “If I have seen farther it is by standing on the shoulders of giants” (Merton 273–75). Questions of peer review, grounded in arguments from the topos of communality, feature heavily in both *McLean* and in the Sokal affair.

DISINTERESTEDNESS serves the normative function of controlling scientists’ motives, which are regulated through their accountability to their peers. In Merton’s description, this norm keeps scientific fraud at a low level, compared to other professions. Disinterestedness, in the Mertonian view, demarcates science from other spheres of activity such as medicine and law, which, unlike science, were created by capitalism and therefore encourage practitioners to exploit laymen. Although scientific and technological achievements can be appropriated for interested purposes, the topos of disinterestedness, with a “firm basis in the public and testable character of science,” extends scientifically-produced certified knowledge to the public.

Finally, through ORGANIZED SKEPTICISM, scientists suspend judgment, at least temporarily, and detach themselves from the attitudes and claims about various aspects of nature and society made by other religious, economic, and political groups (277–78).

It is important to remember that Merton situates this discussion of scientific *ethos* in the context of “incipient and actual attacks” upon science. When the integrity of science is challenged by outside groups, the institution “must reexamine its foundations, restate its objectives, seek out its rationale,” and that is accomplished, Merton claims, through “clarification and reaffirmation of the ethos of modern science” (267–68). In both *McLean* and the Sokal affair, outside groups challenge the knowledge-producing prerogatives of science, and scientists still respond, forty and fifty years after Merton, by shoring up scientific *ethos*.

The four basic norms of scientific *ethos* that Merton describes are reiterated and recast rhetorically as topoi available for the construction of *ethos* in Lawrence Prelli’s extensive topos-based analysis of scientific argumentation in *A Rhetoric of Science* (1991). Prelli organizes the topoi found in scientific argumentation into four broad categories: (1) problem-solution topoi (providing “good reasons” for scientific claims, such as experimental competence, replication, and originality; corroboration;

quantitative precision; and predictive power); (2) evaluative topoi (including accuracy, internal and external consistency, scope, and simplicity); (3) exemplary topoi (discursive strategies such as examples, analogies, and metaphors); and (4) topoi that enhance the scientist's *ethos* (Merton's universality, communality, disinterestedness, and skepticism). However, Merton's sociological perspective in his 1942 article makes more explicit, and I think more helpful, connections than does Prelli between these four *ethos*-forming topoi and science's technical methods (i.e., those that are argued through Prelli's problem-solution and evaluative topoi). Prelli seems to think of the four *ethos*-forming topoi as elements that the scientific rhetor can "add and stir" to his or her discourse, rather than elements that are an essential part of the methods and epistemological goals of scientific argumentation. By focusing on the inventional and persuasive potential of scientific topoi as consciously chosen argumentative strategies, Prelli sidesteps the essential connection between the topoi of scientific *ethos* and the methodological and epistemological privileges that accrue to scientists who display that *ethos*. Prelli merely wants the rhetoric of science, grounded in an elaborate appropriation of classical rhetorical theory, to help scientists more efficiently achieve their communication goals, and his rhetoric of science focuses on the matching of claims to community

conventions and audience constraints, noncritically examining how scientific texts do what they do. Although Merton has also been criticized for developing a sociological perspective that merely serves as a justificatory adjunct to rationalist philosophies of science, I suggest that Merton's understanding—that an *ethos* tied to institutional practices and knowledge-making privileges plays an essential role when science is attacked by outside groups and must defend itself on a public stage—offers a vision of *ethos* that more richly reflects the complex potentialities of classical terminology. I will return to my problems with Prelli, and other rhetoric of science approaches, later in this chapter.

In the 1940s and 1950s, scholars who offered sociological and philosophical accounts of scientific activity made it their task to demarcate science as unique among intellectual disciplines. Science's uniqueness derived from what was seen as the remarkable consensus achieved among scientists about the kinds of knowledge worth pursuing, the methodological procedures for pursuing it, and the results of that knowledge as an accurate and truthful understanding of the natural world. In contrast, in the humanities and social sciences, it was argued, academic productivity was largely motivated by dissensus over these problems. In the sociology of science, this focus on the achievement of nearly universal consensus in

science through adherence to the normative topoi outlined above was known as the Mertonian school. The rationalist philosophy of science, dominated by logical empiricists and later by Karl Popper, like Mertonian sociology, functioned as a handmaiden to science, offering its own rationalist explanations for why the achievement of scientific consensus led to truthful statements. As physicist-turned-sociologist John Ziman claimed, consensus was “the basic principle upon which Science is founded. It is not a subsidiary consequence of the ‘Scientific Method’. It is the scientific method itself” (qtd in Laudan 255). Mertonian norms functioned as a sociological equivalent to this epistemological and methodological focus on consensus in a way that did not threaten scientists’ cognitive authority in their own domain. Focusing its investigations on science as a social institution, Mertonian sociology sought to understand how science organized and regulated itself through the social roles of scientists, reward systems, competition, and the norms that regulated scientific behavior. The norm of universalism meant that the actual knowledge products of science were unaffected by social factors and were therefore exempt from sociological analysis. Hence, as critics would point out in the 1970s, a Mertonian perspective was complicit with rationalist philosophy’s position that scientific knowledge was explicable in terms of its rational merits

alone. Mertonian sociology highlighted consensus by describing the scientific *ethos* that kept science on its epistemological throne in the public eye and in its privileged place as important institution of knowledge production. Sociological, and for that matter rhetorical, accounts of scientific practice that follow the Mertonian paradigm leave in tact scientists' cognitive authority over knowledge-making, and maintain science's distinct epistemological status, clearly demarcated from other disciplines and knowledge-producing activities.

Sociologists Thomas Gieryn et al. claim that this demarcation activity has been essential in the professionalization of science as an institution that provides marketable services in knowledge production and that must establish and maintain control over markets for specialized knowledge or services. For instance, in the early twentieth century, American obstetricians successfully professionalized themselves by demarcating—creating a social boundary—between themselves and midwives, who offered similar knowledge and services in a competitive market. This demarcation was accomplished by depicting to the public the obstetrician's technically and scientifically superior services in contrast to the “unscientific” and “risky” practices of “arrogant” and “superstitious” midwives. These demarcation arguments shifted public support and

empowered obstetricians to successfully engage in organizational tactics that led to restrictive licensing practices and constraints on the medical instruments and pharmaceuticals available to midwives.

Writing in 1985, Gieryn et al. claim that while similar studies in the history of the professionalization of medicine and law have been popular since the 1960s, little attention had been devoted to analogous processes in science. They argue that the production of knowledge for societal consumption functions within a knowledge market in which the State is a primary consumer. The State, of course, patronizes the production of science's distinctive commodity to a much greater degree than it does competing forms of knowledge (poetry, for instance, receives very little State sponsorship, and religion, owing to the Establishment clause of the First Amendment, receives none). By continually negotiating and maintaining the demarcation of their knowledge-commodity and denying competitors cognitive authority in matters of knowledge about nature and technology and about the skills required to produce new knowledge, scientists create public demand for their brand of knowledge while their carefully demarcated non-scientific competitors are denied resources and credibility. The public image of science is bolstered by the public

understanding of scientific *ethos*, particularly in historical moments when public distrust of science is high.

This concern for demarcating science from competitive knowledge producers is clearly evident in Gross and Levitt's *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science*. They define the "academic left" as composed mainly of humanists and social scientists who have "a deep concern with cultural issues, and, in particular, a commitment to the idea that fundamental political change is urgently needed and can be achieved only through revolutionary processes rooted in a wholesale revision of cultural categories" (3). The academic left is portrayed as "muddleheaded" and "hostile to science." They concede that "naturally enough" the academic left dislikes certain social uses of science, but they quickly establish that their quarrel is mainly with those cultural theorists who display "open hostility toward the *actual content* of scientific knowledge and toward the assumption, which one might have supposed universal among educated people, that scientific knowledge is reasonably reliable and rests on a sound methodology" (2, their italics). This hostility they label medieval, anti-Enlightenment, and irrational, a hostility that leads to a dangerous displacement of received cultural values by "an entirely novel ethos" (3). It is, then, scientific *ethos* that they implicitly understand as

under attack, an *ethos* that, as Merton shows, is intricately bound up with the “sound methodology” of scientific knowledge-making practices and even the “actual content” of the results of those practices.

Gross and Levitt also echo Gieryn et al.’s recognition of the professional stake in science’s control over knowledge production in a competitive market, and hence the urgency of reinforcing a sagging public acceptance of science’s demarcation from knowledge-producing competitors. They express alarm over the threat to

the capability of the larger culture . . . to interact fruitfully with the sciences, to draw insight from scientific advances, and, above all, to evaluate science intelligently. To the extent that the academic left’s critique becomes the dominant mode of thinking about science on the part of nonscientists, that thinking will be distorted and dangerously irrelevant. (4)

Here, humanist and social scientist “midwives” peddle their brand of knowledge wares in competition with science. Like midwives, their methods and products, according to Gross and Levitt, must be clearly demarcated from those of science, and their knowledge defined as inferior. Gross and Levitt register surprise that the science critics have not armed themselves by “crowding into science and mathematics lecture rooms” to

learn more about the enemy, but instead have “overcome their former timidity or indifference [to science] not by studying it in detail but rather by creating a repertoire of rationalizations for avoiding such study” (6). Thus the stage is set for the stream of humanities and social science knowledge-bashing generated in the wake of Sokal’s hoax. The Sokal debate generated the same sort of demarcating name-calling that proved effective in the midwife debate: those who attack the cognitive authority of scientists are arrogant, superstitious, unscientific, and pose a threat to the public’s well-being. Marking the academic left as hostile outsiders, Gross and Levitt’s polemical treatise urges academic scientists to fortify the “epistemic dignity of genuine science” by policing the university’s curricular borders, weeding out the “pseudoscientific nonsense” that has infiltrated humanities and social sciences courses that audaciously offer insights about the workings of science, and voicing their opposition to tenure promotions of scholars who engage in objectionable forms of science studies.

In this section I introduced Merton’s explanation of scientific *ethos* and discussed how Mertonian sociology, in tandem with rationalist philosophy, bolsters the “epistemic dignity” of science and helps to maintain its monopoly over certified knowledge production. By the 1970s,

however, ideological developments in sociology and reactions against the Mertonian paradigm fueled significant challenges to the demarcation of science from other realms of knowledge. The next section looks more closely at this intrusion into previously privileged scientific territory that prompted hostile reactions from science's supporters.

Erasing the Boundary: Symmetry and the Strong Programme

New developments in the sociology of science since the 1970s (whose practitioners demarcate themselves from Mertonian sociology of science [SS] by calling *their* project the sociology of scientific knowledge [SSK]) have rejected the Mertonian paradigm and reflect the concerns of ideological critique and postmodern theory that flowered in the 1960s. Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in 1962 sparked new directions in the sociology of science, and in the 1960s and 1970s many sociologists and historians shifted their focus from consensus to controversy and dissensus among scientists. In its new focus on dissensus, many sociologists of science abandoned what they saw as the earlier sociology's complicity with rationalist defenses of scientific knowledge that demarcated it from other knowledge-making activities. New explanations

saw scientific practices as social and rhetorical endeavors much like those of any other discipline or institution.

Traditional theories of the sociology of knowledge (those of Karl Mannheim and Emile Durkheim, for instance) had expanded Marx's notions of social determinism into realms of knowledge such as legal, political, religious, and artistic ideas. The knowledge produced by science, however, remained exempt from social explanations. David Bloor's now classic *Knowledge and Social Imagery* (1976) combines an expansion of traditional sociology of knowledge with a critique of Mertonian sociology of science by opening with the question: "Can the sociology of knowledge investigate and explain the very content and nature of scientific knowledge?" (1). His call for a "strong programme" in the sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK) sets out to answer this question with a resounding yes. Alan Chalmers, a historian and philosopher of science whose work Gross and Levitt praise, explains Bloor's achievement: "Bloor, and a number of like-minded sociologists, have had the nerve to take the cognitive content of science as the object of their sociological explanations and their endeavours are typically interpreted by traditionalists as threatening the epistemological status of science" (82).

Bloor also attacked what had been recognized as a division of labor in the study of science: sociologists interested in the distinction between “knowledge” and “belief” investigated social factors that accounted for adherence to erroneous knowledge by particular social groups (often called the “sociology of error”), while (rationalist) philosophers explained the rational basis for scientific truth. Bloor invades philosophical territory by challenging the asymmetry of this division of labor, arguing that sociology could, and should, also investigate social factors that accounted for the “belief” in scientific knowledge. In other words, he takes issue with the asymmetrical assumption that false knowledge is caused by social or subjective factors while true (scientific) knowledge is simply the upshot of rational processes: “Nothing makes people do things that are correct but something does make, or causes them to go wrong. . . . the rational aspects of science are held to be self-moving and self-explanatory” (6–7). Greg Myers offers a concise example:

One should use the same modes of explanation for belief in witchcraft or phrenology as for belief in electromagnetic waves or neuroendocrinology. The particular explanations behind these beliefs may, of course, be different, but one can’t say, in this approach, that the nineteenth-century public believed in phrenology

for cultural reasons, whereas we believe in neuroendocrinology because it is true. (20–21).

Bloor's strong programme and his argument for symmetry— that the same kinds of social factors that had long served to explain “error” should also be employed to explain “true knowledge”— fueled an enormous amount of sociological research in this new direction.

It is this symmetrical orientation that also appeals to most proponents of cultural studies of science. Andrew Ross sums up the opposing positions in terms of non-expert invasions of scientific territory:

[Should non-scientists] have some say in the decision-making processes that define and shape the work of the professional scientific community? Some scientists (including Sokal presumably) would say yes, and in some countries, non-expert citizens do indeed participate in these processes. All hell breaks loose, however, when the following question is asked. Should non-experts have anything to say about scientific methodology and epistemology? After centuries of scientific racism, scientific sexism, and scientific domination of nature one might have thought this was a pertinent question to ask. (“Sokal Hoax”)

In effect, science's special status as a unique discipline with privileged methodologies and epistemological outcomes was under attack. At the same time, competing knowledges from locations outside the academy also threatened science's privileged position (animal rights and radical environmental activists, to name only two of Gross and Levitt's additional targets, which they consider to be complicit with the "academic left"). Like the Greek aristocracy in fourth century Athens and the middle class of late twentieth century America, science was threatened with status-slippage, perhaps more seriously than at any time earlier in this century. Science was under siege, from elsewhere in the academy, from non-academic activists, and from fundamentalist religion. As I will argue in the following sections, in this case, as in my Chapters One and Two, the class-demarkating needs of scientists are met by appeals to *ethos*.

However, there are many critics of SSK working in science studies who still see science as epistemologically privileged. Bloor's chief sociological critic, Larry Laudan, opposes the focus on dissensus and continues to hold that the most significant "puzzle" to be explained about science is consensus. Laudan argues that the remarkable degree of consensus that characterizes science is even more surprising because science, unlike "some ecclesiastical religion [that] had settled upon a body of doctrine

which was to be its permanent dogma,” is always in flux. Older views are quickly abandoned, and most scientists “will unhesitatingly change horses in midstream to embrace a point of view which had never even been heard of a decade before. . . . That a consensus can be shaped and re-shaped amid such flux is indeed remarkable” (255). Any remaining controversy among scientists is understood as disagreement over matters of fact that will sooner or later be resolved by additional evidence. Recalcitrant scientists are explained away asymmetrically—their “errors” are the result of the irrationality that always threatens human beings, and individual scientists, like anyone else, can fall prey to subjective influences, personal interest, emotional involvement, or irrational stubbornness. As in the Mertonian paradigm, the “sociology of error” explains away dissensus as a subjective phenomenon that deviates from scientific *ethos*. Thus, for these critics of the new sociology, science still “works” because of consensus, and this view continues the task of demarcating science from other classes of intellectual activity.

Gross and Levitt and Sokal are aware of these competing strands in sociology, and they do not attack sociologists who remain in the older school. Chalmers writes, “Not even the most orthodox defenders of the autonomy and rationality of science would deny that there is a role for

sociology” in analyzing problems related to science’s impact on, for instance, the environment and the social uses of genetic engineering (81). Sokal places himself in this camp, defending himself against Stanley Fish’s accusation that he opposes all sociology of science:

Fish implies that I am opposed to all sociology of science, and that I fail to understand the elementary distinction between sociology of science and science. Give me a break! I have no objection whatsoever to sociology of science, which at its best can clarify the important political and economic issues surrounding science and technology. My only objection is to *bad* sociology of science— numerous examples of which are praised (!) in my parody article in the spring/summer 1996 issue of *Social Text*. (“Sokal Replies”)

There are, in this view, social issues raised by science that are the proper domain for the sociology of science, but the demarcation line is crossed when sociological or rhetorical explanations for the actual content of scientific knowledge are also probed as “socially constructed.” However, in the wake of the Sokal hoax, even the “good” (asymmetrical) sociology of science comes under attack for offering nothing but commonplaces.

Edward Rothstein writes in the *New York Times*, “Obviously, science is affected by the pressures of ordinary life. Obviously, economic interests

help determine what areas of research flourish, and obviously, political pressures can affect innovation. Obviously, scientific questions are raised in one era and not another partly because of changes in culture.”

There are, of course, many shades of “social constructionism,” some of them perceived by science’s supporters as more threatening than others. I find it significant that neither Gross and Levitt, nor Sokal, nor any of their supporters in the media blitz in the wake of Sokal’s hoax, ever so much as mention the *rhetoric* of science as practiced by scholars situated in the field of rhetoric and composition. What does this omission suggest about the relationship between rhetoric of science and sociology of science, or between rhetoric of science and cultural studies? Is this neglect due to a complete unawareness of this marginalized subspecialty in a marginalized discipline? Or is it because the work of the rhetoric of science falls on the side of those approaches to science that they do not find threatening to their status or epistemological privilege, and that Rothstein would indict for merely stating the obvious?

In *Writing Biology: Texts in the Social Construction of Scientific Knowledge*, Greg Myers unwittingly suggests as much about his own work. Although he dismisses the Mertonian paradigm and aligns his rhetorical approach with Bloor’s strong programme and the SSK focus on

controversy and dissensus, Myers writes that the biologists he studied “were not surprised by what I had to say, and were only surprised by the lengths to which I went to say it. . . . [They did not deny] that social processes were going on, and that these processes involved texts” (xiii). Not unlike Prelli’s approach, Myers interprets scientific texts in order to discover how they construct scientific authority, a project which neither threatens science’s status nor defends other knowledges that compete with science. “I do not see the analysis of scientific texts,” Myers writes, “as a project of debunking science” (247). After supposedly demonstrating the solely *rhetorical* nature of Mertonian norms, he concludes, “the norms of science tell us about its rhetoric, not about its ethos; to accept them as functional is to promote an ahistorical view of science and to accept uncritically science’s view of itself” (22–24). His complete dissociation of “rhetoric” from a sociological notion of *ethos* is symptomatic of the limitations of this “rhetorical” approach to science. I am not suggesting that the Mertonian paradigm be reinstated wholesale, but I would suggest that these “unsurprising” approaches to the rhetoric of science might be well served by a more careful consideration of what Merton’s discussion of scientific *ethos* has to offer. I agree with proponents of SSK that Merton’s larger project was complicit with rationalist defenses of science and

therefore did not threaten scientists' epistemological privileges. But his analysis of scientific *ethos*, particularly given its emphasis on science's need to demarcate its processes and products for a public audience in the context of a present or impending "revolt from science," has been too quickly dismissed.

In "The Idea of Rhetoric in the Rhetoric of Science" Dilip Gaonkar offers a wide-ranging critique of the current state of the rhetoric of science. I focus on two aspects of that critique here. First, Gaonkar expresses dissatisfaction with "the interpretive turn," which he links to twentieth-century neo-Aristotelianism in rhetorical criticism and which leads to a problematic notion of rhetoric as a "hermeneutic metadiscourse" rather than rhetoric as a civic force. Second, he disapproves of the appropriation of what he calls the "thin terminology" of classical rhetorical theory (by which he means Aristotelian terminology) that he finds in most rhetoric of science scholarship. While I am largely sympathetic with his first critique, and also with his critique of classical terminology *as it is currently deployed* in much rhetoric of science, I hope that my discussion in these three chapters has at least suggested that Aristotelian terminology, particularly when complicated and expanded by sociological perspectives, is by no means "thin."

The Aristotelian vocabulary that accompanies the interpretive turn Gaonkar finds wanting. By “thinness” he means “the abstract quality of the traditional vocabulary as illustrated, for instance, in the tripartite scheme of proofs (*ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*) that enables one to find its presence in virtually any discourse practice” (33). (He later discusses uses of stasis, arrangement, and style in rhetoric of science.) He concedes that such a vocabulary may be adequate as a heuristic aid to performance. Its inadequacy for critical reading, however, is demonstrated in the preponderance of rhetorical analyses (particularly of scientific texts) that he finds “dismal,” mere catalogues of rhetorical techniques and typologies of arguments, “translations” of complexly situated discourses into an oversimplified vocabulary that was intended for production, not interpretation. In his lengthy analysis of Prelli’s topical method, for example, he argues that there is little value in the mere “redescription” of a scientific text in the thin terms of classical rhetoric; such a reading “simply translates a scientific paper from one idiom to another” (69). It also suggests why rhetoric of science might go unmentioned in the science wars.

Gaonkar finds the interpretive turn problematic because it portended the globalization of rhetoric as a mode of understanding, a method of reading, that displaced a view of rhetoric as a civic force with a

pedagogical interest in performance rather than interpretation of texts. He links the interpretive turn to neo-Aristotelianism and describes the interpretive thrust of contemporary rhetorical studies as “fatally bound” to an Aristotelian vocabulary, even when attempts are made to expand rhetoric’s vision of Aristotle. Since in the interpretive mode “what is rhetorical in any given case is invariably an effect of one’s reading,” then “a master reader can produce such an effect in relation to virtually any object” (29). Thus rhetoric is universalized. This globalizing move Gaonkar links to “the politics of repression and recognition,” the interpretive assumption being that discourses not claiming to be rhetorical can now be interpreted as such; their rhetoricity has been repressed, but is recognized by the master reader. In this globalizing drive, science is the furthest outpost, the location where the greatest repression of rhetoric has taken place. If science can be shown to be rhetorical, nothing can escape. The interpretive turn, then, bears a deep affinity with the strong programme in that science, like all other discourses, is subject to symmetrical analysis (although as we have seen in Myers and Prelli, for example, this does not mean that all rhetoricians of science therefore attack or compete with science’s knowledge claims).

Gaonkar, however, notes several striking differences between rhetoric of science and SSK, one of which serves as an introduction to the following section. He explains the traditional distinction between internal and external discursive practices, internal referring to those that are practiced within a specific scientific discourse community and external referring to scientific discourse addressed to other scientific (or nonscientific) communities and to the public. In recent years, Gaonkar claims, rhetoric of science has moved toward the internal pole, through their focus on writing within discourse communities (Prelli and Myers are prime examples of this move). This has occurred, he claims, because the attempt “to read science rhetorically encounters greater resistance as one moves from the external to the internal,” and studies involving the external pole are more obviously rhetorical from the outset. Therefore, rhetorical analysis of internal scientific texts advances the drive to globalize rhetoric. Gaonkar notes that SSK had, from the start, problematized this distinction between internal and external, while rhetoric of science clings to it. However, I would argue that this problematization is evident even in Merton’s analysis of scientific *ethos*: he describes internal norms that supposedly serve to validate scientific claims, but at the same time bolster science’s epistemic authority for those outside the scientific community.

A Mertonian view of the *ethos* of science, particularly because it has become so entrenched in public consciousness, proves useful in scientists' attempts to demarcate themselves and their knowledge market share from would-be usurpers. One instructive example is the case against creation science in *McLean v Arkansas*, a case which is analyzed at length both by Prelli and by Gieryn et al. It deserves attention here because it demonstrates how the Mertonian view of scientific *ethos* functions in the public sphere to demarcate science from non-science and maintain science's professionalized control over science curricula.

Ethos and the Demarcation of Science in the *McLean* Creationist Dispute

When the boundaries between classes of knowledge-producers are violated, when the lines of demarcation between objective scientific knowledge and socially determined opinions are in danger of becoming blurred, *ethos* work helps to redefine and shore up those defiled boundaries. That boundary work includes denying cognitive authority to the competition, which, for science, involves establishing for a public audience its own *ethos* as superior and showing that competing knowledge producers lack such *ethos*. Since Mertonian *ethos*-forming topoi are essentially tied to a

rationalist philosophy of science that justifies science's cognitive authority and epistemological privilege, attacking the competition as unworthy usurpers of knowledge production can be accomplished by attacking the competition's *ethos*. This section describes the *ethos* boundary work in *McLean v Arkansas*, a striking public example of this demarcating game.

On March 19, 1981, the governor of Arkansas signed into law Act 590, titled "Balanced Treatment for Creation-Science and Evolution-Science Act." On May 27 of that year the ACLU, on behalf of a group of Arkansas citizens and organizations, filed suit, charging that Act 590 was in violation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment and arguing that "since creation science is not science . . . the *only* real effect of Act 590 is the advancement of religion" and to attempt to force non-science material into science curricula (qtd in Prelli 220). Thus a significant portion of the trial focused on the definition of science and the attempt by the plaintiffs to demarcate creationism from science—in effect, to argue that creation-science, despite its attempt to appropriate scientific authority by calling itself science, was not science at all but religion. Their argument proceeded along essentially Mertonian lines, offering expert testimony that science is simply what scientists do, and what they do is in accord with the Mertonian elements of scientific *ethos* outlined earlier in this chapter. The

plaintiffs presented, persuasively to the judge, a picture of creationists as a group that did not qualify as “scientists” because they did not practice the normative elements of scientific *ethos*: communality, skepticism, universality, and disinterestedness.

U. S. District Court Judge William Overton’s decision in favor of the plaintiffs refers to the “scientific community” no less than nine times, arguing that creationists’ practices place them clearly outside of that community and hence outside of science. Any “communality” that creationists might have among themselves is beside the point, for he accepts the testimony of the plaintiff’s witnesses that science is what scientists do:

Creation science . . . not only fails to follow the canons of dealing with scientific theory, it also fails to fit the more general descriptions of ‘what scientists think’ and ‘what scientists do.’ The scientific community consists of individuals and groups, nationally and internationally, who work independently in such varied fields as biology, paleontology, geology, and astronomy. Their work is published and subject to review and testing by their peers. The journals for publication are both numerous and varied. There is, however, not one recognized scientific journal which has published an article espousing the creation science theory . . . (*McLean*)

Arguing from the topos of communality, the plaintiffs persuaded Overton that creationists' practices did not demonstrate this aspect of scientific *ethos*. Creationists were not found on the payrolls of leading research institutions, they did not publish in authorized scientific journals, indeed they did not even submit their technical claims about creationism for peer review. Although creationist witnesses countered these charges by claiming that scientific journals were biased and would censor their potential contributions anyway, the judge noted in his decision that "no [creationist] witness produced a scientific article for which publication has been refused." As Prelli explains the persuasiveness of the communality topos, the judge "directly defended the scientific community and its members as appropriate agencies for deciding what does and does not count as reasonable science" (223). Having failed to establish the communal element of their presumed scientific *ethos*, the creationists were well on their way to being demarcated as non-scientists.

The plaintiffs' case also attacked creationists for not practicing the organized skepticism that a Mertonian vision of scientific *ethos* demands. Witnesses for the plaintiffs testified that scientists always remained tentative about their results, looking skeptically at their assumptions and their data. In the words of the judge's decision:

A scientific theory must be tentative and always subject to revision or abandonment in light of facts that are inconsistent with, or falsify, the theory. A theory that is by its own terms dogmatic, absolutist, and never subject to revision is not a scientific theory.

(McLean)

The plaintiffs persuasively portrayed creationists as dogmatists who adhere a priori to Biblical authority regardless of any technical claims they might make about biological processes, fossil evidence, or scientific dating methods. Most of the creationists involved in the trial were members of the Creation Research Society, which requires members to take an oath of faith in the Biblical account of creation. By signing such a statement, the judge was persuaded, creationists abandon the skepticism required of scientific *ethos*.

Creationists were also shown to lack disinterestedness. The drafters of Act 590 were motivated by a political agenda with religious aims. In Mertonian and logical empiricist explanations of science, any subjective or political interests that might motivate scientists are ultimately filtered out by the scientific method, or, in sociological terms, by the institutional procedures that ensure adherence to normative scientific practices that guarantee objectivity in the evaluation of knowledge claims; thus ultimate

disinterestedness is assured. Since creationists, as we have seen, do not participate in these institutional procedures, and since their original motives for implementing Act 590 were clearly political, their disinterestedness was not defensible.

Both Prelli and Gieryn et al. agree that the plaintiffs covertly deployed Mertonian topoi and therefore used scientific *ethos* to drive a wedge between creationists and evolutionists. However, the differences between the two analyses, one from a rhetorician and one from sociologists, highlight some of the difficulties facing rhetoric of science that I touched on above. Prelli's rhetorical analysis, although thorough and informed to an extent by Gieryn et al.'s earlier article, simply redescribes the inventional strategies of both plaintiffs and defendants by cataloguing the topoi used by both parties, naming the "rhetorical exigence" as demarcation, and identifying the primary stasis as a conjectural issue: "What is *scientific* about creationism?" Even though here Prelli has taken on an instance of *external* scientific discourse, his analysis merely redescribes the case, translating it into "thin" classical terminology, as Gaonkar claims.

How do Gieryn et al. go beyond thin redescription? First, they establish the "market model" of the professionalization of science that

explains why the “demarcation exigence” even arises and highlights the public forum in which science denies expertise and authority to competitors. Thus they emphasize the professional stake in the trial. Second, they accentuate the historical contingency of demarcations of science by devoting equal time to the earlier *Scopes* trial, arguing that although the result of both trials was the demarcation of science from religion, the differences in the two are more significant than the similarities. At *Scopes*, they argue, the ideology of science established the uniqueness of its commodity, and although differentiated from religious knowledge, both kinds of knowledge “were presented as distinctive but complementary realms of culture.” At *McLean*, science and religion (as creation-science) are in competition. Religion here is “an illegitimate intruder poaching on the professional authority” that gives professional scientists alone the license to define science (405–06).

Although both Prelli and Gieryn et al. acknowledge the effectiveness of Mertonian topoi at *McLean*, the sociological analysis more clearly echoes Merton’s words from forty years earlier: “After a long period of relative security, during which the pursuit and diffusion of knowledge had risen to a leading place if indeed not to the first rank in the scale of cultural values, scientists are compelled to vindicate the ways of science” to the public

(Merton 268). Even the losers at *McLean* recognized the importance of a public forum: after the decision that outlawed “balanced treatment,” Arkansas senator Holsted, who sponsored Act 590, said, “I feel like we really won because people are talking about it, kids will be asking about it. Teachers will have to talk about creation-science . . . All the hoopla, the publicity—that’s just what I wanted” (qtd in Gieryn et al. 405). Although the outcome of the Sokal affair is yet to be resolved, it appears at present that only the scientists and Sokal’s supporters are happy that the dispute has gone public.

The Sokal Affair: Elite versus Elite?

“Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity” (referred to hereafter as the hoax essay), the essay by New York University physicist Alan Sokal that began the Sokal affair, appeared in a double-volume spring/summer 1996 issue of *Social Text* devoted to the “Science Wars.” Most of the essays in this issue by science studies scholars address the 1994 book, *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science*, by Paul Gross and Norman Levitt. In one sense, it is appropriate that Sokal’s essay found its way into print in this collection, since Sokal claims to have been originally inspired

by Gross and Levitt's book to further investigate their allegations against science studies. Appearing at the same time as this issue of *Social Text* was another article in *Lingua Franca*, "A Physicist Experiments with Cultural Studies" (referred to hereafter as the exposé article), in which Sokal revealed the hoax and explained his several motivations for having perpetrated it. The exposé article focuses on the lack of evidence and argument in his hoax essay, "the dubiousness of its central thesis" that is "held together by vague rhetoric" and "citations of authority, plays on words, strained analogies, and bald assertions" gleaned from Derrida, Lacan, Irigaray, and "some controversial philosophical pronouncements of Heisenberg and Bohr." He reveals that the physics in his hoax essay was nonsense, rebukes the *Social Text* editors for failing to seek the opinion of a physicist on matters which they were ill-equipped to judge, and concludes that they published the hoax essay for the simple reason that they liked its conclusion, that "the content and methodology of postmodern science provide powerful intellectual support for the progressive political project." While Gross and Levitt's earlier book, although widely reviewed, generated little public awareness of the science wars, Sokal's exposé assured far-reaching dissemination in the public media: the story of the hoax was covered by a variety of newspapers and magazines from the *New York*

Times front page, *Village Voice*, and *Newsweek* to Disney's *Discover* magazine and was featured on television by Rush Limbaugh and CNN's *The Capital Gang*. In the wake of the Culture Wars, the Sokal affair gave the media another opportunity to disparage intellectualism and lampoon the Left, "while bolstering the sagging image of the 'scientist' as a figure of authority and a man of reason and good sense" (Osborne 55). I am not here interested in adjudicating, or even raising, the philosophical issues in the debate (although I agree with Osborne that Sokal's "philosophical" views about science would be rejected by nearly all philosophers of science); rather, following Merton's lead, I am interested in what the debate was about *for the media*, that is, the public perception of science and its competitors.

In Chapter One I discussed the necessity of elite Greek orators' negotiation of *ethos* for an audience who distrusted their aristocratic wealth and superior education. Ober's analysis of fourth century speeches offers numerous examples of the Greek orator, fully aware of the proclivities of his audience, posing as a speaker of simple origins while highlighting the silver-tongued but potentially anti-democratic rhetoric of his opponent. This strategy of aligning oneself with the audience's fear of education's ability to undermine democracy, charging one's opponents with elitism,

and depicting one's opponents as clever speakers and wily sophists who want to subvert the will of the demos are also frequently in evidence in the numerous responses to the Sokal affair. Just as the drama of the deliberative or forensic oratorical contest was played out for the demos by competing elite orators, so too was the drama of the Sokal affair played out for a public audience by scientists versus the humanities and social sciences scholars who study science, both sides charging the other with elitism.

With its Enlightenment heritage, science has something of a head start in its attempt to align itself with democratic distrust of elite privilege. Steve Fuller explains science's "supposedly exemplary status as the open society, the very model of public debate and democratic governance in the modern era, one which promises to incorporate all of humanity, typically through a process of citizen education." Fuller goes on to cite defenders of science who have even claimed that because of experimental science's "participatory character and its uniformly critical yet reasoned attitudes toward knowledge claims," it was actually the first social institution "to realize fully the promise of the Athenian polis." Even Merton, in Fuller's view, "represented science as perhaps the only sphere in modern society where the principles of participatory democracy may actually apply." Once he examines the "fine print" of the contract between science and

democracy, however, Fuller finds some disturbing complications: “is the goal of Enlightenment to incorporate everyone as contentious contributors to scientific discourse or as compliant consumers of science-based technologies? . . . Knowledge can be universally distributed, yet its production remain concentrated in the hands of the relative few” (280–281). Thus, although the scientists involved in and responding to Sokal’s hoax take advantage of this ready-made identification with democratic ideals, academic and non-academic critics of science have increased public awareness of science’s anti-democratic tendencies in recent decades, either through castigating science as an elite institution that disqualifies other ways of knowing from competing in the public marketplace (as physicians did with midwifery), or through disenchantment with the actual methods and products of science (for instance, the animal rights activists and radical environmentalist tactics that Gross and Levitt attack along with the “academic left”).

Several of the articles in *Social Text*’s Science Wars issue comment on the decline of science’s traditional elite status. Dorothy Nelkin asks what the Science Wars are really about, and answers that they are “surely not about the real power of humanists, who are hardly about to topple the scientific enterprise.” Nelkin describes the post-World War II manifestation

of science's Enlightenment heritage as a "social contract" between science and the public that "was built on the premise that scientific information was a public resource, that what was good for science was good for the state," a contract that granted science a high degree of autonomy and furthered the reputation of scientists as disinterested knowledge seekers and producers. But this faith in science underwent erosion with the antiwar and environmental movements of the 1960s, and over the next two decades, with the growth of the animal rights movement, creationist challenges to the teaching of evolution, gay-rights activists' questioning of scientific research on AIDS therapies, and other widely publicized critiques of science, the marriage between science and the state deteriorated into a tension-filled relationship. The end of the Cold War led to government cutbacks in technoscience research, and public faith in scientists' disinterestedness withered as it became clear that much scientific research was now done not for the good of the public but for the profit of the corporation (Nelkin 94-96). Commenting on the Sokal hoax, Nelkin said, "scientists used to have great autonomy and no accountability. That contract has broken down" (qtd. in McMillen). Others involved in the Sokal affair, however, still present science as a dangerous elite institution: responding to Sokal's exposé, Andrew Ross writes, "Why does science

matter so much? because its power, as a civil religion, as a social and political authority, affects our daily lives and the parlous condition of the natural world more than does any other domain of knowledge” (“Sokal Hoax”). In a section of the Spring 1997 issue of *Social Text* devoted to responses to the Sokal hoax, M. Susan Lindee remarks on the fact that Sokal’s intended audience was not the science studies community but the larger public. This observation is made in the context of her explanation of the role of public support for science “not merely in the practical matter of funding but in the establishment of scientific data as a high-status, compelling guide to policy, legal decision making, and personal behavior” (140). Science studies scholars continue making allegations of elitism; science struggles to bolster its sagging *ethos* by discrediting science studies.

Sokal and his supporters turn the tables, however, by arguing that the disreputable and dangerous elites in the debate are actually the humanists and sociologists who attack science’s authority and control over scientific knowledge production. In the *Lingua Franca* exposé, Sokal explicitly draws on science’s Enlightenment heritage to charge the postmodern humanities with elitism:

For most of the past two centuries, the Left has been identified with science and against obscurantism; we have believed that rational

thought and the fearless analysis of objective reality (both natural and social) are incisive tools for combating the mystifications promoted by the powerful—not to mention being desirable human ends in their own right.¹⁷

Alerting the media to yet another academic squabble related to the Culture Wars, Sokal got his public audience. In the media frenzy that ensued, commentators who came to Sokal's defense followed his lead in setting up the *Social Text* editors as elite members of an aristocratic academic community. Lindee writes:

Journalists told a story of powerful intellectuals hoodwinked by their own impenetrable jargon. . . . Those seeming to possess knowledge (the editors of an academic journal) were revealed to be ignorant. Power relations were upset; the strong brought down by the clever. . . . The journalists had to see the *Social Text* editors as powerful and secure, and Sokal as living only by his wits. (139)

Gary Kamiya, for instance, in "Transgressing the Transgressors: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Total Bullshit," describes humanities

¹⁷ Much of the response to Sokal's hoax and exposé focused on another demarcation debate between the Cultural Left and the Enlightenment Left. Although, as I briefly indicate, the "Left v Left" battle is closely tied to the science demarcation debate, I do not deal with it here.

scholarship as “pious, obscurantist, jargon-filled cant” and *Social Text* as “a prestigious journal” with “high-powered editors,” while Sokal is a “clever academic, armed with the not-so-secret passwords” who has “the effrontery to place a whoopi cushion under the Supreme Throne of Post-Modernist Progressive Rectitude.” Peter Berkowitz in the *New Republic* calls the *Social Text* editors “arrogant” and postmodernism “boastful, haughty and dismissive,” adding that “those who have never performed an experiment or mastered an equation” display “a sneering superiority based on the alleged insight that science is a form of literary invention distinguished primarily by its outsized social cachet” (15). Erich Eichman in *The New Criterion* describes prominent cultural studies scholars as glamorous, fashionable, and trendy celebrities. In *The Nation*, Katha Pollitt sides with Sokal’s image of the Enlightenment Left and bemoans “the development in the 1980s of an academic celebrity system that meshes in funny, glitzy ways with the worlds of art and entertainment, with careerism.” Even the impartial treatment of the hoax by Liz McMillen in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* speaks to the local-level elitism that fueled the hoax (both Sokal and Ross are NYU professors): “Mr. Ross, who directs a new, high-profile program in American studies, has been covered by glossy magazines. Mr. Sokal is a member of a department that is by contrast less visible. It is

ranked 53rd among 147 doctoral programs in physics, according to the National Research Council.”

Another complication in this battle of elite versus elite arises, however, when it becomes clear, through both accusation and *Social Text*’s own admission, that the hoax essay reached print largely due to Sokal’s privileged position *as a scientist*. Ross and the *Social Text* editors were charged with vulnerability to the deception precisely because they *do* respect scientific authority. Sokal’s exposé article alludes to the irony of the editors deferring to the “cultural authority of technoscience,” accusations of “science envy” were legion, and Kamiya gleefully notes, “A man in a lab coat can even order around a deconstructionist!” Bruce Robbins, co-editor with Ross for the *Social Text* Collective, admitted that they were hoaxed “because we thought [Sokal] was a progressive scientist, a physicist who was willing to be publicly critical of scientific orthodoxies” (qtd in Osborne 55), and acknowledges in another article that the hoax showed how “some scientific ignorance and some absentmindedness could combine with much enthusiasm for a supposed political ally to produce a case of temporary blindness” (Robbins 58). I do not think it uncharitable to read into Robbins’ confessions the subtext that the cultural authority of a scientist propounding postmodernist connections between his field and

theirs might enhance the influence of *Social Text*'s issue on the science wars. Like the creationists in *McLean* who hoped that some authority might attach to their position by calling themselves "creation-scientists," Ross pulled Sokal's hoax from the slush pile and chose to publish, in the science wars issue, an essay that he had earlier rejected, having categorized Sokal as a "difficult, uncooperative author" who insisted that "his article would appear as is, or not at all" (Ross, "Sokal Hoax"). Gieryn et al.'s analysis of the creationists' tactics is applicable to Ross and Robbins: they tried "to use the authority of science to pursue intellectual, political or religious agendas that do not coincide with agendas pursued by the professional scientific community" (Gieryn et al. 403).

In his first response to Sokal's *Lingua Franca* exposé, Ross claims that the editors considered his article "to be a little hokey" and that it would have been considered "sophomoric and/or outdated" if it had come from a humanist or social scientist, but, after some deliberation, they "concluded that this article was the earnest attempt of a professional scientist to seek some kind of affirmation from postmodern philosophy for developments in his field," and even read it "as an act of good faith of the sort that might be worth encouraging" ("Sokal Hoax"). Hence they encourage the struggling scientist to come over to their side; his authority

as a scientist grants him the same leeway, although on different grounds, that would be granted to a powerful, well-established scholar who is actually a member of the community he is writing for. Gesa Kirsch speaks to this issue in her excellent study of women scholars' struggles to achieve authority within their academic discourse communities, which, in its focus on authority if not on gender, sheds light on Ross's explanation. Kirsch explains that established scholars have more freedom in their writing because they are perceived as authorities: "well-known scholars typically have more liberty to make bold statements, draw conclusions, or argue for controversial positions than do younger scholars" (51). Although Sokal crossed discourse community lines to perpetrate his hoax, his status *as a scientist* (even a relatively unrecognized one in his own community) afforded him the authority to be granted freedom by Ross to make statements that, Ross admits, would not have seen print had they been written by someone in the cultural studies or humanities community. As Kirsch writes, "part of *having* authority entails being *perceived* as an authority" (49). Sokal's status as scientist bolsters what Ross tries to pass off later as damaged *ethos* in an article that wasn't really "their cup of tea" ("Sokal Hoax"). Of course, Sokal was also criticized for using his cultural authority as a scientist to imagine that he could accomplish the stunt in the

first place. Kirsh points out that a writer must experience himself or herself as accepted by others to speak authoritatively; Sokal obviously experienced himself

as having the authority to speak in another discipline.¹⁸ Unfortunately for *Social Text*, his experience of himself was not off the mark. Rather than castigating Sokal for scientific arrogance and breach of trust, or Ross for blind desire for a scientific ally, I prefer to see his, and Ross's, perception of his authority as symptomatic of the broad public faith in scientific *ethos*.

So far in this section I have addressed issues of scientific *ethos* in a general way, examining accusations of elitism from both sides and suggesting that Sokal's situated *ethos*, i.e., the authority granted him because of his status as a scientist, outweighed his more problematic, "hokey" textually constructed *ethos* in the hoax essay. My larger claim in this chapter, however, is that the debates that raged in the Sokal affair drew heavily on the Mertonian topoi that proved so effective at *McLean*.

¹⁸ Likewise, in *Higher Superstition*, Gross and Levitt make the purposely outrageous claim that, should for some reason humanities departments disappear from the university, scientists could cobble together an acceptable humanities curriculum based on their supposedly broad collective knowledge of the great cultural works. Needless to say, in their view humanists would prove amusingly deficient if these roles were reversed.

Ethos Wars in the Sokal Affair

I have made two points about scientific *ethos* in this chapter that bear repeating here. First, in the face of threats to science's exclusive control over its knowledge commodities, Merton's four topoi— universalism, communality, disinterestedness, and skepticism— working in conjunction with each other, are not just methodological imperatives that fortify science's epistemological privilege; they also structure scientific *ethos*. That is, through the communal practices of peer review and publication, scientific claims made by scientists who employ an appropriate skepticism and that the community deems disinterested reach the status of universal (if provisional) truths. Second, as we have seen in Ross's and Robbins' explanations of why they published the hoax essay, scholars in the cultural studies of science are not immune to the powerful sway of scientific *ethos*, and are just as likely to demand scientists' adherence to Mertonian norms as they are to recognize the ideological function of those norms. In effect, many scholars in science studies call on scientists not to abandon these markers of scientific *ethos*, but rather to more fully live up to them (not unlike the fourth century Athenian demos demanded a particular *ethos* and accountability from Greek elite rhetors). Expanding on these two points, this section examines the interaction of Mertonian topoi in the Sokal affair

and how they are deployed by Sokal and his supporters to discredit the *ethos*— and the knowledge products— of science studies.

The topos of organized skepticism of received truths is evident in Sokal's confusion over Robbins' statement that "truth can be another source of oppression." As a self-proclaimed in-the-trenches old Leftist who holds to the emancipatory potential of the Enlightenment, Sokal writes that this statement simply makes no sense to him. In its full context, Robbins' statement reads:

Is it in the interests of women, African Americans, and other super-exploited people to insist that truth and identity are social constructions? Yes and no. No, you can't talk about exploitation without respect for empirical evidence and a universal standard of justice. But yes, truth can be another source of oppression. It was not so long ago that scientists gave their full authority to explanations of why women and African Americans (not to speak of gays and lesbians) were inherently inferior or pathological or both. Explanations like these continue to appear in newer and subtler forms. Hence, there is a real need for a social constructionist critique of knowledge. . . . [But] those of us who do cultural politics sometimes act as if the questioning of reality were of self-evident,

universal, and paramount ethical and political value, as if truth were always and everywhere a weapon of the Right. In fact, it's almost impossible to belong to the Left, or to an academic discipline, without some functional sense of truth. (59)

For Sokal, the "truths" of women's and African Americans' inferiority are not "truths" at all. The goal of Enlightenment-inspired science is to explode such ideological myth-making that calls itself "scientific" and expose the cultural influences that produce such falsities. Therefore, he sees little sense in lambasting "science" for producing such culturally biased hypotheses, because, contaminated as they are by subjectivism, they will eventually be demolished. It is this process that Sokal calls "reason," science's constant skepticism about its own received truths, a self-questioning attitude that he claims postmodernists, blinded by doctrinaire adherence to their authorities, do not possess.

Although Pollitt in *The Nation* recognizes and bemoans the fact that the hoax's encouragement of anti-intellectualism by the media and the public will also discredit useful work by several women in science studies (Dorothy Nelkin, Hilary Rose, and Ruth Hubbard, for instance), her essay denounces the cultural Left for its combination of "covert slavishness to authority with the most outlandish radical posturing." Thus the

postmodern Left is criticized for its lack of skepticism about its own received truths. Because Gross and Levitt and Sokal devote so much of their texts to gleeful out-of-context citations of “murky” postmodern writing, much of the debate focused on the impenetrable language of postmodern “gurus” such as Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan. Speaking to this issue, Pollitt writes that the real comedy of the hoax is “that it suggests that even the postmodernists don’t really understand one another’s writing and make their way through the text by moving from one familiar name or notion to the next like a frog jumping across a murky pond by way of lily pads.” Skepticism about the received doctrines of postmodern authorities is found wanting. Just as the judge at *McLean* was persuaded that creationists lacked skepticism and adhered a priori to a literalist Biblical dogma, so too in the Sokal affair public intellectual judges were quick to interpret Sokal’s hoax as an indicator of the lack of skepticism on the part of the *Social Text* editors.

Of course, postmodernist language suggests a certain kind of skepticism, for instance, Lyotard’s “incredulity toward metanarratives.” Berkowitz differentiates this kind of skepticism from an older skepticism grounded in liberal political theory, a “healthy skepticism that proclaims that human beings lack certain knowledge about what is good and just and

true,” a skepticism based in “philosophical modesty,” unlike the “boastful, haughty and dismissive” postmodern incredulity that “focuses narrowly on what is supposedly false and pernicious.” Any skepticism that postmodernists might be admitted to possess is demarcated from the skepticism “proper” to science and an open society.

Social and cultural studies of science have for decades attacked science, sullied by military and industrial sponsorship, for its claims to disinterestedness. Osborne, who sees the Sokal affair as “a set-piece confrontation between a new, culturally-based academic Left and its scientifically-oriented predecessor,” identifies *Social Text*’s mistake as allowing “the lure of an ally within the scientific establishment to dictate judgment about the piece; to allow political convenience to suspend intellectual judgment.” Thus the decision to publish was “representative of an overly *strategic* approach to intellectual matters, characteristic of that section of the cultural Left to which *Social Text*, broadly speaking, belongs” (54, 55). In his hoax essay, Sokal suggests that postmodern science, if it is to be truly liberatory, must be subordinated to emancipatory political strategies, and in the exposé he criticizes the editors for their unquestioning acceptance of his “implication that the search for truth in science must be subordinated to a political agenda.” Thus, from the pen of a scientist, the

topos of disinterestedness is turned back against those who have long attacked science's lack of disinterestedness.

In *McLean*, arguments from the topos of communality took the form of demonstrations that creationists not only were not published in authoritative scientific journals but did not even submit their work for peer review to the community of scientists. Sokal likewise plays on the topos of communality by charging that the *Social Text* editors “felt comfortable publishing an article on quantum physics without bothering to consult anyone knowledgeable in the subject” and later in the same article reiterates the point: “It’s understandable that the editors of *Social Text* were unable to evaluate critically the technical aspects of my article (which is exactly why they should have consulted a scientist)” (“A Physicist Experiments”). That this accusation is based in a long-standing and publicly acknowledged topos of scientific *ethos* is evident from the amount of comment it received in the wake of Sokal’s revelation. Berkowitz follows Sokal’s lead and censures *Social Text* for their arrogance in publishing “a bold reinterpretation of an abstruse dimension of theoretical physics without soliciting the evaluation of anyone trained in the field.” Ross, obviously aware of the power of this argument, recounts at length “the history of the editorial process regarding Sokal’s article,” explaining the

editorial practices of the *Social Text* collective and why the journal is non-refereed. Unfortunately, to the ears of a public still fully attuned to Mertonian norms, his explanations sound as hollow as the creation-scientists' defense that their lack of publications was due to the bias of scientific journals. Sokal, like the plaintiffs and judge in *McLean*, simply claims the prerogative of the scientific community to pass judgment on reputedly scientific claims. If Ross chose not to submit an article about physics to that community, he is at fault.

Ross's response to the *Lingua Franca* exposé suggests that Sokal further played on the communality topos:

We made a general request to him a) to excise a good deal of the philosophical speculation and b) to excise most of his footnotes.

Sokal seemed resistant to any general revisions of this sort, and indeed insisted on retaining almost all of his footnotes and bibliographic apparatus on the grounds that his peers, in science, expected extensive documentation of this sort. ("Sokal Hoax")

Sokal turns the communality topos back against Ross, however, when he claims that "despite my repeated requests during the editorial process for substantive comments, suggestions and criticisms, none were ever received, just an acceptance letter" ("Sokal Replies"). Sokal does what he is supposed

to do— he submits his claim for peer review. However, these accusations and counter-accusations emphasize, as they did at *McLean*, the communality topos, as an element of *scientific ethos*, functions to serve the *scientist* when attempts are made to cross community lines.

In the exposé article, Sokal is the first to acknowledge the ethical issues raised by his deception, opening the discussion to the issue of trust in the larger academic community, but immediately tying it back to the journal's responsibility for communal validation of claims:

Of course, I'm not oblivious to the ethical issues involved in my rather unorthodox experiment. Professional communities operate largely on trust; deception undercuts that trust. But it is important to understand exactly what I did. My article is a theoretical essay based entirely on publicly available sources, all of which I have meticulously footnoted. All works cited are real, and all quotations are rigorously accurate; none are invented. Now, it's true that the author doesn't believe his own argument. But why should that matter? The editors' duty as scholars is to judge the validity and interest of ideas, without regard for their provenance. (That is why many scholarly journals practice blind refereeing.) ("A Physicist Experiments")

Ross and his supporters attempt to expand the normative function of the communality topos to the larger academic community, defending themselves by pointing to Sokal's already confessed violation of the norms of that expanded collective enterprise. Since Sokal had already pled guilty, all that can be done is praise the *Social Text* editors for their magnanimous "faith" (which can only be read as "faith" in a *scientist*):

the parody made use of a certain trust in the value of statements within a professional and institutional context. *Social Text*, by publishing the work of a physicist was attempting to extend a discourse beyond the boundaries of its usual practitioners, and this meant an even greater act of faith in the person submitting. Sokal violated that trust. (Day)

In his *New York Times* response to the hoax and the exposé, Stanley Fish carries this move to its extreme, charging Sokal with (scientific?) fraud and citing *The Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*: "fraud is said to go 'beyond error to erode the foundation of trust on which science is built'." But his argument about faith slides problematically from communality in science to communality in the academy as a whole, which precisely misses the point that the science wars are about demarcating science from the other disciplines he mentions:

. . . it is Alan Sokal, not his targets, who threatens to undermine the intellectual standards he vows to protect. Remember, science is above all a communal effort. No scientist (and for that matter, no sociologist or literary critic) begins his task by inventing anew the facts he will assume, the models he will regard as exemplary and the standards he tries to be faithful to. They are all given by the tradition of inquiry he has joined, and for the most part he must take them on faith. And he must take on faith, too, the reports offered to him by colleagues, all of whom are in the same position, unable to start from scratch and therefore dependent on the information they receive from fellow researchers.

Although it is arguable from the perspective of any discipline that scholars in these fields always try “to be faithful to” the established models and standards of their disciplinary predecessors, Fish’s more egregious slip-up occurs when he simply ignores disciplinary boundaries, gathering them all under “the tradition of inquiry,” suggesting that Sokal is a “colleague” who is “in the same position” as the *Social Text* editors. True, the scientist joining the scientific community does not “start from scratch,” but the *Social Text* editors are members of a different community with different models, standards, and traditions. Science is indeed “a communal effort,”

but the topos of communality serves to demarcate science from its competitors, not to gather them all under its community umbrella.

Finally, universalism becomes an important topos of the Sokal affair because so much of the commentary focuses on the science critics' relativism. Rothstein voices the commonly held notion that demarcates science from the humanities, conceding that in both realms, premises, rules of argument, and institutions of authority function in the processes of knowledge creation, but in science "there exist facts and truths that are invariant—unaltered by culture, politics and prejudices. . . . That may be one reason why science has such prestige and power." A detailed discussion of the relativism versus universalism debate arose at the October 30, 1996 NYU panel discussion entitled "After the Media Event: Politics, Culture and the *Sokal Text Affair*." Sokal described a scenario reported in the *New York Times* that had him baffled: a Zuni community had contested scientists' access to ancestral skeletal remains because the scientists would use their data as further evidence that Native Americans migrated from Asia to North America across the Bering Strait, a view that contradicted the Zuni's autochthonous beliefs. As reported by Eichmann in *The New Criterion*,

For Mr. Sokal, this controversy showed the foolishness of ‘local knowledge.’ Clearly reason, objectivity, and evidence were on the side of the archeologists. . . . As Mr. Sokal was at pains to point out, these warring explanations of human origins were mutually exclusive: they could both be wrong, but they could not both be right. (78–79)

The institutional norms that construct scientific *ethos*—disinterestedness, skepticism, communality, and universalism—function interdependently to provide argumentative strategies that fortify science’s demarcation from other knowledge-making practices and that attempt to maintain science’s knowledge-producing privileges when threatened by outside groups.

Rhetoric and Cultural Studies in the Science Wars

I have explored the problematic relationship between rhetoric of science and SSK, but the Science Wars also raise questions about the relationship between rhetoric and postmodern cultural studies. Much of the commentary on the hoax betrays the binary thinking that earlier in this century sustained logical positivism’s notion of meaningful statements in opposition to poetic and metaphorical language that might soothe the soul or rouse the masses to action but that held no truth-value. For instance,

Sokal's supporters refer to the hoax essay's "impressive-sounding but largely meaningless expoundings" (Freedman), "intentional gibberish" (Brown 17), and "deliberate nonsense" (Kimball) that highlighted both the inability of the *Social Text* editors "to distinguish serious argument from utter nonsense" (Berkowitz 15) and "the vacuousness of academic theory and the absurd incoherence of the language in which it is perpetrated" (Eichman 77).

In the exposé article, Sokal explains his strategy in the hoax: he has tied together citations of Derrida, Lacan, and Irigaray with "vague rhetoric about 'nonlinearity,' 'flux' and 'interconnectedness,'" emphasizing that "nowhere in all of this is there anything resembling a logical sequence of thought; one finds only citations of authority, plays on words, strained analogies, and bald assertions" ("A Physicist Experiments"). Also in the exposé article, Sokal's understanding of "rhetoric" is clearly equivalent to "cultural studies" and to postmodern theories of "language games:"

Social Text's acceptance of my article exemplifies the intellectual arrogance of Theory— meaning postmodernist literary theory— carried to its logical extreme. No wonder they didn't bother to consult a physicist. If all is discourse and 'text,' then knowledge of the real world is superfluous; even physics becomes just another

branch of Cultural Studies. If, moreover, all is rhetoric and 'language games,' then internal logical consistency is superfluous too: a patina of theoretical sophistication serves equally well. Incomprehensibility becomes a virtue; allusions, metaphors and puns substitute for evidence and logic.

Sokal presents cultural studies and rhetoric in binary opposition to a logical empiricist insistence on "logical consistency" backed by "evidence" leading to "knowledge of the real world." Those on the cultural studies side of the debate counter with a postmodern poetics that asserts the metaphorical nature of all language, including that of science. Donna Haraway replies, "What Sokal doesn't know is that there is a whole literature on metaphors and how nature took on legal language and property metaphors" (qtd in McMillen).

Sokal's logical empiricist understanding of "metaphors" versus "logic and evidence" gives rise to his condemnation of cultural studies of science as "subjectivist." Gross and Levitt also make this distinction in their chapter devoted to the ridicule of literary scholars such as N. Katherine Hayles who, Gross and Levitt perceive, read chaos theory or quantum physics as reflections of postmodern shifts across culture:

Of course, anyone is free to read pictures of fractal geometry and the like *subjectively* as emblems for a revolution in sensibility— or in politics, for that matter. The point is, however, that this is utterly subjective; it is poetry of the most idiosyncratic sort. Postmodern cultural transformation is no more inscribed in the mathematical peculiarities of nonlinear dynamical systems than Nazi doctrine is to be read in the geometric configuration of the swastika. To hold otherwise is to revert to the magical, emblematic thinking of premodern (rather than postmodern) times. (105)

Gross and Levitt, Sokal and his supporters, seem to find this notion of rhetoric as metaphoricity far more threatening to their epistemic privilege and knowledge-producing franchise than the rhetorics deployed by, for example, Prelli and Myers in the rhetoric of science. Gaonkar points to a possible reason for this difference in his critique of the humanist paradigm, based on a particular reading of Aristotle and Cicero, whose “governing feature is the positioning of the rhetor as the generating center of discourse and its ‘constitutive’ power.” This view constructs the ideal (scientific) rhetor as a consciously deliberating agent who recognizes “the situational constraints, including the specificity of the audience addressed” and whose rhetorical choices reflect a “capacity for ‘prudence’ and who ‘invents’

discourse that displays an *ingenium* and who all along observes the norms of timeliness (*kairos*), appropriateness (*to prepon*), and *decorum* that testify to a mastery of *sensus communis*" (48). This agent-centered strategic and intentional model still exerts, Gaonkar claims, too great an influence in rhetoric of science. Prelli, for instance, believes that his topical method could facilitate communication, and if scientists were instructed in it they could negotiate their controversies more successfully. Gaonkar sees here an Enlightenment view of scientists "as self-monitoring rational actors who seek to advance knowledge through mutual understanding" and reads scientific texts or discourse practices as a manifestation of strategic consciousness, a position that SSK, with its focus on "the sheer materiality of science as an institutional practice" has abandoned. Strategic consciousness, though, "marginalizes structures that govern human agency: language, the unconscious, and capital" (Gaonkar 51, 68, 70).

My own project in the last three chapters has appropriated a sociological notion of *ethos* (that Sumner took from the Greeks in the first place) to argue that the intersection of sociology and classical rhetorical terminology need not appropriate Aristotelian terminology in this agent-centered fashion. I have attempted to begin a conversation between rhetorical and sociological notions of *ethos*, because a rhetoric that claims

its roots in classical theories of public debate between differently-situated classes (classes with different access to cultural authority and political power), finds in *ethos* a dialectic between rhetorical agency and structures that govern that agency. My discussion of *ethos* is simply one element, one point of connection, in that web that explores the relationship between rhetoric and structures that define relationships between differently situated classes, whether those be the elite and demos in ancient Greece, the middle-class worker in the twentieth century and the globally webbed symbolic analyst, or the sciences and the humanities in the contemporary academy.

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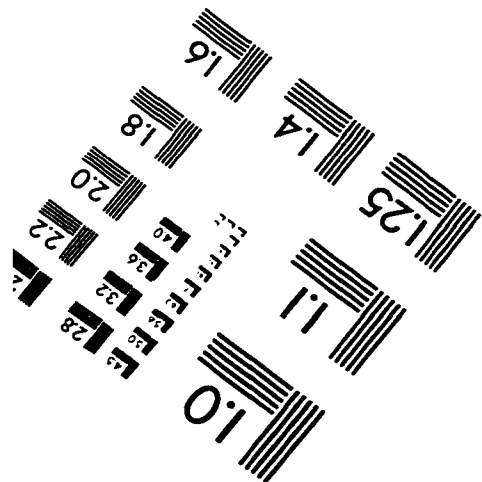
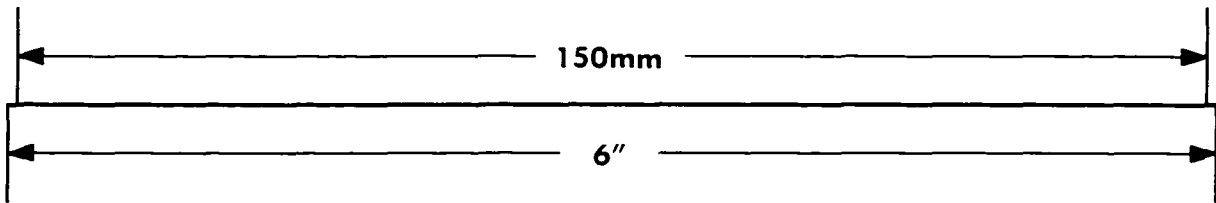
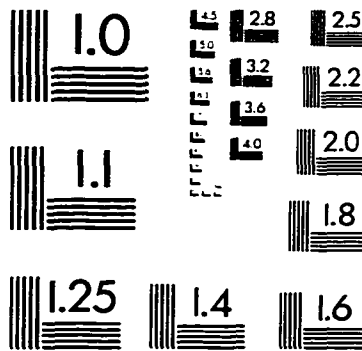
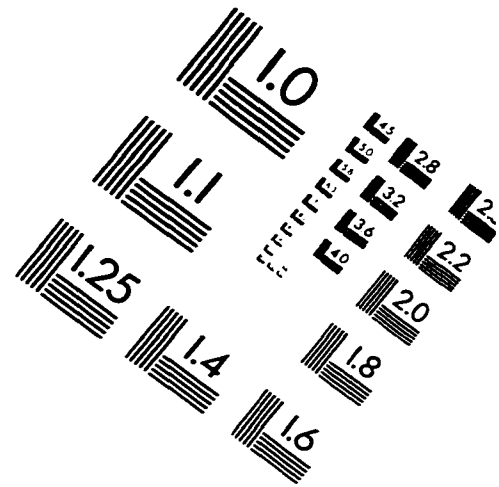
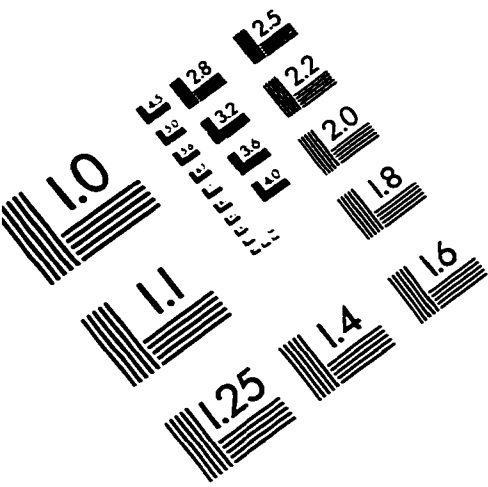
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